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In/coherence: a layered account of a Kuwaiti woman's post-psychotic self-in-progress

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Word Count: 44043

Doctor of Counselling and Psychotherapy
University of Edinburgh
2017

Abstract

This is a thesis on madness and moments and what happens in between. I invite the reader into the world of a post-psychotic woman living within and without a Kuwaiti culture. As a fragmented and traumatised researcher I use my chaotic and dismembered writing as a narrative quilt creating a layered account of conversations and stories, in other words, “moments of meeting”. Moments that make us, define us and continue to create knowledge. In those moments, I dialogue with myself, with other people representing different cultures as well as the different “messy” theorists I draw on in my work. The messy theorists include writers such as Alec Grant, Sophie Tamas, Helene Cixous and Susanne Gannon. Through the creative freedom afforded me by their theories I begin to explore my chaotic psychic landscape. Those explorations are, what I call in this thesis, process inputs as they are also reflections of my personal process in writing this autoethnography. They exist alongside the moments of meeting to create snapshots of my experiences from different perspectives at different times. In this work, as a bipolar Kuwaiti woman, I have a dual purpose, where I give voice to my lived experience of a severe mental illness highlighting my struggle with narrative coherence as well as to provide a Kuwaiti I-account detailing my experience of being “othered” as a result of my “mad episodes”. I hope to, in the process, provide people with severe mental illnesses, Kuwaiti women and members of marginalised communities who have been forced out of the cultural scripts or master narratives of their country with constitutive narrative resources and alternative story lines that they can draw on in their journey towards “a more functional state” in the case of severe mental illness and the creation of a dialogue with people who are unable to, for cultural reasons communicate about their experiences.

Lay Summary

In this thesis, I write about myself as a bipolar Kuwaiti woman within the context of a Kuwaiti culture amongst others. As a result of trauma after the first and then second psychotic episode, my writing is disordered. It doesn't flow easily and is jarring in content and form. I use this kind of writing, as I move in and out of coherence to illustrate my interactions with different people representing Kuwaiti, medical and psychotherapy cultures in my journey through the writing of this thesis. Through my analysis of these interactions, these "moments of meeting", as I call them, I am able to learn and in the process also create knowledge about personal accounts of mental illness and their consequent effects on family dynamics and cultural expectations. These effects include being excluded or shunned from the family and society due to a person's "failure" to follow specific rules of conduct and their associated values. The enforced silence around these issues can and has resulted in isolation, despair and an impeded recovery.

In writing this thesis and exploring those "moments" as mentioned above, a lot has come up for me emotionally. Using the work of writers such as Alec Grant, Sophie Tamas, Helene Cixous and Susanne Gannon as a source of inspiration I also explore the issues that have come up for me in my writing. These issues include reflections on what it was like writing each section as well as a personal exploration in response to these reflections.

Acknowledgements

It has been a long journey to get to this point and there are many people who have helped along the way. I would first like to thank my first supervisor, Seamus Prior, whose steadiness, guidance, support and encouragement has made this thesis possible. I would like to thank Aidan McGlinchey for always being there for me emotionally when I needed it, for visiting me in hospital when I was sick and being on the receiving end of long teary phone calls when things got too much. I would also like to thank my colleagues and tutors (Seamus Prior and Craig Hutchison) on the interpersonal dialogue course in the first two years of the professional doctorate without whom I would not have developed as a counsellor and a reflexive researcher. It was a powerful experience and I am only now just starting to integrate it into my life. I would like to thank Aileen Murray at PF, Gillian Rouse at Sunflower garden and Sue Tomkins at Hope Park for their patient assistance in checking my final client logs. In my thanks I can never forget Leighton McDonald, my clinical supervisor for being so gentle and informative with his feedback in the first three years of my counselling career. Many thanks also go to Alette Willis, my second supervisor for her help and feedback. I would finally like to thank my family who, also in their own way, have made this thesis possible.

Declaration by Candidate

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and effort and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. Where other sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

Signature:

Date:

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"I am tired of hiding, tired of misspent and knotted energies, tired of the hypocrisy, and tired of acting as though I have something to hide."

Kay Redfield Jamison (1995, p.7),

An unquiet mind: A memoir of moods and madness

Dr. X- Consultant Psychiatrist

Friday 13 November 2012

CRR/CLT

Dear Dr. XXX

(Dr. Fejer Almajed, address XXX, D.O.B.: 02/01/1985)

I assessed this young lady as an outpatient at the XXX Hospital at the request of your colleague XXX.

Presentation:

Dr. Almajed described developing psychological difficulties in 2010 when she was working a junior doctor in internal medicine in Kuwait and was working long shifts with little support or supervision and in quite a competitive professional environment. She described experiencing false beliefs that she was receiving signals from the Ministry of Defence mediated through others and also false beliefs regarding the meaning an interpretation of works of art.

Her mood difficulties were associated with feelings of fear associated with a degree of paranoia and resulted in her withdrawing from work and from contact with others for a period of several weeks before the extent of her difficulties became apparent to her family and they intervened. She was subsequently taken to Switzerland and had contact with psychologists there. Treatment was initiated with antipsychotic medication Aripiprazole and Quetiapine. She returned to Kuwait and received some psychological therapy, but was unable to establish a therapeutic relationship and moved between three different therapists. She reported that there were ongoing tensions in her family dynamics principally related to concern about her expanding and more liberal approach to life.

She tried stopping her medication, but this does not appear to have been a success and she attended a further psychiatric assessment in London and had a period of treatment with Duloxetine while her antipsychotic medications were reintroduced.

Her mental condition appears to have been stabilised in 2011 allowing her to return to working as a General Practitioner trainee in Kuwait although she has subsequently decided to withdraw from this and has recently started a degree in psychotherapy and counselling. She intends to complete this three-year degree and then hopes to move to the USA and pursue training in psychiatry.

Dr. Almajed told me that there has been some reduction in her dose of Quetiapine to its current level, but she reported ongoing difficulties with side effects including excessive sleeping so that she goes to bed at around 9:00 pm and weight gain which she has been having some success at addressing through increased exercise.

On Examination:

Dr. Almajed presented as a slightly overweight young lady of a little below average height with shoulder length black hair. She was dressed in clean, smart, casual clothes. She was pleasant and cooperative on interview. She made good eye contact and was facially animated and

reactive. She appeared relaxed and her mood was bright. She appeared to be of above average intelligence and have a good degree of insight into her difficulties.

Background:

Dr. Almajed was born and brought up in Kuwait where she recalled a happy childhood and schooldays. Her parents are aged in their mid-fifties and enjoy good health. Family history: XXX. Her parents separated when she was aged eight and she remained with her mother, but had weekly contact with her father. Her mother remarried when Dr. Almajed was aged 14. She is on good terms with her stepfather. Dr. Almajed has a 25-year-old sister and 22-year old brother who are both living in Kuwait and with whom she is on good terms.

After leaving school at the age of 17, Dr. Almajed moved to Glasgow for a year where she lived with a house-mother while sitting her higher grade exams. She then moved to Aberdeen where she lived alone in her own flat while studying medicine which she found challenging, but enjoyed and she recalled having a supportive social circle. After graduating in 2008, she returned to Kuwait and spent a year as an intern before taking up the post in internal medicine where she became unwell.

Dr. Almajed is unmarried and has no children and had no relationships prior to the age of 23. She has been involved in a relationship with her current partner Aidan for six months and he is a PhD student living in Edinburgh who she had known from her school days and she is happy in her current relationship.

Dr. Almajed has lived alone in her current rented flat since September 2012. She has limited social contacts outwith her boyfriend and her recreational interests apart from attending her studies involve going to the gym and attending dance classes and self-defence classes. She is a non-smoker, and has no history of illicit drug misuse and drinks little alcohol.

Past Medical History:

Her medical history is unremarkable apart from hypothyroidism diagnosed when she was aged 18. Her past psychiatric history is detailed above.

Current Medication:

Thyroxine 75mcg daily;
Quetiapine 200mg daily;
Aripiprazole 10mg daily.

Impression:

I discussed with Dr. Almajed my impression that her difficulties do not appear typical of an effective psychosis as part of a bipolar affective disorder because there do not appear to be prominent or pervasive associated symptoms of either mania or depression although she did experience some depressive symptoms in the recovery phase when her psychotic symptoms subsided.

From her history, it appears that she has suffered from an acute psychotic episode precipitated by work and situational stresses and from which she has made a positive response to treatment with antipsychotic medication although her recovery course appears to have been

complicated by additional family, social, cultural and situational stresses.

She currently appears to be mentally well. She is settled in Edinburgh and enjoying her course.

She is benefiting from supportive contact with my psychological counselling colleague XXX.

Dr. Almajed was keen to discuss her diagnosis and future management plan and we agreed to the following:

Recommendations:

- 1 I consider that it would be appropriate to proceed with a cautious tapered reduction in her anti-psychotic medication that might be progressed in incremental stages, and Dr. Almajed is keen to pursue this.
- 2 Correspondingly I have advised her to reduce her dose of Aripiprazole by half by taking her current medication on alternate days, and at present I advise no change in her ongoing treatment with Quetiapine.
- 3 I intend reviewing Dr. Almajed as an outpatient in January and will naturally keep you informed of her progress and I would be happy to provide further advice or input on request in the interim.
- 4 I will send a copy of this letter to Dr. Almajed for her information.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely,

XXXXXXXX

Preface

I stare blankly at the screen, wondering how I should introduce myself. It isn't a difficult question. I mean, I've done it before. It's just that I'm not quite sure of my self at the moment. One year post-psychotic breakdown number two and I'm in a basement writing a thesis on incoherence whilst reading psychiatric literature on the importance of narrative coherence to recovery. It's all a bit confusing really. I smile to myself thinking I sound quite reflective here unlike the mad ramblings in my diaries. It seems a strange way to write a thesis. I know I need to sound sophisticated and expertly wow you the reader but frankly that is not the way I do things anymore. One thing about being mad and having outed yourself as mad is that you stop caring about how others see you. You have to, stop caring, I mean. Otherwise you would never leave the house again.

I sip my tea, earl grey of course.

So let's begin....

In this thesis..I type...I refer to my scribbled notes, wondering what I was going to say, damn those drugs!

In this thesis, I create a layered account of stories and conversations from my personal and professional life. I focus on "moments of meeting" as I shall call them between myself and others. Moments where we express ourselves and show each other our unique inner lives. Moments that continually create and reveal knowledge. Moments that can reshape and rewrite historical and ideological scripts. Fleeting and unrepeatable moments that make and continue to determine who we are.

Alongside these "moments" of meeting I also write about my explorations of my chaotic psychic world through the creative freedom afforded me by my dialogue with different messy theorists such as Alec Grant, Sophie Tamas, Helene Cixous and Susanne Gannon. These explorations, known here as process inputs also reflect my personal process in writing this autoethnography. This personal process has impacted on how I presented myself and interacted in those moments of meeting and vice versa and so I have included it as the "backstage" or "underbelly" to my work.

Through these vignettes and process inputs I wish to invite the reader into the world of a bipolar Kuwaiti woman living within and without a Kuwaiti culture. The world of a post-psychotic self-in-progress. As shown by the psychiatrist letter (copied exactly from the original) at the very beginning, it is a world in which I am othered, an object both to the medical profession and to, as readers will note later, members of my family.

I offer snapshots into my life in the two years leading up to my thesis hand-in and these vignettes and their associated process inputs have been arranged in the order I wrote them in. At this point, I write for myself and for you and throughout the reading of this, you, the reader will note that I do change voices, I zoom in and out of experiences and sometimes use other characters to talk about me. In many ways, it is a 3D experience in word form. Welcome to my world.

Part 1: Grafting

"I want you to feel what I felt. I want you to know why story truth is truer sometimes than happening-truth. What stories can do, I guess, is make things present..[T]his is true: stories can save us."

Tim O' Brien (1991, p.179)

The things they carried

WhatsApp text-Kuwait

Friend: Hey!

Layla: Hey!

Friend: How are you?

Layla: Not too bad.

Friend: So how's the thesis going?

Layla: I'm quite happy with it at the moment.

Friend: That's a nice change. How come? You've been miserable for a while now.

Layla: I've decided to ditch the introduction.

Friend: You did WHAT?!!

Layla: Ditch the introduction :)

Friend: Are you nuts!!

Layla: Oh the irony!

Friend: You can't do that!

Layla: Yes I can. It was pretty lame anyway.

Friend: Just 'cause you had to rewrite some of it

Layla: It wasn't that. It sounded more like a high school essay to me. This is me, where I am from, blah blah blah.

Friend: What about the other theses that passed. They had an introduction! I would have failed my own PHD if I didn't put one in.

Layla: I just can't write the way they want me to.

Friend: Well then you shouldn't be writing a thesis. They'll say you're not well enough. You know they will.

Layla: They can say what they want. Just 'cause I'm fragmented post-trauma doesn't mean I can't contribute!

Friend: You throw about these terms like they mean something.

Layla: Look it up.

Friend: You mean that Baldwin paper you were talking about?

Layla: I just had a flash of inspiration reading it. Baldwin discusses the difficulty faced by people with a severe mental illness in constructing a coherent narrative. He states that there are ways around this that involve us reframing what we see as narrative. One of them is relating stories to other stories rather than working through events or topics chronologically.

Friend: So you're just going to blast people with vignettes you've been writing?

Layla: Nope. I'm going to blast them with vignettes, emails, phone calls, whatsapp messages like this one (if you'll consent to it!). All the, what I would call, moments of meeting that make up this thesis.

Friend: I hope you know what you're doing.

Layla: I'm presenting my work here. Not anyone else's.

Friend: Sounds more like a copout to me.

Layla: Kinda tired of your restrictive attitude to be honest.

Friend: Someone's got to knock some sense into you. You've just got to force yourself to write it.

Layla: It doesn't work like that. It just comes to me as I read. Whenever I'm in the shower, drying my hair or sitting with friends. I also get inspired through writing in my diary.

Friend: You've included diary entries too?

Layla: Yes! I got the fragmented thesis idea from there as well. I write how I think and write in fragments. That made me think that this whole time I've been writing this thesis I've been trying to write like an academic rather than writing as me.

Friend: But you are an aspiring academic.

Layla: True, but I have to be my kind of academic. They do exist you know.

Friend: Yes, you've told me about them.

Layla: Weirdly by fragmenting my thesis I feel like I've unified it and made it more coherent kinda when I talk about making madness my friend and being able to function in a better way.

Friend: So through being incoherent throughout you become more coherent?

Layla: Yes.

Friend: Does your supervisor know about this?

Layla: Hehe, he advised me to go nuts with it and I'm going to.

Friend: I don't know what to say.

Layla: Well then don't say anything.

Friend: Can we voice later?

Layla: I'll be at my grandmas all day so I don't think so.

Edinburgh

I got off the bus on Princes street and started to walk home. It was a beautiful day in Edinburgh with the sun shining brightly down and a cool breeze caressed my face. As I approached the flat, I made sure to scan the surrounding space to check for any suspicious activity, my heart quickened for an instant as I saw an Arab-looking woman cross the street. Her phone rang and she answered in Greek, chatting excitedly. I let out my breath and mentally berate myself for being paranoid, a remnant effect of mistreatment from a psychotic episode that took place 5 years ago, the fragments of which still lie in me, coming out to torture me when they wish. I walk through the door of the flat and smell the warm spicy smells of dinner. I immediately relax and a smile spreads across my face as I see my friend in the kitchen, chopping up vegetables. He has his headphones on and is concentrating intensely on creating row after row of evenly shaped onion slivers, his face scrunching up when this chiffonade rhythm eventually gets interrupted and an uneven piece emerges.

Layla: Hi.

Steve (smiling broadly and giving me a big hug, taking off his headphones): Hi

Layla: Smells good! Chicken wraps today?

Layla goes to sit on the only chair, cross my legs and sit watching him cook

Steve: Yup, as requested. How was your session with your supervisor?

Layla: Good I think, though it looks like I'm going to do autoethnography.

Steve: I thought you wanted to avoid that?

Layla: I really did, though it looks like my research may be shaping up in that direction.

Steve: What do you mean? I thought you already had a question!

Layla: Well...I did.

Steve: Where did it go?

Layla: After some discussion with my supervisor, I became aware that there were some ethical issues regarding the technique I was working on. I've been thinking about this on the way home and I realised that I was trying to communicate my experience or in other words evoke my experience in other people in a way that felt safe and yet educational and thereby completely misrepresenting my experience! Ironically, I was trying to communicate by distancing myself from my topic. I didn't want to get my hands dirty but at the same time wanted to express myself. It just didn't make any sense.

Steve: But don't you have to be objective? How can your research be of any value or have any validity if you're just writing about yourself?

Layla: Well that's just it. It's not just writing about myself. I would be writing about myself within the context of a specific culture. It would be both evocative and at the same time contain a degree of critical analysis.

Steve: That sounds all over the place. They'll eat you alive in the viva.

Layla: Well, to be honest, that's why I initially wanted to avoid autoethnography. I felt that my experience was in many ways explosive and messy. I worried about being able to contain

it within the framework of a thesis. Was I ready to share that part of my life? How would my account of my experience be measured? In many ways I felt protective of it and at times defiant.

Steve: Defiant? Why?

Layla: Well, in recent years I have come to respect “messiness”. Throughout my childhood, I was constantly chastised and pressured into being stable, reliable and independent. Failure and being unsure were not things that were tolerated in our house. I have spent years of my life trying to repress the unpredictable, irrational and inconsistent in me and it has only made things worse. I grew more inconsistent and irrational. I have finally started to accept that I have a “stormy character” so to speak and that I have to work with it rather than against it and to have to neaten up my experience into a thesis project would feel wrong and almost a betrayal to the person I have become.

Steve: Well what does your supervisor have to say about it?

Layla: He hasn’t heard this part yet. He doesn’t know my reservations about autoethnography. He did however recommend I read the work of a writer called Jane Speedy amongst others and on my way home I stopped off at the library to print a few of her papers. I read the title of one called “Where the wild dreams are fragments from the spaces between research, writing, autoethnography, and psychotherapy” (Speedy, 2013) and immediately settled at a nearby desk and started to read it.

Steve: And?

Layla (smiling): I loved it.

Steve is at this point stirring the salsa in a pot and inhaling contentedly. Can you smell this first?

Layla gets up from the chair and goes over to the stove to smell the salsa.

Layla: Mmmmmm.

They both smile.

Layla: Can I read you a bit?

Steve is at this point cutting up the chicken.

Layla reaches into her bag and take out the paper, looking for the bit that she has highlighted.

Layla: “I continue to claim a solidarity in my life and in my work with the unsorted, the unsafe and the unhinged-sometimes from my own life experience, but even more importantly, from my very real and imagined sense of what might have been” (Speedy, 2013, p.30).

Well that just hooked me in, right there.

Steve: I can see why.

Layla: It’s her defiance, her will to stand by that messiness and the unhinged and her open alliance to it. I find that inspiring and remarkable. I’ve been looking at other autoethnographies since then and I have found other, what I would call “messy writers” such as Alec Grant and Sophie Tamas. The initial pull for me was the honesty and openness about pain and confusion

as well as writing from the “I” first in relation to the “we”.

Steve: The “I” first?

Layla: Yes, the “I”! I feel that I am starved for real “I” accounts. I have lived for 21 years with the “we” in Kuwait and it can be very isolating.

Steve (looking confused): the “we”?

Layla: There is no “I”, only “we”. It was one of the things that infuriated me and quite literally drove me into hysterics. It especially happened when I fought with my mother. I would be trying to communicate how upset I was at a specific situation. There would be no “I” back. Only “we”.

Steve: Can you give me an example?

Layla: Last April, when I went back to Kuwait for a holiday. I had brought back some dresses that I could wear for when people came to visit. Some of these dresses were sleeveless. On my first evening back, my siblings and their spouses were coming to visit. As the only “strange male” was my brother-in-law who was two years younger, I thought it would be ok for me to put a sleeveless dress on. My mother came into the room, took a look at me dress and said:

Mama: You’re not wearing that!

Layla: why not?

Mother: Because it’s sleeveless!!

Layla: So? Only my brother-in-law is coming.

Mother: He is still a man. This is not the way we do things.

Layla: He’s two years younger than me and like a brother to me”

Mother: These are not our customs.

Layla: Who’s we? And why is it ok for me to wear sleeveless when travelling and not in my own house? Or I forget, your house.

Mother: This is our house and what you are doing is not proper.

At this point, I feel incredible pain and I start crying feeling the lack of connection between me, the I and the obscure and collective “we”.

Steve: Does she really talk like that?

Layla: Most of the time she does. Sometimes, when we have happy moments, she forgets. It becomes worse when I disagree with her, her Kuwaiti dialect switches to classical Arabic and it sounds like she is reciting from a holy book. I feel like I’m talking to a repeating radio and after all this therapy and training I find the absence of any real dialogue extremely upsetting. Living in Kuwait in the past, I rarely got to experience real dialogue. There is a certain script that is followed in public conversations (in my case, private conversations as well as I come from a political family) where certain things are not mentioned.

Steve: What certain things?

Layla: Topics that express vulnerability, any form of swearing, controversial feelings, sexual references and issues about homosexuality.

Steve: That’s a lot of stuff.

Layla: And so the art of saying nothing is perfected.

Steve: That wasn't my experience there.

Layla: I don't doubt it. You were an expat and a boy. Things are different for expats and boys.

Steve: Not that different. We still had restrictions.

Layla: Well I agree, but nothing like it was for the girls. You had a girlfriend and you got to socialize with other people. I wasn't allowed near boys or mixed gatherings. When I'm back there I'm still not "allowed" to do that stuff. It's kind of sickening as I am now thirty years old and have lived abroad in a mixed environment for years.

Steve (fondly): I remember your first mixed gathering.

Layla (blushes): Yes, it was three years ago. It is kind of embarrassing to admit that in this country.

Steve: Some Kuwaitis do have them, you said.

Layla: Yes, they do. Some of them are very progressive. It depends on your parents. They are your gatekeepers to life. Invitations come through them and if not I have a curfew and a driver.

Steve: So coming back to your topic, how will you be able to write about all this?

Layla: I'm not sure yet and I like that. I like this new unsure place. I don't quite know how to be here in writing. I can't be there at all in speaking.

Steve (looking confused again) as he spices the chicken: You guys really speak strangely. Us scientists have an easier time understanding each other.

Layla: That's 'cause you barely speak at all!!

Steve: I don't think that's true.

Layla: Well you're definitely the exception judging from your last work do. Conversation there was like pulling teeth!

Steve (sheepishly): I can't argue with you there. Though your lot are even more difficult!

Layla: I probably should not have mixed you guys up.

Steve: We do not live in a patriarchal society!

Layla: Yes, I know, relaxed table chitchat is definitely not their forte.

Layla: Back to being unsure. I have been told that I sound "rehearsed", "artificially clear" or like I was "hosting a tea party". Having evolved to perfect this "glassy" speech, I feel that my challenge here is breaking through it.

Steve (tired now): Glassy?

Layla: Yes. I expose myself through my words but my fluency can keep people out. I find it really difficult to communicate brokenness. When I am broken, I am crying, usually at home, away from sight. How can I address this?

Steve: Umm...I don't know.

Layla: I remember a tutor mentioned one writer a year ago in one of our research supervision groups. I think her name was Patty Lather. The name stuck with me as I remember how a comment was made about speech and how instances of brokenness can communicate so much. Though she has been in my mind for a while, I did not pursue her work. She has written

a whole book about being lost as a form of methodology (Lather, 2007) and strangely, I think that may be a good place to start.

Steve (dishing up the plates): Well at least you know where to start.

Layla: I'm still thinking of how to position myself. I feel that in my current position of Muslim turned agnostic and doctor turned therapist living in Edinburgh post-psychotic breakdown that I have lost "the script"; the dominant "Kuwaiti script". I don't belong anywhere. I have no reference point. I used to have one. Now it's gone.

Steve: Can we eat now?

Layla: I am unscripted.

Steve: No psych talk at the dinner table.

Scotland

Research Supervisor: I would advise you to find a focus or strategy for your thesis, it would be a lot easier to proceed in this way.

Me: Of course (nodding my head already knowing where I was going to start).

“An autoethnography of a mad awakening written under the influence”

I type the title confidently and proceed to stare at the screen.

The influence of what?

Seroquel, Jane Speedy, Sophie Tamas and Alec Grant.

In other words, I will be writing about the experience of a brief psychotic episode from the viewpoint of a doctor turned therapist, Muslim turned agnostic, mostly Arab, medicated, upper-class and heterosexual woman using feminist, post-structural and post-modern ideas.

Right...

Rewind to last week

Layla is sitting on a brown leather couch with a blanket around her shoulders.

Layla: I really lost it at group supervision last week.

Therapist: What happened?

Layla: I don't understand it and that's what's so frightening for me. I was feeling fine!! I felt happy, confident and sure of what I was going to write about for my next input. The next thing I knew I was sobbing for the next three hours. Through the whole session, on the way home and for an hour after that!

Therapist: What was going on for you when you were sobbing?

Layla: I felt so hopeless, so upset, abandoned, betrayed and violated!

Therapist: At what?

Layla: I found myself getting incredibly upset with my clinical supervisor. I had recently started at a new agency and I had started working with a new clinical supervisor. I was used to my previous supervisor who I had a trusted relationship with for two years and suddenly there was this new woman who was twitchy and kept changing her behaviour. I found myself tensing inwardly, my body stiffening up and started feeling incredibly unsettled which led me to start chattering about clients without really focusing on anything. I was then asked outright to speak about what was going on for me in my client work. Why was I there? I then felt myself regressing and started to feel experience and sense recede from me.

Therapist: It sounds like you felt violated by her question.

Layla: I think I did but I didn't connect with that feeling. I ended up complying with the violation. Violation is not new to me, though I have never connected feeling violated in a situation with bodily emotion before. I usually just accepted it and moved on, kind of like my body was an appendage and not linked to me.

Therapist: What has changed?

Layla: I honestly don't know. I've been engaging with feminist writing, Cixous in particular about writing the female body. I was looking at it from a cognitive detached academic distance

(or so I thought!) and was finding the writing quite lyrical and beautiful. I even told my colleagues about how I was really loving it. Next thing I knew I started crying for four hours.

Therapist (raising his eyebrows): Sounds like you had a powerful reaction to that.

Layla: As doctoral students I feel that we throw around these academic terms about our epistemology and ontology, professionally discussing postmodern and post-structural ideas but from what I have seen, never really engaging with these influences on a personal, mental and bodily level. Wolf (1992) questions, "I wonder how many 'normal' (i.e. non-intellectual) humans are comfortable with the instability, ambiguity, ambivalence and contradiction that delight postmodernists?"(p.88) Whilst I am not sure I am 'normal' or an intellectual I feel terrified at having to connect to the reality of living in a fragmented changeable state.

Therapist: Why is that?

Layla: Because it's unsettling and brings on feelings in me that I don't want to feel. I feel hopeless, miserable and uncertain. I feel as if I don't know anything and cannot even predict how I'm going to be. I remember when I initially encountered post-modern ideas I felt validated and empowered as it gave words and comfort to my struggles against being lost and incoherent, battling with mood swings and changing or developing states, never knowing what I'm going to be like from one month to the next or even one day to the next. The idea of a fragmented self or even multiple selves (a great explanation to my changeability!) being a base state or even a somewhat accurate portrayal of the human condition made me feel quite relieved, even dare I say it "normal" rather than "crazy".

Therapist: So what has changed?

Layla: I think I actually began to engage with these ideas rather than looking down on them and being quite moved by them like they were some lovely concept that I could just read, identify with and then later switch off. Living this reality is something very different. Tamas (2009) mentions how "losing knowing, losing yourself feels terrible" (p.48). This is also supported by writers such as Kesby (2005) who also mentions that if "ordinary people are to deconstruct existing structures and then hold them at bay...they require new powers to provide some kind of guidance for alternate living" (p.2049-50). De Botton (2012) also addresses the emptiness and pain felt by agnostics and atheists as a result of the removal of religion from their life as nothing has been done to replace the gaping hole.

Therapists: I thought you said that these ideas made you feel less crazy? That they validated the way you were experiencing and being in life.

Layla: They did initially and then I thought to myself, was me being crazy in life was supposed to be life? That this was it? As I started to explore these ideas further I came across post-structural ideas of embodied knowing and started to read feminist literature that focussed on the female body. This in itself brought up more stuff. Actually writing or engaging with my own body is very different to put it mildly. My previous degree taught me about the human body or rather naming bits of the human body and understanding function and pathology. Engaging or feeling my body and connecting it consciously with my mind was never part of the equation!

Therapist: So you were never aware of the mind-body connection?

Layla: Of course I was aware of it. Many symptoms are psychosomatic and intellectually I could understand this. I have just never connected with it.

Therapist: Connected with it?

Layla: I really don't know how to explain it. It was never "real" before. I knew that I kept getting ill during this course, from rashes to hay fever to strange eye symptoms. I just never connected with it. I keep getting advised to take vitamins and I've been trying to eat healthy and get exercise. It doesn't seem to have done much good. I just keep getting sick.

Therapist: Maybe your body is finally expressing itself.

Layla: Against my will of course.

Therapist: Your conscious will.

Layla: This is getting very complicated.

Therapist (smiling): Of course it's complicated. Its dealing with issues of the mind, body, self, dare I say soul?

Layla: I miss feeling clear and certain.

Therapist: And how did being clear and certain work out for you?

Layla (laughing): Badly.

Silence

Layla: I think another reason, a more "innate" reason to use a scientific term, is the culture and religion I was brought up in. The body is to be fought against, to be brought into submission, to be exercised and punished through fasting and prayers for forgiveness. Sexual and emotional urges had to be silenced and then ignored.

Therapist: You're referring to Islam?

Layla: I was quite devout you know. An idealist, a true believer and then I had a mental breakdown or maybe wake-up I don't know. The end result it a complete wiring mix-up. A soiled and sinned female body that has been ignored for a long time. Waking something like that up is a serious thing. It may sounds liberating and empowering but then it's not just a body is it? It is a body with a story, sometimes an untold story that the mind/self until now has refused to hear. "The marks of my faith... are already etched into me" (Wyatt, 2014, p.22) and the result is not a clear one. Freedom of body does not coincide with freedom of mind for it can be argued that the mind is never free from its shackles, its history, its script. Whilst there may be an illusion of development through actively outwardly leaving belief systems such as religion, one wonders whether it is ever possible to truly leave those things behind. I feel myself in that horrible in-between state of wanting and pushing myself to relinquish shame and fear of Godly reprisal only to find myself praying furiously when threatened. This is of course made even more difficult with having to keep ties with my Muslim family and even in speaking the Arabic language itself which has artefacts of religion scattered all over it. Words like inshallah (God willing) and Allah yahfiddich (God protect you) which feature in most conversations make it difficult to ever escape.

Therapist: So the thesis creates another thesis.

Layla: Well it certainly feels that way. I feel that what is coming up for me, as a result of researching and writing this autoethnography, is something I want to write about.

Therapist: An autoethnography about writing an autoethnography. Perhaps a meta-autoethnography?

Layla (smiling wearily): Yes

Therapist: Sounds interesting

Layla: Well it's a known type of autoethnography, some would call it a "confessional autoethnography (Ellis, 2004, p.50) though I don't like that term. I refuse to think of myself as confessing a thesis, almost like it's some dirty secret that I want redemption for. That's not what it's about for me.

Therapist: Well what do you want from it?

Layla: I think that's a very difficult question. I would love to write an introduction detailing my exact focus and question but if I'm to stay true to myself/selves and my chosen lens I would have to say I want different things from it and that these change from time to time. I want to ask questions, start a dialogue, look at things from different angles, stir it all up and see what comes out. I am interested in process. What happens during this process? What happens in the process of writing the self? Of letting the writing write the self? Or perhaps letting the writing re-story the self in a way that stays true to the messiness and confusion in my life. What's it like for someone in my situation whose voice and body have always been in silent prison and have now been invited to speak? One could say I could draw on other oppressed voices in different places of history and geography. Oppression, violation and subjugation to a religion and culture are not new themes; it is sadly a common story. My story, however is the process of teaching the self and body how to speak and seeing what happens in the process. My position of being in transition between specific cultures, religions and careers almost at the same time is, I feel a unique one and is of sufficient magnitude to dissolve the hampering effects of logic or attempts at rationality and certainty. My experience of a psychotic episode disrupted or shattered the "paradigm" of certainty, good and evil right and wrong, dissolving everything that I knew and dissolving in my mind everything that I was. I was left with a massive "gash" in my vision that doesn't seem to go away. It is almost like looking at the world through the lens of a broken mirror, bits are missing and other bits are painfully blindingly clear. Having now reached this place of painful unknowing I feel like I can now start developing this work further.

Therapist: This sounds incredibly challenging!!

Layla: Tell me about it. Susanne Gannon (2006) writes about the impossibility of writing the self if one is to use a post-structuralist approach and I would agree with her in that this is not going to be a neat linear process and that the challenges of communicating the complexities of human experience through story are incredibly difficult for we don't experience things in neat story lines. There are examples, however of French post-structuralists such as Derrida,

Barthes and Cixous who use deconstructive writing practices to reconcile their experience with their poststructuralist view point and I think my previous attempts at layered, sketchy and transitory text would have to be developed further if this is to work. It is jagged, painful and will make me bleed, the kind of writing that "sticks a window in there so you can see the gore" (Wyatt & Tamas, 2013, p.13). I feel that there is something there to be said, something to be gained and evoked that will provide new insight and knowledge in the field of human experience and of student learning. I feel that the academic terms we use in conversation are not to be taken lightly. What they mean in an experiential sense, on a day-to-day level is something incredibly powerful and I feel that it is important to look at what happens when terms are connected to human experience at the same time. Writing as showing what has happened rather than telling.

Therapist: Time is up.

Layla: Sorry I was rambling so much about my thesis. I know you're my therapist and not my supervisor.

Therapist(smiling): Nice circumscribed clear roles. Clearly fitting in with what you were just discussing.

Layla (sigh): See you next week.

Scotland

Voice from speaker: *Passengers if you could please be seated for takeoff. Could you please keep your hands and feet close to your seats and please be silent for our safety demonstration.*

I sit in my seat, hands gripping the arm rest, and willed myself to think about something other than shooting into the sky and being suspended in the air in a small box with other people. I never used to be afraid of flying, however feeling more vulnerable and exposed as a result of a lot of process work around my close brush with suicide during my “mad episode” has made me very aware of the fragility of human life, or more honestly, my life. I decide I must make conversation with the lady sat next to me in order to distract myself from possible impending doom. The lady wore a grey hijab and had her head down. I wondered if she was praying. I knew the flight “dua” (prayer) well yet did not have the heart to utter it. I had already abandoned that path though I frequently miss the safety I felt it afforded me.

Layla (in Arabic): It's a bit scary, this flight thing.

Grey lady: We are in the hands of God. It is all in his will.

Layla: Ahhh... Too true.

Grey lady: And you are?

Layla: My name is Layla.

Grey lady: Whose daughter are you?

Layla (pausing):...Almajed

Grey lady: which ones? There are loads of Almajeds.

Layla: I'm not sure what you mean?

Grey lady: Who's your mother?

Layla: My mother is XXXX

Grey lady: Ahh...AIXXXX..Yes I know them. How is your grandmother? We're all thinking of her.

Layla: My grandmother is not doing very well at the moment.

Grey lady: I thought she'd gotten better?

Layla: I'm afraid she's getting worse.

Grey lady: But they never said!

Layla: I don't think they quite believe it. I think that they feel that by telling people, it makes it true.

Grey lady: It was the same with my mother. It took two years of us caring for her before we realized that she was dying.

Layla: My mum prays all the time. It really helps her.

Grey lady (incredulously): Really?

Layla: You sound surprised?

Grey lady: I just meant, well, the women in your family don't wear hijabs!

Layla: That doesn't mean that they are not religious. They just don't choose to cover their heads. My grandmother never liked it so it was never encouraged.

Grey lady: Oh I see.

Layla (feeling the need to promote her family's piety to protect their reputation): The women in my family all go to hajj and they give zakat (alms) and are devoted to their husbands. Though they may work and dress in an "open" way, they are still quite devout.

Grey lady (visibly relaxing): Oh that's really good.

Layla (heart sinking): Yes, it is.

Grey lady: So what do you do?

Layla (now thoroughly regretting ever starting the conversation): I used to be a doctor and now I'm pursuing a doctorate in psychotherapy.

Grey lady: What's that?

Layla: It's therapy.

Grey lady: Therapy?

Layla: Kind of like a psychologist?

Grey lady: Oh yes!!! That sounds very useful.

Layla: It is, in my opinion.

Grey lady: I know a psychologist. He's very popular. All the good families go to him. He treated the Al xxxxx family. His name is

Layla: I don't know him. I'm not familiar with Kuwaiti psychologists.

Grey lady: Have you not heard of the Al-xxx family?

Layla: No I haven't.

Grey lady: Well there was that terrible thing with their daughter.

Layla: What happened to her?

Grey lady (calmly): Well she was killed.

Layla: Good God! Who did it?

Grey lady: Her family did it. It was an honour thing you understand. One can't imagine what they must be going through. May God help them in their plight.

Layla (gripping the arm rest until her knuckles turned white): God help them indeed.

The plane lands in Kuwait and I step off towards baggage claim area with mixed feelings. I felt quite distressed by my conversation with the grey lady. I realise I am back on Arab soil with all its fruits and trappings. I call over a porter and wait for my bags to arrive. I look around as I wait and I see a range of faces and colours around me. I feel startled and a bit nervous. I usually avoid Arabs when in the UK, as my previous experience during my time in Aberdeen, a time where I was very active in both the Arab and Muslim community meant that it was difficult for me to go when and where I liked as I would be identified and news would be sent back to the "mother land" and as my mother put it, if I wasn't careful I would end up like the women who went to University with her in America, alone and unmarried. The worst of all punishments, I think as I smile sarcastically to myself. I see my bags appear and I ask the porter to lift them for me. We walk to the sliding doors to the arrivals area and I start to look around the crowds for my mother. It was 6 am and she has never once missed picking me up

at the airport. I look around to see her small smiling face. I walk through the crowd and then I see her running towards me as she throws her arms around me. I breathe in her musk perfume and hug her tightly. Love was a very strange thing.

The car pulls up at our house and Nasser, the guard comes up to help with the bags.

Nasser: Welcome back dictoora!

Layla: Hi Nasser! How are you?

Nasser: Never better!

I smile to myself as I see him dressed smartly, remembering how he had refused to wear the black trousers and white shirt my mum asked him to when he first arrived from Egypt. He did not want to be parted from his Hawaiian print shirt and shorts and wore them persistently for days, watering the plants almost to death in his enthusiasm at being the one in charge of the garden. He always cut the most beautiful pink flowers for me. They were big and unapologetically wild with lots of green foliage that towered over the little glass vase they were put into. My mum used to try hiding them behind the more manicured store bought flowers, not sure what to think about their place in such an ordered house. We none of us fit very well in such an ordered house. I walked up the stairs and into the living room feeling strangely taller as I walked in. It was as though I had been a lot younger when I had last been here though it had only been some months. As I looked around, I saw the two sofas, looking as immaculate as always, where many a violent confrontation had taken place. Conversations and physical man-handling that I can never forget. The sofas looked untouched and coldly elegant. I began to miss my messy living room in Edinburgh with its unfinished sewing projects, half-read books and bits of yarn all over the place.

Though the house in Kuwait would be considered a mansion with all the trimmings of Moroccan royalty, I missed my little homey flat.

Kuwait

Remembering begins in the body, in vague feelings, in the sensuous before it claims its story. Memory is made from traces, fragments and images, from what cannot be let go, from what insists on a psychic space (Pelias, 2004, p.50).

I walk into my dad's work building, pausing to smile at the security guards and state my name and purpose there. At this point, the guards looked terrified and immediately ushered me in.

Me: "Which floor is it again?"

Guard 1: "The chairman's office is on the top floor".

Me (casually): Oh right, thanks.

I stopped in front of the lift waiting for it to come down and found myself looking up at the numerous screens around the lobby, with slideshows of employees getting different kinds of awards. Some of the photos had my father, smiling proudly as he handed over a certificate to employee X. I felt myself getting upset as I remembered how they called him "Bo XXXX". He was more their father than he was ever mine. I got into the lift and made sure to take a look at myself in the mirror as I composed myself and checked my outfit and makeup, knowing that they would feature in the conversation as they almost always did.

The lift arrived at the chairman's floor and I walked out making sure to look pleasantly relaxed as I held my stomach in and made sure to keep my balance as I walked in my heels to my father's office. This meeting had to go well, my doctorate depended on it.

I walked through to the secretary sitting at the desk and asked if my father was free now.

Jameela: He's in a meeting now, can you please go through to the meeting room?

Me: I'll go say hi to the other secretaries and wait there.

Jameela: Ok, I'll let your father know.

I turned left and went through the corridor to see my dad's two oldest secretaries, the ones that came with him from his previous position before he became chairman.

Amal got up from her chair and came to give me a hug.

Amal: How are you? We've missed seeing you!

Me: Yes it's been a while. I've been working at the hospital so I haven't had time to come here to see you all and Baba.

Amal: Your father tells us you don't want to be a doctor anymore. You want to go study psychotherapy?

Me: Yes, I've applied and got accepted to study psychotherapy.

Amal: What's that?

Me: Well to be a therapist, you know?

Amal: Why? You've got a job here. Your dad is very worried about you. He was very upset to hear about you resigning.

Me: I guess that's between me and him, though I know that he always keeps you both updated. Is he even free today? I texted you about his schedule and you said he agreed to see me at this time?

Amal: Yes, he told us he could fit you in between meetings.

Me: I just came to say goodbye. I'm leaving for Scotland in a couple of days.

Amal: I'll just go remind him and see if he's done.

I sat in the waiting room waiting for Amal to come back and I thought about how surreal the situation felt. I had to make an appointment to say goodbye to my own father who might have possibly forgot about seeing me.

My father came through, followed by Amal and gave me a big smile.

Baba: Hi.

Layla stood up and hugged him, making sure she did not mess up his qitra.

Me: Hi baba.

Baba: Why don't you come through and we'll order some breakfast?

Layla: Sounds nice.

Baba: Great, I'll tell the tea boy to send us some from the downstairs cafeteria.

Layla follows Baba through to his office. It was light and airy with floor to ceiling windows. There was no desk, only some couches and a coffee table. Baba had gotten rid of his desk some time ago and this had become his sitting room, creating an informal "home-like" environment for himself and his employees.

Layla sat down and looked out to the sea view.

Layla: You've got such a beautiful view baba.

Baba (looking out disinterestedly at the view): It's alright. You get used to it after a while.

Layla: Ah, I see.

Baba: So what's this I hear about you going to do a PHD in Scotland?

Layla: Well, like I said on the phone, I got accepted into Edinburgh University to do a doctorate in counselling and psychotherapy.

Baba: Is it an accredited University? Will they accept the qualification in Kuwait?

Layla (trying hard to keep a calm and pleasant demeanor): Well it's currently ranked as being in the top twenty universities in the world. I believe it is accredited.

Baba: You're definitely leaving medicine?

Me: I don't want to do it anymore.

Baba: You've worked so hard and now just because you don't like it you're leaving to do something else. What is wrong with you? Do you think life is easy? You've got to stick to things. You can't just keep changing. You'll never get anywhere!

Layla: I've tried to stick with it for a while now. I'm just not happy.

Baba: I think you're running away. You can't face real life. People are not always going to be nice to you. That's just life.

Layla: It's not about people being nice to me. Though I have seen real cruelty at the hospital, my decision is based on my feelings around the actual job I'm doing. I don't feel that there's a point anymore. I'm not excited about it. Have you ever felt like that?

Baba: What about your future? Marriage and children?

Layla: I've given the suitors that have come forwards a chance. It just didn't work out.

Baba: If you leave you might never have the chance. You'll get old.

Layla: I'm going to have to take my chances.

Tea boy walks in with a tray of sandwiches and two cups of coffee. He sets them on the coffee table and leaves.

Baba: This just feels wrong. I'm not convinced.

Layla: I know your feelings. You've talked to my sister about them and she has passed on the message.

Layla puts a sandwich on her plate and makes sure to cut it in half as she knew Baba got worried if she ate too much. She always made sure to eat sparingly in front of him. Baba put a sandwich and some of the chocolate on the table on his plate and began to eat.

Baba: I want to tell you a story.

Layla: Ok...

Baba (wiping his mouth with a napkin): There was a man looking for a wife. His mum advised him of three options. The first woman was very rich, the second one was very charitable and the third one had undergone plastic surgery to get herself big breasts. Guess which one the man chose?

Layla: Which one?

Baba: the one with the big breasts!

Layla (making sure she laughed lightheartedly): But of course.

Baba: I just don't want you getting fat.

Layla: I won't.

They were interrupted by a young woman strolling into the office. She was texting on her phone. Baba had at that point stood up. The girl casually mentioned that she had to be off early today as she was attending a wedding later on in the evening. Baba said that would be fine and introduced her to Layla. Layla could feel his gaze surveying her carefully.

Woman: Oh hello! It's lovely to meet you.

She walks over to the sofa and sits comfortably, seemingly as though she has done this many times before.

Woman: Your father talks a lot about you.

Layla: Really?

Woman. He says you're very vibrant and that I remind him of you.

Layla's gaze turns steely as she stares down this strange woman.

Layla: I'm not vibrant at all I'm afraid.

Woman (taken aback): I heard you're going into psychotherapy. Have you heard of Dr. X?

He's pretty big on the Kuwaiti scene.

Layla (still smiling coldly): Nope. I'll make sure to check him out on Instagram.

Baba was quietly sitting next to Layla, listening.

Woman (now thoroughly uncomfortable): I guess I'd better leave now.

Layla: I'll see you later.

Woman leaves hurriedly, looking over her shoulder.

Baba surveys Layla's face for any sign of interest or curiosity

Layla (dismissively): She seems quite intelligent.

Baba (quietly): She is.

Layla: I guess I'd better be going.

Baba: Goodbye (He stands up and hugs me). Best of luck and don't forget what we talked about.

Layla: I won't.

Layla walks out of the sitting room to the lift. The teaboy was in there and he accompanied her on her way down.

Teaboy: You're so beautiful.

Layla: Thank you.

Layla leaves the building and walk towards her car. The security guard at the gate takes a look at her black Porsche and lets her out. She drives her car into the nearest secluded alleyway, stops it, locks it and starts to cry.

Zoom Out

I'm staring at the screen as I type the words for my next thesis input. I find myself getting emotional and wondering how my writing had led me into this specific alleyway. I have my favourite Arabic singer playing in the background as I try to capture the essence of what I had experienced in Kuwait. I find myself thinking of dark locked cars and what happened in them. Cars meant freedom in Kuwait and teenagers, on getting their first cars, immediately blackened the back windows. "For privacy" they said. I found it so curious that it was only in the backseat of their cars that they found privacy. Later on, once I had experienced more in my life did I understand how useful the dark backseat of a car would be. For many a clandestine activity as well as for a place to completely break down with no questions asked. Like most of the Kuwaiti youth, I lived with my parents and consequently, my life at home, though very comfortable was one of extreme censure. There were certain rules I had to live by and certain ways I had to appear. From my teenage years, my body, style and makeup were constantly scrutinized. It began with my parents and as I began to enter society, my body and other girl's bodies were under examination. Their level of attractiveness was and is still constantly being commented on. As I think this, I am reminded of an Islamic saying cautioning women against exposing their bodies.

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments ... that they should

draw their khimar over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands... (Quran 24:31)

Though Kuwaiti culture is loosely based on Islam, not all women here wear the hijab. They do however usually dress modestly in that their arms are usually covered and skirts are usually knee length or longer. Though our dress is modest, our bodies do not escape being the foodstuff of most conversation. It was another oddity that I could not get my head around. It was like our bodies were not our own. They belonged to everyone but us. In a marriage interview, it was common practice for a girl to sit in a café with her mum or sister and wait for a prospective suitor to walk in, survey her briefly from afar and inform the matchmaking relative of his opinion. The girl would not know which man in the café was the one surveying her and having been “helpfully” told by some relative that she was being surveyed, had to act as though she never knew and was being quite natural, smiley and uncommonly prettily made up. As I relayed this to my therapist in Edinburgh two weeks ago I saw his face look shocked and appalled.

Therapist: How awful! How degraded you must have felt!

Layla: Umm, to be honest with you, apart from the awkwardness at being appraised, I didn't feel anything.

Therapist: How is that?!!!

Layla: All the other girls I knew had to do the same thing.

Therapist: So after you'd been “appraised”, what happened then?

Layla: Well in my last “interview”, the man called my father the next day and told him what he thought of me.

Therapist (curiously): What did he say?

Layla: He said he thought I had a pretty face but that he was worried about what I would look like if I got pregnant.

Therapist (carefully): and what did your father say?

Layla: My father said that I could go on a diet if need be.

Therapist (looking visibly shaken): I see.

Thinking about these experiences after three years of a psychotherapy degree with its associated feminist readings and having been in a relationship with a man from a very different culture, I find myself looking at my life in Kuwait in a different light. The most painful thing to me is that I did not realise or understand the implications or meaning of individual situations such as the ones I mentioned previously. Through new eyes of self-respect and newfound maturity, I now feel as though I have been living in a body that has been continuously violated through the words and actions of people who I had thought were the closest to me. Through conversations with colleagues, friends and reading papers, I found myself gaining illumination and a revised understanding of what feminist issues actually consisted of. Strangely, through writing of my body's violation, I was able to free myself of it, cleanse it and claim it back as my own. The world I came from was so different and set in its ways that looking at such feminists

fighting for choice and freedom was like looking through a hazy window through which I could see fuzzy shapes dancing in a way that looked unstable to me. In writing this, I find myself reminded of a Tunisian woman (Amina Sboui) who had joined the feminist group Femen along with her Ukrainian counterparts, posing topless on facebook with the words “my body is my own” written in Arabic across her breasts (“100 Women 2015”, 2015). Egged on by European feminist zeal, the Tunisian girl proudly displayed the photo in public on facebook. The result was her eventual imprisonment in Tunisia. There are many more examples of similar cases. The Arab world is a different one with its own set of rules. I find myself getting angry at the Ukrainian counterparts who had thoughtlessly encouraged this protest with no thought for the Tunisian girl’s safety. Though I am an advocate of women’s liberation and live my life as freely as I possibly can, I am also a pragmatist and follow discretion and caution in all my actions. Mine is what would be called a highly edited life. My actions are considered once, twice and then again. Though this may seem rehearsed and practiced, it is because it has to be. Or out of habit from a time where it was a necessity. In addressing such personal issues in this thesis, there is a risk to myself in writing this thesis, hence my focus on specific issues at the expense of others though certain “taboo” topics are implied. I have to hold on to the fact that I haven’t slandered my country, myself or the people I talk about. My purpose here is to merely lay the groundwork to open up a space, start a dialogue..

Stop

I find myself rambling along, losing my thread of coherence as I try to keep my head clear to write a balanced input that would reflect my intellectual distance from a key feminist issue.

Try to listen to how it *feels*.

Just try and *listen* to how it feels.

How it silently tugs and strains at you (Mair, 1989, p.60).

In an article entitled “Writing from the margins of myself”, Luci Barnes (2014) illustrates her experience of taking part in a process of experimental writing and developing her research into writing as a form of inquiry. She describes listening “carefully to hear the precise tone, sounds and rhythms of” language (Barnes, 2014, p.243) and how art (in this case writing) can “build resonance” (Leavy, 2012, p.517). I try to apply this to myself and I find that I feel nothing but rage, rage that has no target but the facelessness of society that has evolved so far away from its origins of tolerance and respect. I find that I cannot write in a balanced way and hope to communicate in my rage far more than I can in my measured smile and sweet words. Rage that is wordless at something that does not even exist but that continues to rule my life and many others. In moments such as this, I feel that only Helene, unmeasured, fiery and unashamedly female and fearless in her voice and fight against injustice can “cool the fires of my heart” (translated from Arabic phrase),

“I turn to those invisible and impalpable prisons in which each of us lives today as hostages of a spell, an evil spell the size of the society we live in. I will speak of our deceiving societies, of our prisons disguised as democracies, of our wolves wearing the smile of the

lamb" (Cixous, 1993, p.210).

I look back at the clock, the time is midnight. I turn off the music and laptop and reach for my anti-psychotic pill. It's bed time.

Kuwait

I can't write. I stare at the computer screen and think, my brain muddled with medication. I have a piece of work due in a week.

Shit

I hate you thesis, bane of my life

I look around my bedroom. I stay in the guest bedroom now and it has become a haven, much like the room at the asylum I stayed in for six months following another severe psychotic break. When is it ever going to stop?

"Just quit" says my mother. "Come back to Kuwait and live your life".

Kuwait sounds tempting at the moment, luxury and peace from having to think and make decisions.

Except that would be it. Forever.

My therapist asks *"why are you doing this?"*

At the beginning, it was hard to answer. This is probably the first piece of coherent writing I've been able to do for a while and I almost want to cry with relief. I loved it so much. I loved writing the sketches and reading up on the relevant theory. It was a big part of my life and I was passionate about seeing the process develop. In preparing for writing I have read numerous autoethnographies and memoirs of people with mental illnesses and it has made me hopeful and less alone. Having done all that reading, I feel like I'm being cliché in saying that. I think of Laurel Richardson in her recovery from a car accident that led to a coma and Kay Jamison who writes about living with bipolar disorder and her struggles in being an academic. Jane Speedy who suffered a stroke and Alec Grant who struggled with alcoholism for years. They became friends to me in my moments of loneliness and hopelessness. On the other hand, when I read about writing through pain I had no idea what that meant. It never truly goes away and no one talks about the confusion that is felt afterwards. The tales I read, mostly for publication, a fact that I shouldn't forget, usually are determined in such a way. They are mostly stories of survival, of social activism, of coping successfully. I don't know where my story fits in that. What does my voice say? Is there even a voice or to put it more accurately, voices in my work? Living with the immediate aftermath of a psychotic episode. I feel like I have lost my voice. In many ways I feel like I'm still at the asylum, counting the days until it's all over. I am confused and beyond upset looking at the wreck that has become my life. My relationships, my work is twisted, gnarled and almost sick, just like me. I still hear voices and I am coming to terms that this may be a permanent thing. I just don't know what to do. I write of contradictory states, of loving and hating my thesis, loving and hating myself. This is an autoethnography about process and it is not coherent, well ordered or very clear, an image of a swamp comes to mind, yucky and slippery. I remember the contents page I wrote before getting sick, it was playful and creative. As I picked up my work again I looked at the contents page and realised that I didn't want to play anymore, I didn't have it in me. What to write about then? Despair and hopelessness. What part does my thesis have to play in the world and what discourse do I

want to join? I want to talk about stuckness, despair and shifting realities from within a culture that does not allow for such things. Here one is supposed to get on with it, to make do with one's situation and shroud it in silence. I suppose that is what I could do, bring light to such an experience that is unique in the fact that it is actually discussed. There are no personal accounts of Kuwaiti or even Arab girls who lose their minds. I think that I could join the feminist agenda. Talk about emancipation from the patriarchal Muslim world. As a post-modern, poststructuralist researcher, I am supposed to be comfortable in talking about fragmented complex identities. Whilst academically to me this makes sense, the reality is that myself and body does not want it. I want certainty and unity and I don't like the idea of my body telling me things I don't want to hear.

Stop.

Zoom out

I look back and read what I have written. It doesn't flow. I can't connect the sentences and I lack confidence in stating my position. I am slow and unsure and I'm not sure how that can be academic. How am I to write 40,000 words? Could I use my stilted and staccato style in this piece as a stylistic form in this piece of work? I want to share my reality with my readers and I want them to notice the inconsistencies in my speech. The crooked and incomplete nature of it. That is my process. I want to draw a picture of my current reality in words and I want people to see a mind, broken and healing attempting to write. There is no flair here, no beauty, no flourishing of pretty words and sentiments.

Am I well enough to write this?

I look at the bedside table. Look at the boxes of pills and think to myself, this is actually it. I have bipolar disorder and I have to live with it. I cry as I write this and think of my future.

I hope I can do something with this.

Dillon's Café-London

Six months ago, I believed that Satan wanted me. He followed me around the ward while I ran away chanting some sort of magic to keep him away. I fell and hurt my foot in the doctor's office and was screamed at to get out by a fearful group of nurses. I limped back to my room terrified and humiliated.

Fast forward to now.

I sit at a student's cafe, staring at my ipad. I cannot understand what I am reading. Memory loss due to repeated trauma and inability to concentrate due to the drugs I am taking. I can write though and I feel that I must at least try to do something. My brain feels different to me and though I know from experience that this is a question of time I still feel panicked. I have started to write for myself now rather than for my supervisor. It helps to clear my head and I think that my sentences seem to follow from each other more. As I read this, I realise I am still very jumbled up. I need to keep stimulating my brain. Working with it regularly to unravel all the knots in it. It hasn't healed up all that well and I am avoiding even writing about all the stressors. Running away had never appealed to me so much. I feel like a wreck. A harassed scrambled wreck. Being bipolar is like being on a rollercoaster with no seatbelt. You just have to hold on with all your hands as your cart goes careering down the rails. Finding something to hold on to becomes the purpose of my existence for now. I think I will look on these pieces of writing in the future and just cringe. The ramblings of a lunatic living a postmodern life and feeling thoroughly miserable. My doctor tells me that I am psychiatrically recovered and what I am facing now is normal because of my background and the situation I find myself in having loved a British man and keeping it from my parents. I feel so far away from anything now...just so tired. At the same time, I don't want to be alone. I spent so much time alone when I was sick. Hours and hours in my room as I talked to the voices in me. They saved my life and I feel them say thank you now as I write this. I will always love them even though I hope that they will go away. I want my life back to what it was before the breakdown. I was happy, though continually stressed and on the wrong medication. I'm feeling a bit calmer again. My brain is enjoying "vomiting all over the page". What do I do next in this piece of work I wonder, I need a plan. I don't have one. There is no urgency here though there is a rough kind of flow from sentence to sentence.

Progress I think?

London flat

I hate who I've become. Mixed up, confused and twisted. I feel emotionally disturbed and the sketches I so enjoyed writing no longer manifest. I cannot tell stories about my life or family. I am unable to narrate myself because I am in a constant fight. I cannot make sense and I know I have to for my recovery from the psychotic episode. If not recovery, then at least restoration of function. I don't know if that will ever happen. I feel that in order to "recover" or become functional as I like to think, I need to try to put this episode in context and integrate it with my past and present. I am unable to do that. It doesn't make sense to me that I knew I was going to marry prince Harry or that I was a secret sleeper agent that had just been woken up. How does one reconcile that with being a doctor pursuing a doctorate whilst being in a loving relationship? I am told to just discount this, to dismiss it as my illness. Were I my own doctor, I would tell myself to try and move on from it. I feel that I am being slowly destroyed by it and I look with dismay again at my stream of consciousness writing. Where the hell is this going to fit in now? Virginia Woolf did it I think to myself. It can't be that bad if there's a precedent. I don't know how to organize my thoughts anymore and in a way I think that writing in this way shows how traumatized I really am. I want the readers to know that. I want to talk about the torture I feel at being unable to live with my family anymore. How I've become sick to them and will always be sick to them. Every mood change I have or choice that I make that does not adhere to my cultural upbringing is a symptom of my illness. I had never thought of suicide before but the thought is constantly on my mind. I am reminded here of the Oxford Handbook of Clinical Specialties. A small side note on one of its pages mentioned the case of a woman who believed that she was receiving messages from aliens that told her that someone was going to blow up the White House. When the doctors told her it was a lie, she went and killed herself. She needed to believe in that contact. Needed those aliens to speak to her. I need my voices there. I miss them when they go and the one that remains now, I call him papa, has been integral to my survival. As the situation worsens at home, I think of running away every day. Yes my experience would make a great thesis but in way there is too much in there. Too much for one person. I wonder how I do it. I feel slow, so very slow and as I make notes on the papers I read I am reminded of my past fluency and speed of understanding. I try again not to panic. Step by step...it's going to be ok

Will it?

I think in fragments and write in fragments, unable to focus. I start with writing notes, decide to stop and move onto writing the chapter. I then stop that after several paragraphs and move onto reading something. I put the little pieces together and out somehow comes the thesis. I feel confused about this process and very uncomfortable.

Zoom Out

I look at what I have written and I immediately want to delete the word suicide from the text. I worry about what people think and I don't want anyone questioning my stability. I laugh to myself, ever the doctor! You can't hide it anymore! I remember when the words suicide used

to mean an instant referral to a psychiatrist, wait a minute, I've seen seven. Whilst many people think that this is no laughing matter, I find it difficult to stop giggling. Inappropriate affect. There you go, another one. I could go around in circles and have myself admitted again in no time. What is one to do? The madness has infiltrated the very essence of my being and I again smile at the way my sentences seem to flow better when I make madness my friend. I cannot pretend I have not seen what I have seen or lived where I have lived. I cannot, in good faith censor my madness from my readers. It scares me to hold it up to the light like that and I feel terrified as I write this. How much madness can I expose without fear? I have been plenty crazy and seen plenty crazy and three months out of an asylum, the experiences are still fresh in my mind.

Benbecula

Stuck, sticky, hurt, tired.

I have decided to take time away from writing this month to heal. Writing hurts. I never knew it would hurt. Hurt plus other hurts makes one bleeding writer. Each word is an effort. I can't seem to think beyond it. I can't seem to go into the words. They feel plastic, impermeable. I don't want to show this bit. Robotic. As if bits of my flesh have been sliced away and the knife keeps coming back for more. I'm not sure how to deal with that. Looking back on my diary entries they have been painful both to live and write. This is my last one. The orders have been given. I was told that I didn't have a place to stay in London anymore. The mad scramble, the tears, the leaving of the albeit hostile family nest has almost finished the writer in me off. I stand, near mute with trauma, soundless in my misery and I walk around the streets of Newcastle numb, afraid and missing the person who threw me out. How fucked up is that? I find a place to stay in Edinburgh, I'm on an island writing this piece of work. It's another bloody diary entry I can imagine my supervisor saying. How is this relevant to my thesis? I still hurt and I feel stupid for hurting.

The doctor part comes out and says that I have to get on with it. The counsellor part says I should give myself permission to feel what I need to feel. I go with neither and sit in myself, walled off. The voices come and go and I am trapped in my tower still trying to write. Jane Speedy talks about writing around the silence she feels and I draw strength from this. Maybe by writing around my muteness I will liberate it. Set free to what needs to be said. Having veered off my "personal map of the possible" (Tamas, 2011, p.431), I sit with severed heart and think about my life without my family. Saying goodbye to the tribe. I was never an easy member but without that part to my identity I feel so lost. I've lost my place. I think to myself that it would have been better had I died. I think my parents would have preferred that to me living in a way that they felt was "sinful". I feel myself going mute here, reluctant to divulge the details of family history that would risk my family's safety. My reputation, already shot to bits, was something I didn't care about anymore. I should feel liberated but I feel scared and alone. I feel scared to read. I am stuck again. Stuck is not an ending I think to myself. I must give these pieces an ending. A good one for morale's sake. Marginalization and stigmatisation should not be allowed to win.

Freedom has come at long last. This is it. I answer to no one. I wait for the wave of triumph and happiness to come over me and I feel misery well up in me again. I think of loss and Barty Crouch's line in Harry Potter, "we're never whole again are we?". I feel myself sliding into muteness again. Almost like the fading away of a tragic music piece. Silence is the ending. Everything stops. The clocks keep on ticking. I sip my coffee. I start to falter as I write and I begin to shut down.

I die.

Telephone ringing-Two Lecturers

Em: Hi Bill, just rereading the thesis draft of the student we were talking about earlier.

Bill: So what do you think?

Em: It's a bloody ethical nightmare! I think she has to rewrite the whole thing! I'm worried about the University's reputation.

Bill: What are you worried about exactly?

Em: Has she even consulted the school's research ethics framework?

Bill: Why do you ask?

Em: It clearly states that the "design, implementation and conclusion" should respect the "dignity, health and safety of such participants". Have you seen the way she writes about her parents?

Bill: I believe she mentions that her writing of them is a reflection of her experience at that particular stage of her processing of the trauma of being domestically sectioned.

Em: what about her culture? Islam and the "holy book" are mentioned in a negative way. Doesn't the framework also mention that researchers should "respect the cultural, religious, gender and other significant characteristics of sections of the population" she plans on researching and presenting?

Bill: Just give her time Em, she's working through her issues whilst writing this piece of work. None of us can avoid writing about our parents without mixed feelings coming out of it. She talks of being forced out of a dialogue with her parents and in another vignette also mentions love. There is a lot of hurt and confusion there and I believe that she addresses the split honestly.

Em: I don't know if we can put our name on it. We have a duty to "responsible, ethical and thoughtful scholarship". The work has to have "integrity and consider the welfare of both the researcher and the participants involved". What if her parents read it? What do you think will happen then? What will happen to her in a country where there is honour killing and imprisonment of individuals who speak out against the country.

Bill: Em, we have discussed that. The student assures me that she is safe so long as she doesn't mention anything that is critical of the Emir and the Royal family in Kuwait. Her work does not involve slander of any individual and she has structured it in such a way as to preserve her honour. As for her psychological welfare she is already seeing a therapist and psychiatrist as well as having an active social network. She is still engaged to her fiancé and has repaired her relationship with her parents. I think she's doing pretty well in dealing with the possible damage that she could have sustained to herself in exploring this difficult topic.

Em: Do you think she's well enough to do it? She's recently been diagnosed as bipolar and has come out of a 6-month hospital stay.

Bill: It's been almost a year since that has happened. The woman is a trained doctor and therapist. We trained her! I think we should trust her and just wait and see.

Em: I'm still very worried about the mother.

Bill: I've got another student coming in a bit but I'd like to remind you of Ellis' (2001) work about her mother and Tony Adams' (2006) work with his father. There are many more examples of this that have already taken place. Let her find her way in writing this ethically!

Em: We'll just have to wait and see.

Skype Call

Steve: *You don't know that she said that. You have no proof!*

Layla *(with her head in her hands)*: *I can just imagine it!*

Steve: *You're being paranoid.*

Layla: *I'm not!*

Steve: *Explain.*

Layla: *It's what I would say if I were her!*

Steve: *What, that your work is an ethical nightmare?*

Layla: *It's how it felt at the beginning.*

Steve: *And now?*

Layla: *Now I feel differently. Having researched relational ethics and read through and reworked my vignettes, I feel that I have worked through the ethical dilemmas presented in the University's ethical framework and guidance notes.*

Steve: *So you've changed the truth of what happened?*

Layla: *Not really. I have anonymised certain people as well as collapsing some of the events. I have found a different way to write about my parents.*

Steve: *What about your parents? And what they've done to you!*

Layla: *Well it's not as simple as that. I have to respect their dignity and honour as well as the culture of Kuwait.*

Steve: *So you're going to cover for them. I don't believe this. You were going to write about the culture, the restrictive religion, the control and the "I against the collective" or has that changed now?*

Layla: *When I first started writing, I was in a very different place to that which I am in now. I was full of hate and anger. Now, after all that has happened, I have to take responsibility for my own position in the relational dynamic between me and my mother and between me and my father kind of like Tony Adams (2006) did.*

Steve: *What are you talking about? They imprisoned you! Made you see doctors against your will! Kicked you out of the flat! When will you start to get furious and leave?*

Layla: *"They" are not "they". They are individuals. In my being in Edinburgh, on this course and hanging out with you I have neglected them in their most important moments. I wasn't there for my mother when my gran died and I wasn't there for my father when his two sisters died in a car crash. My sister miscarried when I was writing up an essay and I couldn't be there for her either. In all these years that I've been here I've only seen them for a few weeks at a time. They don't know me anymore and I have to keep that in mind when I write about my relationship with them.*

Steve: *You really are part of the collective or tribe as you like to call it aren't you? I thought you said you were going to leave? It wasn't your fault that you couldn't be there. You had so much to do that was important for your future.*

Layla: *It doesn't matter that I had to work for my future. Bottom line is, I wasn't there for them*

when they needed it. It matters to them and with their support in funding my degree and their previous emotional support to me in difficult times, I owed them that. I just didn't know how to balance my life with theirs. It's almost like I cut them out.

Steve (softly): You needed to cut them out. They didn't approve of the life you have or had here. You couldn't go where you wanted to and most importantly you couldn't love who you wanted to.

Layla (tearing up): I know that. It's just so difficult and confusing. So much love and yet so much restriction. I don't know what to do with that.

Steve (quietly but firmly): It's simple. Leave.

Layla: I can physically leave but I'm not sure if I can emotionally leave. Even my thesis is a collectivist effort. The way in which I express myself best is through dialogue with others. When I am alone as I express in my diary entries, I am usually unhappy. I don't know how to fill in the gap. I can't be like you. Wherever I go I take my inner collectivist with me and try to communicate through others. I don't really like it but I don't know how to change it. It's like I'm enmeshed or entangled in it. I'm stuck!

Steve: They really screwed you up haven't they?

Layla: I cannot deny that they've made mistakes with me. They have and I will say that to their faces. I have made mistakes too. They have also given me so much in terms of love, a great education, the best medical care and shelter when I needed (except for that one time).

Steve: What about Islam? And Kuwait?

Layla: The "holy book" as I refer to it, in one of my vignettes is from a religion that I have mixed feelings about. I went through a time where I lived and breathed it. I even, don't know if you remember this, wore a hijab for six years and became president of the University's Muslim Student's association.

Steve: Thank God I never saw that.

Layla: Oh I was proper devout I was but after I had my psychotic break I felt so betrayed by God that I stopped praying and fasting. I had done everything I could for Islam. Prayed and fasted and travelled on pilgrimages to Mecca! I later felt that I couldn't wear the hijab anymore, it became a burden to me and I took it off. Needless to say, everyone around me rejoiced.

Steve: Why? I thought they loved Islam?

Layla: In my family and close circle of friends, no one wears the hijab and so when I wore it I was seen to be strange and scary.

Steve: This is all very confusing.

Layla: It is. I can't rationalize it.

Steve: You say you're not good at being alone but here you are alone in a basement writing your thesis.

Layla (laughingly): With my voices.

Steve (pityingly): I didn't want to mention that.

Layla: It's ok. I need to laugh about it.

Steve: Say hi for me.

Layla laughs.

Steve: So what do you do out there in the dustbowl?

Layla: Family gatherings, restaurants or coffee shops with friends. That sort of thing.

Steve: Do you go dancing or drink?

Layla: Nope.

Steve: But you love to dance!

Layla: I do but that's the culture here. Certain things are not done. I do go to all women's parties though.

Steve: I don't know why you keep going back there. You don't really fit in.

Layla: Well, I'm not sure about the future but this place has given me a lot.

Steve: Other than a set of issues?

Layla: I got my medical degree thanks to this country as well as many opportunities to develop myself professionally.

Steve: You sit on your arse and have everything done for you.

Layla (sighs): Yes, most houses have servants and drivers. It's a different world out here.

Edinburgh

Layla enters office and sees an elderly man with a friendly smile seated at a desk.

Dr. M: Hello Dr. Almajed. How are you today?

Layla goes to sit down on the seat right beside the desk.

Layla: I'm doing okay I guess.

Dr. M (looking at Layla's thighs in her sundress): Looks like you've lost weight.

Layla (blushing, pulls at her dress to make it looser): Thanks. I've been dieting and going to the gym recently.

Dr. M: Good for you! So why are you here today?

Layla: Well, I've just come for a regular check-up and I have some questions for you.

Dr. M: Go on...

Layla: I need to know I'm okay enough to do this course.

Dr. M: What do you think?

Layla: I think I can do it but I need you to tell me I'm okay to do it.

Dr. M: Why do you need that?

Layla: Gibberish! She said I was talking gibberish! It made perfect sense to me!

Dr. M: Let's go slowly here. Who is "she" and what was "gibberish"?

Layla: I don't want to mention names as I've recently been reading about ethics but someone whose opinion counts has said to me that I talk gibberish when I talk about my work!

Dr. M: And what do you think?

Layla: I was talking excitedly about what I had read!

Dr. M: And?

Layla: Apparently there was no link between one sentence and another. Was it just me being manic?

Dr. M: From my experience you do get quite passionate about things. That doesn't mean you are manic. As for gibberish. When is gibberish ever gibberish?

Layla (trying to sound more balanced and less excitable): What do you mean?

Dr. M: In my line of work and in the case of some therapists, gibberish is not gibberish. We see a lot of patients who are fragmented for a variety of reasons. There are ways to work with that rather than ridicule it.

Layla: What ways?

Dr. M: Finding points of contact, themes and story threads. There's plenty of literature to support this (Baldwin, 2005). Have you read Lauren Slater's (1996) book "Welcome to my country: a therapist's view of madness"?

Layla: I read some of it.

Dr. M: Remember the part about the spaceship?

Layla: Which part?

Dr. M: Lauren Slater, a psychologist, was sitting in a group session with some schizophrenic patients. She had been advised by her superiors to not agree with any of the patients'

comments that didn't make any sense; ones that were not rooted in reality. Slater had been trying this approach for months and had not been successful. One day, during a group session, where the patients were wandering all over the room, one patient said "there's a spaceship in my belly" (Slater, 1997, p.14) Rather than dismiss it as "gibberish", Slater decided to change her approach and put her hand on the patient's belly and said the word spaceship. The other patients looked at her and they all gathered around the patient and put their hands on the patient's belly and started saying "spaceship". Slater had found a "point of contact".

Layla: Prouty had a similar idea didn't he?

Dr. M: You think so?

Layla: It feels like that to me.

Dr. M: Tell me.

Layla: Well his method involves reflecting things back to the client/patient and staying with them no matter what they're saying.

Dr. M: Well Prouty works with pre-therapy.

Layla: Some psychiatrists and therapists would argue that a patient with psychosis is similar to a child who had not matured emotionally to put it very simply.

Dr. M: There are many ways of looking at psychosis. Books that may interest you include the psychotic core, the psychotic wavelength, going sane and bipolar.

Layla: Well I feel pressured to choose an underlying theory for what I've been through.

Dr. M: You are in a unique position of being able to explore a range of theories about psychosis.

Layla: I find that really hard. At this point in my writing, I feel like I have processed a lot of my experiences and would like to work more organically with what I'm going through. I don't want to theorise my life. I feel like I do enough of that already.

Dr. M: Really?

Layla: Well, I feel like I'm in danger of living what I would call an "autoethnographic life" where I lose sight of living in the now and am always thinking of how I'd write about situations and life events that came up and whilst writers such as Tony Adams (2006) talk about living with theory. I feel like I want to keep some things to myself.

Dr. M: So how are you going to write an autoethnography? It's all about your psychosis in relation to a Kuwaiti culture.

Layla: Well if I had to choose a theorist it would be R.D. Laing.

Dr. M: Why? When you've got theorists like Freud, Klein and Bion who have contributed majorly to psychoanalytic ideas concerning psychosis. It was actually Freud's paper in 1911 that "inaugurated thinking around psychosis" (Lucas, 2013, p.47). So why Laing?

Layla: I found myself really identifying with the idea of "ontological insecurity" (Laing, 1960), of true selves and false selves and how the surrounding environment during childhood plays such an important part in the maturational progression of the infant.

Dr. M: You do know that it was Winnicott who first came up with the idea of true and false

selves in 1960.

Layla: Really?

Dr. M: Yes.

Layla: Do you have any theories about me?

Dr. M: I don't want to talk about that. I'd like you to find your own way. Notice how lucid you sound when you've calmed down and started to talk coming from your "true self" and not trying to comply or sound like something you're not.

Layla (anxiously): So no more gibberish?

Dr. M (smiling): No more gibberish.

Kuwait

I started to write this thesis from the viewpoint of my post-psychotic fragmented self. As I move through my stages of denial (I'm not sick deal with it!) anger (how could they do this to me), betrayal (I don't trust anyone anymore) and acceptance with reflection (maybe I needed help/protection in a way I couldn't understand), I feel that my thesis itself is in flux and my focus keeps changing. As the time flies by and my deadline approaches, I'm not sure what to do about that. I can't seem to pin it down much like I hate to be pinned down by others. It's become an extension of me and in many ways I just can't tame it. I look at my previous writing and note the difference between them and what I'm writing now. It's like I was another person. It is sinking in slowly, the diagnosis and as I read Jamison's book for the third time I feel validated in my feelings, in my highs and lows. I feel the need to keep quoting writers that I've read almost like doing so will make this piece "stronger" and "more academic" when quite frankly I'm the best authority on my personal life. Well, at least I'd like to think so. Sometimes it doesn't feel like it.

Edinburgh

Layla enters supervisor's office

Supervisor: Have a seat Layla. Let's get started.

Layla sits down at the seat next to the window.

Supervisor: So how are you doing?

Layla: Not bad. Bit of a tough deadline but coping as well as can be expected.

Supervisor: Good. Is there anything you'd like to say first?

Layla: No. I'd like to hear your feedback regarding the inputs I sent.

Supervisor: Well, I'm a bit confused. You started out by writing vignettes, moved onto diary entries and now I'm getting short conversational scripts. How does it all fit together in a thesis?

Layla: Well it's what's coming out of me at the moment. I tried to mix it up to make it look more "artistic", however, I then realized, looking back at all this work, that it's been quite a journey and that within itself is what I see as artistic. Going from a point where I thought everything was fine hence the well-crafted scenarios to having a psychotic episode and then the process of handling it as evidenced by the diary entries and then moving on to recovery enabling me later to have fragmented flashbacks. That is what the later scripts represent; a sum of the pivotal moments of my life compressed into short conversations.

Supervisor: So you want to show the journey that you've been through to the readers. My only question is how are you presenting it? What are you basing it on?

Layla: Well, I'm using different formats in this thesis such as scripts, whatsapp messages and phone calls to document the process of writing this thesis from the view point of a bipolar Kuwaiti woman. In the beginning, it was going to be my experience within the context of the Kuwaiti culture. As I write though, I realize that I straddle different cultures, in other words "culture border zones" (Rosaldo, 1989, p.208). These include the Kuwaiti culture, the medical culture and the psychotherapy culture. These cultural border zones keep coming up for me in my work and so I'm beginning to wonder whether they all just merge together in my daily life. That it isn't possible for me to choose one culture at a particular time and work within it.

Supervisor: And your theoretical base for this?

Layla: Well I was initially inspired by Roland Barthes' textual strategies in representing the post-structural self, that which is incoherent and fragmented. I love how he mixed photographs, poetry and realist prose to create what can be seen as an anti-autobiography. That was the initial template for my work as you know it. After I began to produce all the conversation scripts I began to think about memories and more specifically flashbacks. These conversations, representing pivotal moments in my life just kept coming. It is almost like they wrote themselves into existence and I became alive among them. As Jacques Derrida (1988) says in his paper "it was the term which was searching for me, it had the initiative, according to me and was doing its best to collect itself by every means for a period of time."(p.3) Writing my thesis reminded me of looking at what is known in the Harry Potter books as a "pensieve". A glass basin, which allows an individual to look at memories. I was particularly struck by the

scene from the second part of the deathly hallows when Harry took a look at Snape's tears in the pensieve. The flashbacks were quick, lifelike, evocative and in many ways transformative. I always cry at that particular scene. It was the best I'd ever seen. Like so much of my work I find inspiration once it's already written.

Supervisor: So you're using Harry Potter as a source of inspiration. Sounds like a novel and what could be seen as a risky approach this far along.

Layla: Well that is what I feel. Remember that piece of work I submitted where I discussed the paradigm shift I had to go through in order to write a piece of work like this?

Supervisor: Yes, you said you went from working with a modernist lens to being an artist.

Layla: It really opened up doors for me, that shift. I felt so locked in before. I know like to think of myself as a vessel through which the world communicates.

Supervisor (laughingly): Bit grand that.

Layla (face falling): It came out wrong.

Supervisor: It's ok. You get inspiration from a range of sources. That's the art world, the writing world and dare I say it, the counselling world. Counselling is an art form in itself.

Layla: Well I remember quoting Batman on my first day on the Interpersonal Dialogue programme and I got put down by a colleague who said it wasn't academic enough.

Supervisor: There is a lot of theory behind movies. Don't know if you've heard of Joseph Burgo (2013, May 23). He uses films to illustrate certain psychological conditions. Most notable is his work on narcissistic mothers). You should definitely check it out on YouTube.

Layla: Well, that certainly makes me feel a lot better.

Cafe Nero- London

Layla and baba walk in. They find a table and sit down.

Layla: I'll get it. What would you like baba?

Baba: The usual. A cappuccino and a chocolate croissant.

Layla: I don't know if they have them here. Why don't you try their chocolate twists? They're amazing!

Baba: Sure!

Layla walks to the counter and waits in the queue. When it is her turn she goes to speak to the man at the counter. He smiles at her and starts to speak.

Man: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX?

Layla: I'm sorry but I don't understand what you are saying.

Man: Are you Brazilian?

Layla (giggles): No. I'm from Kuwait.

Man (pales visibly) and looks back at baba (terrified): Good God! I'm sorry! I'm really sorry!

Layla (confused): It's ok. It's not a big deal.

Man mutters to his co-worker and avoids her gaze. Layla takes the tray back to baba and they start to eat. She looks back at the man inquisitively and he studiously avoids looking in her direction.

Zoom out

Layla is sitting with Steve and 2 of their friends at a pub in Edinburgh. They look a bit disturbed by the story of the man at the cafe.

Alan: So why was he scared?

Layla: I think he was worried someone would do something to him if he engaged with me. I saw him looking back at my father terrified. He must have heard about Arab culture and panicked.

Ling: But what is wrong if a man engages with you?

Layla: There's nothing wrong with it. My family is quite open minded about these things so long as they are superficial. Other families are not. He has obviously heard of those families and didn't want to get into trouble.

Steve: But how do you feel about that?

Layla: It makes me sad. Almost like I have no identity. That people like that man see my father and his possible wrath rather than me.

Ling: Is it always like this? What's it like in Kuwait?

Layla: People in cafes there are not afraid because they understand the ins and outs of the culture. They will smile but not go further until they see your response.

Alan: So Kuwait, you told me, is next to Saudi Arabia. What's it like over there?

Layla: Well it's not a bad place to live. There are so many resources over there. So many services. The country really takes care of its own. There are implicit social rules however and it can be hard to keep to them if you think differently from the collective.

Ling: What do you mean? Which collective?

Layla: Well there are different kinds of collective. There's your personal tribe (your family and relatives) and the country's national collective. Each with their own implicit rules and formulations.

Alan: What's your collective like?

Layla: You mean my tribe?

Alan: Yes

Steve visibly stiffens and looks incredibly uncomfortable.

Layla: Well.. uhh..., we..

Steve: They.

Layla (gulps): They are a confusing bunch really. Very successful in their careers, loving.

Steve: When they want to be.

Layla: Can you please stop that?

Steve: Really?

Alan: Ok ok, the wider collective then.

Layla: Kuwait? Or the women?

Ling: Kuwaiti women.

Layla: In Kuwait women work, drive, have their own passports, travel out of the country and hold governmental positions. This is all done independently. The right to vote took a lot longer though but eventually we got there; it happened in 2005. There are, however still some social and legal discrimination issues which we are now working through (Sassoon, 2012).

Alan: So this is what you're writing about in your thesis? The collective?

Layla: I'm writing about the "tribe" I come from more specifically. I show more rather than tell more about the tribe in the stories I tell and in so doing show my relationship to them.

Ling: Telling and showing?

Layla: These are storytelling techniques that I use in my thesis. One of them, showing is when you invite a reader into the written events and their surroundings and help them to "experience an experience" (Ellis, 1993, p.711) through the use of dialogue especially, engaging with the actions emotions and feelings. With telling however, readers are distanced from the written events and so are in a position to think about them in a different way. These techniques can be used together for effect. I use showing a lot more than telling in my thesis. I'm just fascinated by dialogue and how we can learn more in two sentences of it rather than in pages of theory as the autoethnographer Carolyn Ellis (2004) says.

Alan: It sounds very progressive and different.

Layla: Well I like to think so. It's bloody hard to do. Steve has seen firsthand what it's like to be with someone who goes through it.

Steve: Shall we change the subject?

Layla: Sure.

Whatsapp text-Kuwait

Suitor: Can I call you?

Layla: Sure

Mobile phone rings and Layla picks it up.

Suitor: Hi! How are you?

Layla (sounding aloof): I'm fine.

Suitor: What you up to? Where've you been?

Layla: At home mostly. Writing up and playing with my dog in my breaks. What about you? Starbucks?

Suitor: You guessed it. I'm getting a pumpkin spice latte as you recommended.

Layla (smiling despite herself): Aww.. Good for you!

Suitor: Can I ask you a question?

Layla: Go for it.

Suitor: What do you think of gay people?

Layla: They're just people with different sexual preferences.

Suitor: Well I just saw two of them and they made me sick to my stomach. I felt nauseous like I wanted to throw up.

Layla (horrified silence): Uhh... that's a pretty strong reaction.

Suitor: I just hate them.

Layla: And if your kids were gay? What would you do then?

Suitor: Aootho billah (God prevent the devil from such events). I'd do my best to make sure that never happened.

Layla: And how would you do that?

Suitor: With regards to my son, I would make sure he came with me everywhere. I'd get him into masculine pursuits like football and wrestling. Make sure his hair is short. If he had a sister I'd make sure they wouldn't play with one another.

Layla: You wouldn't let him play with his sister?

Suitor: Of course not! He might pick up some feminine traits. The sister or the girl would always stay with the mother so that she'd learn how to be feminine.

Layla (trying to control her anger): I see...

Zoom out

Phone rings

Suitor: Hi

Layla (guardedly): Hi

Suitor: How's your day? Where've you been coming and going?

Layla: Well, I went to a family gathering and am now knitting in front of the tv.

Suitor: Ahuh.

Layla: And you?

Suitor: Am going to a cafe to meet up with a friend.

Layla: How was work?

Suitor: I had a rather tough day. The girls where I work are mostly useless.

Layla: Useless?

Suitor: I have found that girls in general cannot be depended on with regards to work.

They cry a lot and never get things done.

Layla: Not all girls are like that.

Suitor: In general. I said in general.

Zoom out

Phone rings

Suitor: what's up?

Layla: Nothing much really. I've taken the day off studying. How are you?

Suitor: Good. Am on my way to the gym.

Layla (a bit teary due to a previous conversation): Have you ever had a bad breakup?

Suitor (incredulously): What?

Layla: A bad breakup.

Suitor: Why are you asking me this question?

Layla: Just wondering. A friend of mine and I have just been talking about it.

Suitor: No. I haven't.

Layla: In your whole life?

Suitor: Yup. I have been very lucky to have a mother who has sheltered me and my brother from all suffering. She taught us about how to deal with issues that upset us. We didn't suffer at all.

Layla: So you've never suffered from anything?

Suitor: Nothing. I've had a good life. Going back to breakups though you should know that a girl with a past is not the kind a man would wish to marry.

Layla: Really?

Suitor: Really. In fact if a man found out about it there is a big chance that he would back out of the marriage.

Layla (quietly): I see.

Suitor: And if a man is married to this girl and later finds out that she has a past. Well then he might do something to her.

Zoom out

Layla and girlfriend walking in the park.

Girlfriend: So he threatened you!

Layla: Well, it was more general talk.

Girlfriend: Sounds like a threat to me! Aren't you scared?

Layla: Well, more determined than scared. I can't be with him.

Girlfriend: Understatement of the century. Not only is he homophobic and misogynistic, he also sounds violent!

Layla: He's been trained to speak like that.

Girlfriend: He's a grown man. He should know better.

Layla: He's never left Kuwait. Lived with his family for 38 years. He hasn't seen the world. He speaks word for word what the conventions of this culture instruct us to do and not what actually happens.

Girlfriend: Well I'm Kuwaiti too. I would never stand for that. Not all people think like that.

Layla: Yes but we can never be public about it can we. We "uhuh" and "I see" our way out of these conversations.

Girlfriend: I wouldn't.

Layla: Well that's the way I've been raised.

Girlfriend: Who are you really?

Zoom out

Layla is sitting on a couch in an office speaking to her therapist.

Therapist (furious): You do know I'm gay right?

Layla: I am confused. I thought you said you had a wife.

Therapist: I call my partner my wife.

Layla: Ok

Therapist: So how did you take his homophobic sentiments?

Layla: I was just quiet about it.

Therapist: And how did that make you feel?

Layla: I was both horrified and terrified.

Therapist: Why?

Layla: Because that man could have been my husband. I would have had to live with his homophobia and his ideas on bringing up my future children.

Therapist: Let's explore that idea.

Layla: What the horror? Or the terror?

Therapist: Your silence. Tell me about your silence.

Layla: Well, not all Kuwaitis think like that but there are some who do. Islam is the dominant religion in the country and it's ideas concerning gay people are known. Gay people are ridiculed, pitied or seen as objects of amusement in some family backgrounds. Whilst there is an underground gay community, it is still not socially acceptable for someone to be gay.

Therapist: I grew up as a Roman catholic and I faced some problems like that myself.

Layla: There are homophobic people everywhere. The situation was just too close to me.

Therapist: You're still avoiding the question.

Layla: Well you're not the first person to comment on my silence in the face of such hate. My fiancé still asks me incredulously why I refuse to stand up for my beliefs and my girlfriend has also criticised it.

Therapist: Uhuh...

Layla: I suppose I'm afraid to voice my opinion on such subjects with potential husbands and

I guess with people in general.

Therapist: Where does that come from?

Layla: Well I've been raised to just accept things and manage people. Manage my future husband. It's all talk I'm told. He doesn't really mean it. Just stay quiet about it. Don't make a fuss. Accept things as they are. Also, I am outnumbered and powerless. Whilst I come from a powerful tribe and have more freedom than most, there are still limits to what I can say and do.

Therapist: So you live your life in silence?

Layla: I occasionally throw a temper tantrum when I can't take it anymore. However, it is seen as a symptom of my illness and is disregarded as a mood swing.

Therapist: Maybe that's a God send.

Layla: It really is. I wouldn't have survived if it wasn't for my diagnosis of bipolar disorder. It explained away my anger and "misconduct" with regards to societal conventions. It does get tricky though 'cause I myself can't differentiate between what is me and what is my condition.

Therapist: The me and the "not me"

Layla: I can't trust myself.

Therapist: So you're silent because you're afraid to voice your opinion against the larger collective and you're also confused about your anger. Is it yours or your illness'?

Layla: Yes. Back to this suitor, he came highly recommended.

Therapist: And you kept talking to him?

Layla: Well, it became some sort of morbid curiosity. I spent most of my formative years in the UK and never met anyone like this. I wanted to study him.

Therapist: Well there are people like that in Britain. They're just silent about it.

Layla: I don't know what to think about that.

Edinburgh

The room is full of buzzing voices as the students pour into it, greeting each other excitedly. They sit on chairs in a circle and gradually wait for the time to reach 9:30. The tutor walks in and everyone goes quiet.

Tutor: Hello everyone, welcome back! Hope you've had a nice holiday. Let's start by asking someone to volunteer to talk about their research.

The room goes quiet.

One student (Layla) raises her hand.

Layla: I'd like to talk about my work if that's ok.

Tutor: Of course, you go ahead.

Layla: Well I'm in my final year and writing up my thesis. I've got three months, actually two and a half left of writing before I have to submit. I just wanted some feedback on my work if anyone has any. I hope no one minds but I've written up what I wanted to say on this paper here as I get nervous when I speak in public.

The title is In/coherence: a series of autoethnographic vignettes from the viewpoint of a bipolar Kuwaiti woman. In this thesis, I use creative autoethnographic vignettes conveyed in the form of whatsapp texts, phone and skype calls and conversation scripts to create a layered deconstructive account of what it is like for an Arab girl to lose her mind. Weaving in and out of coherence through writing and being, I draw on post-modern post-structural principles in an attempt to write my fragmented post-psychotic self. Building on the works of other messy writers such as Jane Speedy, Sophie Tamas, Alec Grant, Helene Cixous and Susanne Gannon. I use these creative pieces, what I would call "moments of meeting", to build up a hazy picture of my process in writing this thesis from the standpoint of being a bipolar Kuwaiti woman.

In writing about writing a thesis, there are two different facets to my work. I write about issues that arise when I come up against the Kuwaiti culture, using myself as a vehicle through which to both channel and create knowledge through my meetings with people in the Kuwaiti, medical, psychotherapy and "western" community. I then zoom out and discuss with others and with myself what it was like to write about those experiences in light of the different psychological and familial issues that came up for me. I work through the other in finding and losing myself in this work, contributing to the experiences of Arab women who have had psychotic breaks, marginalised communities and the international counselling community.

Silence

Layla: That's basically what my thesis is about. I would really value what anyone has to say about it.

Rebecca: Why moments of meeting?

Layla: I guess I'm just really fascinated by the amount that we can learn about ourselves and each other from daily events and little snippets of conversation. I have also chosen this approach to my thesis as I have discovered through writing and reflection that this is the best

way I can communicate whilst still recovering from a traumatic episode.

Rebecca: Thank you.

Ben: How do you find and lose yourself in the work?

Layla: I use Patti Lathers' idea of "getting lost as the very force of learning" (Lather, 2007, p.13). My losing everything has forced me into "veering off the map of what's possible" (Tamas, 2011, p.431). I am now and through the writing of this thesis in no-man's land. A place I have never been to and never thought I'd reach.

Ben: Sounds like personal growth. Isn't that a good thing?

Layla (laughs): Sounds very good on paper or in conversation. A shit thing to have to go through. I've been in therapy and in treatment with several different psychiatrists to get through to where I am right now.

Kajul: If it's such a difficult and personal topic why write about it?

Layla: Because I must. Whilst I am writing up for my thesis I am also writing myself and knowing myself in the process. It all came pouring out of me. It hurts and there have been a lot of times where I've just wanted to end it but in the end it has become something I love in a painful kind of way. Don't really know how to explain that. Almost like I'm killing a part of myself, the traumatised part. I feel freer and emptier as a result.

Elle: I like the fact that you use whatsapp texts, phone calls and conversation scripts. It makes it seem more modern and relatable somehow.

Layla: Thanks. I just thought of how I communicated with others and learned from others in real life and decided that I wanted my thesis to be real life too. I don't want to unnecessarily censor my work and give you a stylised integrated me when that is not the case. I feel that people can learn more from the upchuck I spew out on the page rather than my telling a pretty story with a happy ending. There are no happy endings. I guess there aren't any unhappy endings either. Everything is in flux. Some things are damn shocking, others are sobering.

Bella: I find myself getting really excited about your work. I really want to hear about it. Sounds quite exotic. An Arab woman who has lost her mind!

Layla: Well that is something I struggle with. I am from an Arab country and so I don't see us as being exotic however when I speak about my life to my British friends it always sounds so dramatic! The vignettes I write are based on true events and to my friends they are seen as quite disturbing.

Bella: What's disturbing about them?

Layla: I think it's my silence in the face of such atrocities. My calmness in hearing all sorts of hateful sentiments. I personally also find that the most disturbing thing.

Ben: So why do you stay quiet?

Layla: That's the part I'm writing about right now and I don't feel like talking about it. Thank you all for listening and contributing.

Kuwait

Layla and sister walk towards the car.

Layla: So we need to get two chai lattes, one iced Americano and one cappuccino.

Sister (entering driver's seat): Yup. You okay to pay this time or shall I?

Layla: I'll do it. You pay for too much stuff already.

Sister: Ok. Let's do it.

The car starts to move. Sister turns to Layla.

Sister: Are you alright?

Layla (looking blank): Just having a bit of a rough day that's all.

Sister: Are you tired? Have you taken your medication?

Layla: No. I've slept for 14 hours and yes I am taking my medication.

Sister: Oh my goodness! That's a lot of hours.

Layla: I feel stoned. Kinda like I've had a load of drugs and it's the day after.

Sister: Well you are on a lot of drugs. I personally think it's that thesis of yours. We all hate it now. Whenever you're down we know it's the thesis.

Layla: Whilst writing the thesis is hard going, it's more than that. I've been like this even without the thesis. Sometimes I have good days and sometimes I have bad days. It's part and parcel of my condition.

Sister: Well you're still miles better than what you were like in London in the early days. I still can't get it out of my mind. You were scary.

Layla: What do you mean?

Sister: I still can't get the image out of my mind. You were in Harrods, all dressed up and with makeup on and yet you were walking around in circles, muttering to yourself, stamping your feet and shaking your arms.

Layla: Why was I in bloody Harrods then?! I should have been kept at home!!

Sister: Don't you remember it?

Layla: I remember bits of it. The rest I'm too ashamed to even remember.

Sister: Well you were ill and we just wanted to make you happy, that's why we took you to Harrods. You didn't want to buy anything then. I suppose it was better than when you went to Primark. You began to grab things off the racks hurriedly, rushing around aimlessly in front of everyone. You then spent two thousand pounds on lingerie and makeup that you then never wore!

Layla (sighing ashamedly): Well I don't have anything to say to that.

Sister: So what I'm trying to say is "count your blessings!" you don't know how far you've come.

Layla: I guess so. It's still difficult to manage it. I can't get out of bed in the mornings and sometimes I feel like I want to laugh and cry for no reason.

Sister: It's ok. It will get better. You look a lot happier here. We don't want you to travel again. Just stay with us.

Layla: I do feel a bit scared travelling on my own again. I'm scared of going crazy on my own.

I don't want to stay like this though. I want to be stronger and more independent.

Sister: You will be. Never forget where you were.

Skype call

Steve: *It was the worst day of my life. Don't you remember it?*

Layla: *I can only remember bits of it.*

Steve: *How can you not remember?*

Layla: *I just don't.*

Steve: *Well do you not remember being in the taxi and rambling about the Palestinians and jinn?*

Layla: *I remember thinking I had died and had gone to heaven and that you were Jesus and reading to me. I was so scared. I then somehow thought you were dying and kept crying over it.*

Steve: *You were sobbing your eyes out. That wasn't the horrible part though.*

Layla: *What was?*

Steve: *It was the screaming. When we got to the hospital you started to scream.*

Layla: *really?*

Steve: *Yes. You screamed so hard. Kept saying "I don't know anything" and then moved on to "I'm nuts I'm nuts" then went on to "fuck fuck fuck" and then you passed out.*

Layla: *I remember thinking I was a spy and I was being interrogated.*

Steve: *Is that why you kept saying "I don't know anything"?*

Layla: *Yeah.*

Steve: *The staff were great though. They just took it in their stride and took you away. I just stood there. I couldn't cry, couldn't do anything.*

Layla: *Gosh you were so brave. I don't know what I would've done should the places have been reversed.*

Steve: *You've just got to. For the people you care about.*

Layla smiles and gets a bit teary.

Steve: *Anyways, all that is better than your affair with Prince Harry. The way you kept talking about him made me really jealous!*

Layla: *Well I was under the impression that I was in a relationship with him. I got kinda obsessed!*

Steve: *I know. You said you cut a picture of him out of a magazine and put it in your bra.*

Layla (blushing now): *Yeah.*

Steve: *It was more than that though wasn't it? Not just Harry?*

Layla: *Well there was a spy story too amongst other things. I was terrified. Believed also that the devil was after me and I was a witch.*

Steve: *So many stories...*

Layla: *They put me in a private room you know? Reserved for the worst cases they've seen. I actually scared the patients there.*

Steve: *You said you were scared of them too.*

Layla: *Yes, I was. It was really horrible for a while. When I got better I was put in a dormitory*

with three other women. They were actually really nice once I got to know them. They shared their food with me.

Steve: Remember how I used to visit every day? Once you decided to stop hating me.

Layla (smiling): I remember.

Steve: The times we had at the hive. The earl grey you used to order with a tunnocks tea cake. You always loved that.

Layla: Thanks for coming to visit all the time. I know money was short and you had to walk there.

Steve: Always.

Part 2

“There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit at the type writer and bleed”

Ernest Hemingway (cited in Arthur Bochner, 2007, p.197)

I sit in our family diwaniya on a Friday afternoon and look at the smiling faces kissing and hugging one another. I find myself thinking about the texts I have written, the anger and hate I have felt and I feel sad. Sad that it all had to happen and I am back where I started, another person, another self. Should I have written it? Committed it forever to paper and memory? My answer is yes. It needed to be told. The truth as I experienced it at the time needed to be told. I am not saying I am blameless in what happened, I too have been reckless and provocative and I will admit that but the reaction to my illness and the events that followed was a fanatical one. Granted that little was known in my environment about psychosis at the time but I was the one to suffer for it. Accused and treated as if I were dirty, sinful, ungrateful and rude The patient was the one who was blamed. I had originally intended to start this chapter by commenting on the lovely progression that was evident in my writing throughout the texts, starting with fear and vulnerability in unscripted moving to anger in therapy, brokenness in the diary entries and eventual ability to be what I saw as more balanced on page 45. I find myself furious as I write this and also tearful. Whilst the advice being given to me by friends is to not let these experiences define me, the truth to me is that they do. I write myself bare in this thesis. I am in it, I am it. There was a plan to this part and I will go through it. I will be analytical but I will also be truthful. It is a major challenge I face in analysing what happened. My lens, continues to change and morph with every angle I take and I cannot pin it down. As Carolyn Ellis (2004) mentions,

thoughts and feelings circle around us, flash back and forward. The topic is interwoven with the chronological. Thoughts and feelings merge, from our grasp and then reappear in another concept (p.118).

There are those who would argue that I am too close to it still and that writing this thesis was a mistake. Is it a mistake to show the readers my reality, my confusion, my inability to sit still with one subject?

This layered account as mentioned before is meant to shock, confuse, disturb, much like this chapter does. That's what it was like and is still like for me. As one survivor from Tamas (2011) study mentions "I will never really recover" (p.433). I couldn't completely draw myself out of the experience to write this part and so I must continue to write in this unsettled frame of mind. Looking back at the scenes I have written in part one of this thesis, I could not predict how a reader would respond to them and so I have decided that as a person who is bipolar with two psychotic breaks under her belt that my very inability to construct a coherent narrative was something I should offer up to the readers. That this disorder might actually speak for itself. I refer here to what Moore and Davis (2002) describe as "narrative quilting" (p.262-266). Originally described as a technique for people with severe dementia it has been adapted for people with severe mental illnesses (Baldwin, 2005).

Individuals who suffer from severe mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia are sometimes unable to narrate themselves and can come across as fragmented, incoherent and inconsistent. Baldwin (2006) suggests that rather than expecting narratives to be linear, coherent and consistent we might try to change what we see as narrative and "accommodate

a sort of patchwork of fragments, undivided, uncertain in meaning or narrative value, into a meaningful whole” (p.106). In this, we relate stories to other stories rather than putting them in chronological order and relate each of them to other stories known or told about the individual in order to get an idea of what the individual is trying to communicate. Thus here the “narrative consistency and coherency then rests not in chronology but in the assemblages of fragments related by meaning.” (Baldwin, 2006, p.106). These fragments are joined together in an attempt to “observe and make sense out of the chaos of suffering and loss.” (Montello, 1997, p.194).

In my case, as mentioned previously, I use these fragments of conversations and stories and layer them to capture the meaning or essence of my “moments of meeting” with the various cultures in my life represented by the different people I engage with. The family, the tribe and the suitor are an example of Kuwaiti cultural scripts that cannot be washed away and that I am confronted with daily. My psychiatrist and Steve represent the medical/positivist/scientific culture and my therapist, supervisor and colleagues represent the psychotherapy culture. As mentioned before I also include my personal explorations (otherwise known as process inputs) in the writing of this thesis along the way.

There are deeper issues here concerning identity and lack of belonging but these are outside the scope of this thesis. I had originally intended to arrange these past vignettes artistically, to create a beautiful collage and add photos and paintings. In the end, I decided to settle on these bare texts. I didn’t want to dress it up. Prettify it. The texts were always there for me, from the beginning of this journey and they will be there in the end.

There was a real danger I have found, of getting too caught up in what came up for me in the writing of these vignettes and process inputs to be able to write academically and coherently in this part of the thesis. It was very hard to get off the emotional rollercoaster that I had experienced in writing these vignettes as they unfolded in my life. It was only through distance, much rereading and rewriting of this section in addition to the feedback of my two supervisors that I was able to work through the “tunnel vision” (Ellis, 2004, p.118) that I had developed during my rollercoaster writing. In many ways, I “wrote myself into recovery” as my supervisor remarked and this section is a culmination of all my efforts in writing this autoethnography and puts the previous scenes into context.

My very real terror at being discredited by exposing myself in this way is something I have had to work against in writing this autoethnography and I feel that not talking about this terror is in many ways a betrayal to my experience. Kay Redfield Jamison (1995) had kept her “illness” a secret for many years for fear of reprisal in the work place. Due to my very public hospitalisation, I did not have that luxury and this has been compounded by the fact that I have decided to write an auto ethnography around such issues as madness and psychosis.

There are six main sections in Part two. I will start with “Locating self and work in time, place and culture”. Here I put the vignettes into the context of my early formative experiences, where I come from and the different cultures that form the undercurrents to my life. I then move on

to “Inspirations: epistemological and methodological” where I discuss my journey to and relationship with my epistemological position as well as coming to my chosen methodology and its history. Following on from this section I write of “Moments of meeting”. In the section after that comes “Speaking my mind: illness and narrative”. Here I discuss what it is like to speak my mind as an “ill” person, where I locate my writing within illness narrative frameworks as well as the therapeutic and witnessing functions of this autoethnography. Madness and the family comes next. In my thesis I talk a lot about my family and indeed after a psychotic break or severe mental illness, there can be massive disruptions to family dynamics. I found this to be especially pronounced in the tribal environment I have been raised in with its specific cultural scripts. Thus in this section I discuss the theoretical assumptions underpinning madness and the family. After this, comes “Nuts and bolts’: crafting this thesis” where I go into the back stage of this thesis talking about characters, scene setting and plot development. Finally, I end with the section entitled “Ending, beginning and letting go” where I discuss the aim of my work, what it has been like to release this thesis from my life, almost rewriting myself into a new body and beginning a new chapter.

Starting points: locating self and work in time, place and culture

Location in discourse

Due to the multifaceted nature of my research and the lack of any information about Bipolar Arab women, it has been difficult trying to locate it in a well-demarcated body of knowledge or a specific discourse. Though these autoethnographic writings focus more on writing about myself and Kuwaiti culture I cannot deny that the situation is in fact more complex. I straddle several different cultures in writing here as mentioned before. These include the medical culture, the psychotherapy culture as well as the Kuwaiti culture. Rosaldo (1989, p.208) talks about the constant crossing of "cultural border zones" and their rules. These borderlands are defined as "the space when two or more cultures occupy the same psychological space" (Rosaldo, 1989). These overlapping areas are seen to be more "zones of creativity" rather than "analytically empty" areas (Rosaldo, 1989, p.208). There are many ways of looking at this and I struggle to write from this cultural border zone as I am strongly tempted to locate my work in one culture. Though I have described this as so in previous paragraphs, focussing mostly on my interaction with the Kuwaiti culture, I feel the need to mention the powerful undercurrents that take place below the surface of this work. I am continually guilty, as one client has mentioned, of trying to make things clearer than they really are.

In this thesis, I use "medical language" such as "condition", "illness", "psychosis" and the need for medication. It would follow from this that I place myself firmly in what is known as the "medicalisation" camp where I follow the standard Western medical model which assumes, in the words of Donald Mender (1994, p.93), "that the body functions as a machine, illness results from mechanical breakage, and the doctor acts as a repair man".

However, also implicit in my work, is my quest for freedom and social justice both for myself and others in marginalised communities in writing this thesis, qualities that are espoused by members of the "psychiatric survivor movement". This is a group of "self-identified mental patients" (Bassman, 1997, p.238) who have "authored alternative narratives of recovery" to the master narrative of the medical model and so are seen to be major contributors to the demedicalisation discourse.

Looking at my uncomfortable position between both the medicalisation and demedicalisation movements there is an obvious tension in my work. Something doesn't quite fit here. Whilst I make it clear that my writing, in many ways is a counter-narrative to master narratives in Kuwait concerning families and mental illness. I do not touch on demedicalisation. I didn't feel ready at the time to do that. I had this need to cling on to my medication, my labels and my need for discretion (it took time for me to be ready for the publication of my thesis). I wrote this thesis while I was still "fresh" off the bipolar "rollercoaster" as I like to call it. I was and still am terrified of becoming "ill" again. I use the term "ill" here because I cannot shake off the fact that I would have harmed myself or someone else when I was, to use the more organic term "mad". I was walking into shops and attempting to purchase things I could not afford. I crossed streets chattering to myself and not looking out for lights. I had suicidal thoughts. I couldn't function

and felt incredibly unwell. I begged my partner to get me to hospital and when I got there I found huge relief in sedation. Being “mad”, after the highs was a horrific and terrifying experience and I desperately needed medical care.

As I write this thesis, however, I also note that I describe my mental difficulties in the context of my family environment with its specific history and situational stressors including imprisonment when I failed to adhere to cultural norms. I also reference R.D. Laing with his theory of the nexus. R.D. Laing was part of the anti-psychiatric movement in the late 1960s. Clearly socio-cultural factors existed that could have perpetuated my illness though I do not make this explicit in my work. The reason I do not do that is that, two years on from the second episode and seven years on from my first episode, I still cannot understand my experiences or make meaning from them.

I got ill while I was with my family and I got ill while I was away from them. I got ill without my partner and I got ill with my partner. I have lived with stress for years and so I do not understand how that could have contributed though according to my doctor, I know it can be a triggering factor. My fantasies of marrying prince Harry through my imagined association with MI5 do not, in my opinion relate in any way to my life. It could be argued here that I should analyse the themes and the associations that these fantasies with their associated imagery could have for me but with the voices that speak to me, it has become difficult. The more I analyse the worse the voices get and I worry that I’ll start to believe it again. It doesn’t make sense to me and when I get scared I put my doctors hat on and I think to myself, it’s just an illness. I need to manage it. This is why I made the decision not to speak towards the demedicalisation perspective. At this point, I could not describe my position as I was still processing the events that had happened.

Location of self

I come from a country that has conservative traditions regarding sexuality, marriage and mental illness. There is a significant amount of stigma as well as legal, physical and social consequences for those who stray away from these traditional expectations, in other words “cultural scripts” (Wierzbicka, 1994, p.12). Stigma, would result in being ostracised from the family and the damage to both the individual and their family’s reputation resulting in diminished marriage prospects for both parties as well as possible imprisonment and deportation as was the case of Sarah Al Drees, a Kuwaiti woman who spoke out against the royal family on Twitter.

Though I went to a British school in Kuwait, those traditions were always there for me in the background and created a tear inside me as I also adopted the British culture from the teachers and students around me. This mixed-up upbringing was further influenced by my home environment which was confusingly libero-conservative. My mother was divorced for much of my childhood and so I was deeply influenced by her confusion at her own mixed identity as she had come from a highly influential political family that had played a great role in the history of Kuwait. She also exhibited a highly skilled, efficient outlook as a result of studying at a well-

respected university in the United States of America. Though I was mostly allowed to dress the way I wanted (short skirts and sleeveless tops were not allowed), I was not allowed to go out with boys or even attend mixed gatherings outside of school. Texts, books and films were censored both at school and in the community and this has caused increasing confusion for my Kuwaiti colleagues and myself. Though as part of our culture we were encouraged to tell stories and dance, we had to do so within approved limits.

In saying this, there are multiple levels or dimensions to the culture I come from. Though I have simplified it previously, I would also like to clarify that though Kuwait has those traditions and laws mentioned earlier, this does not prevent those who violate them from enjoying their lives. There are diverse underground communities that are only starting to emerge as they feel safer. They are, however, not allowed to discuss issues such as their sexual orientation or their traumatic mental history in public.

Further to the above and its explanation of the diversity of the community, there are also a diverse number of home environments that have their own political, religious and social rules. As a child in the evenings, I liked to look out into the dusty streets and see all of the silent houses while wondering at the secrets behind those locked doors. This gave me licence to imagine all sorts of stories about the neighbours.

At the age of seventeen, I left Kuwait to go to Aberdeen where I trained to be a doctor. I then left after five years to work in Kuwait where I gained experience in both general practice and internal medicine. Throughout these years of training, I had a psychotic episode where I ended up thinking I was being helped by the Ministry of Interior to integrate into Kuwaiti culture. The actual episode was pleasant in the beginning. I felt high and connected to the world around me. I saw the world in coloured signals and felt loved and respected by the Men at the Ministry. With time, the men became persecutory and my quality of life deteriorated to the extent that I could not undress or go to the bathroom with the light on for fear the men would see me. I would sit and study for fourteen hours a day in my room covered in a blanket to further preserve my modesty. I stank of my own piss and lost a lot of weight. It took a month for my family to notice that anything was wrong. After this episode, I found it more and more difficult to get back to my previous way of life. I began to ask questions about who I was and what I wanted to do. As a result of this line of questioning I ended up taking off my hijab (I was the only one in my family who wore it) and changing my beliefs. As this affected my conduct and way of relating, it ended in my imprisonment in my own home by my family. I was never the same again afterwards as I had observed my loved ones turning into captors. As the whole extended family got involved I had no privacy and in addition to living in a patriarchal society, the consequences of the power imbalance were immense. I began to observe first hand Laing's theory of the family nexus and how if one entity wanted to leave the whole, it would be attacked violently and stopped from leaving (Laing, 1962). This was the case when making relationship choices that my mother didn't approve of. Whilst I can acknowledge that imprisonment in a mansion is preferable to a Kuwaiti asylum it still was my first experience of being locked in and

forced to see doctors.

After the month of imprisonment was over and I went back to work, I began to grow more and more disillusioned with the medical system in the Middle East and the social injustices that I observed and so began to search for another vocation. I came across psychotherapy theory and realised that this was the field I wanted to pursue. I was able to apply for the programme at Edinburgh University and was accepted.

Process Input

Psychotherapy training proved to be extremely difficult as I realised that I had thrown myself into the deep end of something I could not understand before I had done it. My way of relating and writing were seen to be "overly distant and professional" and I struggled to write with the appropriate amount of depth in my assignments. No one had asked my opinion before I started this training and it was a while before I found my voice. I would side with what I saw to be the appropriate dominant discourse (i.e. psychiatric language in fitting in with the medical model) and I ended up coming across as limited and trying to please the "establishment". I did not realise that this was due to my cultural upbringing and its iron grip in protecting and quartering off the "collective" or in my case the "family tribe". With time, therapy, group work, the persistence of critical feedback from my tutors and a lot of tears I was able to progress to finding a voice and writing pieces of work that were personally meaningful and seen to be "excellent". Writing the thesis was the next step and I found myself getting lost again as I realised that this would be another steep learning curve. I was extremely fortunate to have a supervisor that worked with the resources I was able to offer and with his guidance, I allowed myself to venture slowly into my chaotic experiential world.

Inspirations: Epistemological and methodological

The narrative quilt presented by these autoethnographic vignettes aims to provide the reader with a layered account of my experiences as a bipolar, Kuwaiti, doctor turned therapist, post-psychotic self-in-progress using writing as a form of inquiry. In this section, I will start by talking about writing as a form of inquiry, coming to autoethnography, auto ethnography as a method and then go on to discuss the layered account format.

Writing as a form of Inquiry

Writing was the method through which I constituted the world and reconstituted myself. Writing became my principle tool through which I learned about myself and the world. I write so I would have a life. Writing was and is how I come to know (Richardson, 2001, p.33).

The writing morphed and took shape as I progressed in process and experimental playing with text. Each stage I arrived at took me to the next with the end-result unknown. I had to learn to trust implicitly in the process and in so doing found the need to name this approach to writing what I later described as an autoethnographic layered account. I came across, in my reading around writing and research, the concept of writing as a method of inquiry.

As a method of “discovery and analysis” (Richardson, L & St. Pierre, E, 2008) this approach to writing is fluid and creative with special attention being given to the craft of writing itself.

Writing in this way, leaves things open for both the reader and the writer as both an internal and external world is created and investigated through the process of writing with language as a “centrepiece” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2008, p.961).

Writing this as I do right now makes my world real and enables me to seek connections with others thus constituting myself also as a relational being as I go on to discuss later.

Whilst writing enables us to know, it also according to Richardson (2011) enables us to “unknow” ourselves and others. It is also a way of finding silence, muteness, areas where you cannot or have never been to.

Living in silence about my diagnosis and experience meant that writing was both a luxury and a freedom that at times I felt I could not afford for fear of repercussion from my family, and wider community. This fear is not unique to my situation and consequently, there is silence around the Kuwaiti bipolar woman. Whilst I can identify with Bipolar people and Women in separate categories there is a yearning in me to belong somewhere, a need to draw on narrative resources that was unmet. I have lived and in some respects continue to live in an “impoverished world”, a world where my reality and my self could not be constituted as I had been prevented from writing or speaking them into existence.

Coming to Auto ethnography

I use autoethnography as my chosen methodology because through it I am able to reflect the reluctant “collective” or “tribal” identity that I have developed and continue to run away from. The culture/cultures that I inhabit are an integral and at times unwanted part of who I am and they shape my interactions, reading and decisions. The cultures speak through me and I through them. Thus I felt that autoethnography would be the most fitting way to both

communicate and to research my experience.

I initially tried to avoid using this method as I felt uncomfortable with its seeming lack of structure and dependence on creativity and initiative. Whilst these qualities may be present in other methods, there was something about autoethnography that I felt to be "unsafe". I was not alone in thinking this as I found out by reading the theory around autoethnography. In the words of Goodall (1998)

It should be dangerous. It should mess with your mind, it should open locks, provide pathways, offer a language capable of inspiring social, personal and institutional liberation. I think it should help people think and behave differently if they choose to. Writing that doesn't do that isn't very good writing (p.5).

Autoethnography as Method

Autoethnography is an approach that "seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Culture meaning the "account of particular social processes as practiced by particular people in particular settings" (Wolcott, 1999, p.253). The term "autoethnography" was first used by David Hayano in 1979 in reference to anthropology studies by individuals of their own culture (Smith, 2005). Its roots go back to the 1980s postmodern crisis of representation in the field of anthropology (Behar & Gordon, 1995) where it became a "radical reaction to realist agendas in ethnography and sociology" (Denzin, 1992, p.20) through which the researcher is preferred over the subject and the methodology becomes more important than the substance of the research. In this, there is a strict adherence to singular conceptions of truth, generalisability and validity.

In writing an autoethnography, one considers both the autobiographical and ethnographic aspects that make up that term. In autobiographies, the writer writes retrospectively and in the process uses materials such as diary entries, pictures, recording and photography to write about "epiphanies" (Ellis, 2011). These are "times of existential crises that force a person to attend to and analyse lived experience" (Ellis, 2011), focussing on an individual's ability to overcome difficult situations and their consequent aftermath. This aftermath can come in a variety of forms of memories, images and feelings. In ethnography, researchers observe cultures, beliefs, common values and relational practices. Ways of speaking and relating are analysed. Thus in combining autobiography and ethnography to form autoethnography, researchers write about "epiphanies that stem from or are made possible by being part of a culture and/ or "cultural identity" (Ellis, 2011).

Layered Account Format

Whilst this work did not start as a layered account format, the narrative quilt that it ended up becoming produced what can be seen as analogous or having the effect of a layered account. The "moments of meeting" that I describe when superimposed on one another in a layered format (Rambo, 2005; Ronai, 1995) using Derrida's concept of the mystic writing pad (Derrida, 1978) form a hazy picture of what it is like for me as a bipolar individual to work against the culture of Kuwait, psychotherapy and psychiatry.

The idea of a layered account format came from Carol Rambo's paper in 1995 entitled "Multiple Reflections of Childhood Sexual Abuse: An argument for a layered account". It was then defined as a

postmodern reporting technique that enabled a writer to incorporate multiple voices including theory, subjective experience, fantasy and more to convey aspects of a topic at hand that would otherwise be excluded from a more traditional format (p.563).

This enabled or in many cases gave permission to a writer, in this case Rambo, to create writing that didn't flow (i.e. wasn't chronological), was conflicting and ambiguous. This would be similar to the kind of account I have created about my experience of psychosis, staying true to the experience of madness and my postmodern principles.

Rambo developed the idea of a layered account further in her paper entitled "Impressions of a grandmother: An autoethnographic portrait" (2005), comparing the process of creating a layered account format to sketching using ideas such as camera viewfinders in taking snapshots of her grandmother at different moments of time. The idea of individual viewfinders has been applied to the layered account format, the sketches and Derrida's concept of the "mystic writing pad" which I will go on to explain in the next paragraph. As these "snapshots" build up, they create impressions and traces that "merge and blend into an illustration of identity as a process and thus an autoethnographic portrait." (Rambo, 2005, p.561)

The mystic writing pad is a child's toy and consists of three layers. The base layer is a wax slab, on top of which is wax paper covered by a layer of celluloid. In pressing a stylus on the celluloid, a child is able to create drawings on the pad. As the stylus is lifted off the layers, the drawings can no longer be seen. Whilst the surface can be seen as clear, previous markings have been made underneath the layers and so will always impact what will next be drawn on the celluloid. Jaques Derrida (1978) applied this idea to consciousness and stated that human experience isn't fully present or absent, traces are what remain. Each vignette in the layered account represents the drawing and erasing of the drawing on the celluloid leaving new traces on the wax paper underneath. With each marking there is a shifting, changing and reinterpretation of our identities.

Process Input

A lot of the work for this thesis happened outside the library through my interactions with other people and my subsequent reflections and reading around issues that came up for me. This was sadly deterred by the resurgence of my illness as I experienced another psychotic episode. Unlike the first episode, the second was a lot more severe and had grave consequences for myself and my British fiancé as my family were hostile to our union. It was also my first experience of being in a mental asylum. I was a patient in two hospitals for six months and the terror and loss of dignity that I have experienced have rendered me almost voiceless, making my writing slow and difficult. I am afraid as I write and I think of Helene Cixous (1993, cited in Lather, 2007),

the book that is worth writing is the one that we don't have the courage to write. The book that hurts us. Writing is writing what you cannot know before you have written it

(p.4).

I wonder why I write it? What is the purpose of this testimony? Whilst I can be passionately eloquent in discussing how my work can provide unique knowledge and be a platform for social justice, I think about my personal process as I sit down to write and wonder about my secret motivations to write. I write because I can, I must. I write in order to fight back and resist. I see my sentiments echoed in the researchers I read about. The imperative to write is not in itself unique. I am, however, also relinquishing my ability to know, letting go of my "assured ontologies of the 'real', of presence and absence" (Tamas, 2011, p.437). Letting go is a difficult process as is shown by my inability to move away from medical terms and ideas. Having been psychotic and now in the process of working and fitting myself back into a socially constructed reality, I struggle with this notion of being able to know anything. I am reminded here of Sophie Tamas' work (2009a) in writing about trauma and wonder how I can turn the voiceless and incomprehensible into a coherent and theoretically informed thesis. I think quite simply, I can't. I initially wanted to write about something easy. I wanted a question that would lead to a highly structured project where I would find clear answers that I could then use in further research. My attempts at clear questions failed as I struggled through my modernist lens to write a doctoral thesis in the field of counselling and psychotherapy. My turning point came with a change of supervisor and a quiet giving up of trying for a question. I started to write vignettes mirroring real conversations and events that had happened. With time, the project began to take shape organically and the title began to emerge. The thing I tried to fight the most, coming from a medical background became the format of what I began to base my research on; "In/coherence". Coherence being the "quality and state of cohering, especially a logical, orderly, and aesthetically consistent relationship of parts" (Your dictionary, 2017). I wrote in and out of coherence of speech and action as I moved through my severe mood swings and in and out of a psychotic episode. I had initially started to write about my first psychotic episode but with time I realized that I needed to look at it from a different perspective. The sum of my work was more than one psychotic episode.

As I also developed personally through my counselling training in addition to the changes in my mental health status, I felt that again I could no longer keep my medical positivist lens in this new world that I was in. One where my reality was fallible and myself incoherent and uncontrollable. I had an epistemic crisis and I feel that it was the reading around subjects such as postmodernism and by default post-structuralism that saved me. I began to think of myself as an artist rather than just a practitioner and this paradigmatic shift became an essential part of my process. As an artist, writing became an emergent explorative journey better suited to "the incoherence of catastrophe and pain" (Tamas, 2011), a genre better fitted to "bypassing rationality" and holding "paradoxical truths" (Lash, 2006, p.227).

What I am doing now is the absolute antithesis to what I have been trained to do as a doctor and I draw inspiration again from Tamas (2011) when she describes her process in writing her book "Biting the tongue that speaks you: (Re)covering survivor's narratives". Not knowing

where to start, where you're going or what your current vantage point is seems like a suicide mission for a doctoral student but in this work I must be true to myself.

Whilst there was extensive research to guide me along this path, thereby making it a lot easier, there were days when I couldn't write and I found myself having to go into intense therapy once again to keep myself safe. I also tried to stay grounded by writing out my confused and intense feelings in the format of diary entries, to be woven in with the vignettes I had already written. Those diary entries served as the backbone to my work and the process behind them was that of the "upchuck", the vomiting all over the page. I found this spewing metaphor to be transformative and visceral, qualities that I lacked in my writing and scholarship before this piece of work. I had previously lived in my head and coming down to the world of physicality, the thrusting and the fighting proved to be both traumatic and essential to me in my research. I wanted, through this piece of work, to invite the reader down into the world of a lost Kuwaiti woman trying to find herself through losing herself in the writing process.

This felt to be, in a sense analogous to a baby taking his/her first breaths and screaming for dear life, a process to me of what could be compared to rebirth after my "inner voyage" (Laing, 1967). How this thesis fits together is not very certain and I am inclined to say that it doesn't. I don't think it's supposed to and I now feel that I can say that I don't want it to. Much of my anguish and despair stems from that "incoherence" and I sometimes wonder whether this work is "pathological" in nature. I am forever wrestling between the psychotherapeutic and medical systems of thinking. A choice between the two paradigms exhibited by the medical and psychotherapy worlds is ideal but would be a lie. I cannot but work in this split way holding the two systems in place side by side and switching between the two. In the end, I want to be "fixed" and this desire has increased my leaning towards a medical system that advocates medication and long-term CBT therapy. Postmodern principles and terminology when looked at through a "medical recovery lens" indicate that a person is still ill or has a "bad prognosis". How can I work in the tension between these two paradigms when I am on life-saving medication and am a postmodernist researcher?

Working through and writing this thesis has been an empowering experience and I began to realise that this form of empowerment was foreign to me as a Kuwaiti Muslim girl. This, I feel, was a result of the remnants of damage to my independence as a human being brought about by the patriarchal system I had been born into and grown up in. Increasing awareness of my lack of autonomy due to my upbringing, in addition to my subsequent admission into a mental asylum, meant that I was gradually confronted with the truth of myself. It was glaring out at me from the four bare walls that held me captive. I wasn't as strong or as independent as I thought I was. I hadn't taken ownership of myself or my work and I had to learn how to do that.

As a Kuwaiti, doctor, therapist and researcher, there has been some confusion on my part as to how to bring all those aspects of my professional identity together in a writing voice that stays true to me. The Arab part of me kept getting stuck in the story and the evoked emotions arising from it, a remnant of the Arab traditions of story-telling and acting. The therapist part

of me, heavily influenced by the interpersonal dialogue training programme that had preceded this thesis, kept falling into the habit of using the therapist voice to myself as client as I would have done in writing a professional portfolio piece. The doctor part of me, the cultivation of ten years of training, wanted to "tell it like it is" and eschew the flowery sophisticated style of other research projects I have read. Whilst I had great respect for the complexity and intricacy of their work I had to admit to myself that this was not my language and way of doing things and that my earlier attempts at this rang false and risked the integrity of what I was trying to say with my work.

The different parts of me as mentioned above did not coalesce into a single voice or writing style and thus throughout this thesis there will be little shifts here and there in the writing voice denoting a change of "hat" so to speak. I had to work with what I had and present a "self-in-progress" in writing a "thesis in progress" for as in the words of a colleague's supervisor "a thesis is never finished".

In writing this thesis, I drew inspiration from reading narratives and autobiographies about mental illness. The key ones for me were Kay Redfield Jamison's "An Unquiet Mind" (1995), Hannah Green's "I never promised you a rose garden" (1964) and Sylvia Plath's "The Bell Jar" (1963). Those stories, in addition to the works of Helene, Cixous, Jane Speedy, Sophie Tamas, Alec Grant, Carol Rambo and Susanne Gannon have provided a window into another world of being and understanding. I felt wonder, companionship and relief as I looked at the "dirty", "messy texts" (Tamas, 2011) and I started to believe that my way of working was valid. I am thinking particularly here of Plath's (2015) passages in the last quarter of the book where her "coherent thread" almost fails as she moves from one event to another in her life with no explanation and connection. It is a "collage" of events and images that weave in and out of each other presenting a misty almost ethereal quality of not quite being there and yet still there. Speedy (2013), Grant (2010b) and Rambo/ Rambo Ronai (1995, 1997, 1998, 2005) have a similar effect in their interpretations of the layered account format going through different levels of consciousness and playing with the idea of time and experience as they are evoked in us through writing. There is again hope for me and my fragmented approach. The powerful feelings evoked in me as a result of identification, education and transcendence into someone else's experience of illness/madness, most strongly felt in my reading of Green's (1964) and Jamison's (1995) works has further increased my faith in the power of storytelling and its contribution to knowledge and enrichment of the self/selves. It has been frightening and yet strangely therapeutic for me to revisit these "mad places". It has also been imperative for me to learn to look after myself in this process and find a way to minimise the extent of penetration into my already violated mind.

Popular media icons such as Charlie Rose, amongst others, paint a rosy picture of being bipolar in terms of its creativity potential and ways of experiencing divine bliss in the form of mania. As a person who has experienced such phenomena I can only say that I was terrified for most of it as well as resentful at the massive disruption and near severing of the path I have

chosen in life. This, in addition to working within a Kuwaiti culture and family has created the "stuff of this thesis" and has contributed to this traumatic yet fertile experience.

“Moments of Meeting”

When two individual voices interact something remarkable happens,

an utterance is never just a reflection or an expression of something that is already existing and outside it that is given and final. It always creates something that never existed before, something new and unrepeatable, and moreover, it always has some relation to value [the true, the good, the beautiful and so forth] (Bakhtin, 1986, p119-120).

In part one of the thesis, I write about the unique moments of meeting in my life that show dialogical involvement between me and the reader, me and myself, me with the different cultures represented by different people and finally me in dialogue with the different theorists I work with in this thesis. Through this dialogical involvement, these “once-occurrent events of being” (Bakhtin, 1993, p.2.) take place and something happens. Something new and unrepeatable is created. Individuals are made and remade, unique inner lives are expressed, historical and ideological scripts are rewritten, knowledge is revealed and expressed. In this section, I describe and elaborate on specific “moments of meeting” in my personal exploration of my post-psychotic self. Through this, I aim to denote the different defining interactions that make me as a researcher as I use myself in these moments to generate knowledge about the lived experience of mental illness in the context of the different cultures, described earlier, that underpin my work. I will start by discussing the theoretical assumptions behind those moments of meeting, moving onto analysing specific moments using the descriptive framework I mentioned in the beginning of part one and then move on to my personal process in analysing those moments.

Theoretical Assumptions

The moments of meeting that I discuss threaten to make and unmake me as I go through the contradictory emotions to the people I interact with. Those fleeting and unrepeatable moments where much is said and much is not said. Using Bakhtinian teachings, Shotter and Billig (1998), emphasise the importance of focussing on those little moments or events as they describe them, arguing for a social psychology based on these constitutive “everyday discursive phenomena” (Shotter & Billig, p.1). The speaking of words and the way they are used (noting the timing and way in which they are employed), the choice of word itself as well the silences, the gestures and the method of articulation are all part of a “living social process” (Shotter & Billig, p.2). I have used written dialogue in this thesis as a medium through which I attempt to communicate this social process, whilst also trying to recreate the non-verbal atmosphere through multiple full stops to demonstrate pauses, brackets to highlight expressions or emotions and word spacing to denote thought progression as evidenced by the beginning page of this thesis. Though I employ written devices such as these in an attempt to mirror these moments, a process I will describe further in ‘Nuts and bolts’, I can never hope to recapture the experience. The sound, the feel, the self, constituted and reconstituted moment by moment, in flux with surroundings and other people, a “snapshot”, as I mention earlier of a moment in time.

Meaning here depends on and is co-created between the writer and the reader with each word acting as a “bridge” (Volosinov, 1986, p.86) and building on the assumption that the “word is the semiotic material of inner life as consciousness” (Volosinov, 1986, p.14)) means that our “inner lives” are shared in these moments. Our “inner lives”, our human consciousness and the processes that “define the contents of the psyche” (Volosinov, 1986, p.25) are reflected, created and defined outside of us, in our interactions with other people and our surroundings. The implication for this is the importance of understanding, in the words of Volosinov (1986, p.12) that human consciousness is a “socio-ideological fact” and that the inner lives of people are seen to be “particular and social constructions’ (Shotter & Billig, 1998, p. 2). In using these ideas in an autoethnographic context, in my study of myself in relation to social and cultural factors, I hope that I can engage in a constitutive dialogue with my reader and through this, both be made and remade through our journey through this thesis. In the process of this journey, it is my hope that we will be able to dialogue with others and help to increase understanding and create alternative storylines for people such as myself, a process I will go into further during the “Ending” part of this thesis.

Moments where we express ourselves and show each other our unique inner lives

There have been many moments in this thesis where I have expressed myself and showed my inner life to both myself and to others. Poignant moments that have been definitive in constructing and finding my identity through my communications with others. I will go through some of these moments here.

“I am unscripted”

Through Layla’s conversation with Steve, in other words my conversation with Aidan, my partner. I found myself in the position of lost psychotherapist and researcher in opposition to him as scientist and “knower”. There is talk of a “loss of script”, of an inability to break through my glassy fluency into brokenness that is not understood by Aidan. There is also a definite split between the two worlds I inhabit, that of Aidan’s and mine and the split between myself (my medical training versus my psychotherapy training. These were all feelings that were worked through in that conversation. They came into being as we interacted with one another as two individuals with their own socio-historical scripts. The bonding over food, that fleeting and unrepeatable moment where we smelled the dish together is offset by the disagreements we had. In that moment, we explored the idea of me doing autoethnography together and in the process start the making of the autoethnography.

“I hate who I’ve become”

As the autoethnography unfolded scene by scene there came a transformational period of my life where I was able to communicate my brokenness through the writing of my diaries. In these entries I communicated to myself and my readers my desperation to get well and write, my fears of the voices being permanent, my relationship to my diagnosis and the volatile and hostile situation between myself and my family. The writing developed with the idea that someone else was going to read it. In this writing, I dialogued with the reader who is imaginary

at that point. Thus, the dialogue took place between myself and the other within me.

“I just couldn’t balance my life and theirs”

It is here that I acknowledged the impasse or the rupture between my family’s life and mine. In this conversation with Aidan, I found myself, reverting to the tribal mentality and becoming almost robotic in my speech except for that moment where we both talk about love and I soften. Other than that, in this scene, I lost my fluidity and in some ways sounded like I was reciting from a holy book myself, losing myself in the process. It was here that both Aidan and I recognised the extent and strength of my entanglement and enmeshment with the collective/tribe I come from.

“So exotic an Arab girl losing her mind”

I found myself, in this scene, writing about my interaction with imaginary colleagues. Again as parts of me, they were multicultural, representing the struggle I had and continue to have between the tribal part of me and the international education I had abroad. At the risk of being reductionist there was also a struggle between the eastern and western sides of myself. I found myself enticed yet confused at the idea of being exotic and battling with issues such as silence around hateful atrocities.

Moments that continually create and reveal knowledge

“It sounds like she’s reciting from a holy book”

There was fear and frustration at my mother reverting to tribal/Islamic culture when I do not conform to what she expects or sees as “correct” or “appropriate” behaviour.. Through moments like this, I realised that it is an “I” or “we” tribe, you can’t have both and if I wanted my “I” back I’d have to leave. There was also a sense of impending loss here. Through the dialogue or lack of one with my mother I began to see that I was on a path that was leading me away from the tribe with no going back. This had come about as a result of the growth of my dialogical self, the extensive therapy I received after my psychotic break and consequent excommunication from the tribe through no fault of my own. There was also an “othering” at this point that took place between myself and my mother. I became an object that needed to be brought into submission through the will of God and she became a religious object to me, “reciting” rather than being in dialogue with me. It is a common scenario that is repeated internationally between people of different ideologies.

“Ditch the introduction”

In the moments of this conversation, I began to realise the possibilities out there in writing this thesis. I was also in the process of taking ownership of my work and realised that my inability to create a coherent narrative could be used as a focus rather than as a failing. I was in the process of creating a separateness from both my friend and from the traditional conventions of writing. It was a big moment that was pivotal to myself in terms of knowledge and creativity.

“Losing yourself feels terrible”

There was a tension in my work between both the psychotherapy and medical worlds that I inhabited. As mentioned before, a lot of the psychiatric literature recommends narrative repair

through increasing narrative coherence whereas the postmodern poststructuralist theories that I identified with described the self as a fragmented, incoherent identity. As a bipolar doctor turned therapist I am consistently confronted with the choice of whether to stay with the fragmented incoherence that is my baseline or to “fix myself” through extensive research into narrative repair. In this moment, I identified what it was like to work with a fragmented self and how difficult and gut wrenching it was.

“Woman with the big breasts”

This was another pivotal moment for me in studying my family dynamics as I began to question what I was to my father and to the society at large for I found that my parents occupied specific positions allocated to/ or chosen by them in the patriarchal society in which we lived. Gender roles were well demarcated and the value of women was made clear. This was a moment that was conducted in all seriousness to a woman who was going to do her doctorate.

“Bipolar like being on a rollercoaster”

I described in this moment what it was like for me experientially to be bipolar. This statement said a lot both about me and about my experience and I learn from this moment constantly. Through the process of writing about it, I was able to later come up with or identify with terms such as “rollercoaster writing” and “tunnel vision” as I realise how my illness has affected my research.

“Gibberish is never gibberish”

Through my fictitious conversation with my psychiatrist I discussed the possibilities of communication with a person who is fragmented and learned about the different theories that were linked to psychosis. I also learned about myself and how I liked to think of my illness. This later enabled me to work through it organically.

Moments that can reshape and rewrite historical and ideological scripts

I vs we

In writing this “I” thesis, there has been a change in historical and ideological scripts. There are no “academic” “I” accounts of Kuwaiti girls who have lost their minds. As an individual who has been written out of her cultural and tribal script, I was now able to offer an alternative script to bipolar Arab women and others from marginalised communities.

Writing the soiled and sinned body

In rewriting certain religious scripts concerning the female body being hidden away and “covered” for modesty, I exposed myself through my embodied writing. In my first psychotic episode, I wrote of how I dressed modestly in my own room stinking of my own piss. In my “real life”, I talked about how some men looked at me and how uncomfortable that made me feel.

Moments that make and continue to determine who we are

“Looking at Greek woman”

My imprisonment or domestic section has been one of the most defining moments of my life. It is the background thread to this thesis. It affected the way I looked at my family, the way I

looked at myself and the way I interacted with others and my surroundings. It continues to define me and write itself into this thesis at every point possible.

“Reading Jane speedy”

At this moment, the thesis opened up for me. It was almost like being let out into the green wilderness after being cooped up in a concrete block. Whilst I had always been passionate about writing. I now found a way I could be passionate about my research. A way I could write and still be my unhinged self.

“Violation not new to me”

Throughout the thesis and in my life there are moments where I experience violation and am unable to react to it. The new supervisor, the way the tea boy looked at me when I left my father’s office and my psychiatrist looking at my thighs in my dress.

“Love is a strange thing”

There are moments of hate and anger towards my mother and these are confused by moments of love where I see her go out of her way for me. To come pick me up at the airport at 6 am without fail. It is a complex relationship with mixed feelings on both sides. Throughout my years in therapy I realised that my mother is a big part of what I talk about and her confused oppressive love for me in many ways defined me.

“Never forget where you were”

Remembering my mad moments with my sister was incredibly upsetting and shaming. I think the upset for me came from envisaging how I must have looked. It was the visual of me in Harrods and in Primark. My later reminiscing with Steve (Aidan) was a lot more soothing and it is interesting to note how one “mad experience” was re-lived by myself and two people who came from opposing cultures.

“Taking off hijab”

This was another defining moment in my life. The fact that I visually displayed my hair after covering it up for six years was in many ways a personal and political statement. It was a sad rather than angry moment for me as I mourned my previous love and faith.

“Crying in Porsche”

This moment, especially when observed from a distance said a lot about me. In a hidden alleyway, crying in my expensive car there were elements of secrecy, hiding from the world and money and riches never being enough. I came from a powerful family as represented by the expensive car but I had to hide in an alleyway to cry.

“Layla and suitor”

The conversations with the suitor “branded” me. I was definitively written out of a script as wife and mother to a Kuwaiti family. I also became aware of how far I had grown away from my “roots” so to speak and that my immersion in books as a child and subsequent education abroad had changed me irrevocably. There was always a desperation to belong and it is here that I realised that my desire could never be a reality. I began to notice and resent my silence towards beliefs that weren’t my own.

“I’m the best authority in my life”

As the thesis progressed I began to write my new confident self into being. I found my own position somewhere between my tribe and an individual self. I realised that this was the best I could do for now and that I was the expert on “me”. I grew through my pain and brokenness. When I started this work I tried very hard to be academic to insert quotes at specific times to make it “look better”. As I progressed as a researcher, I began to dialogue with the writers whose work inspired me and I started to gain an air of “fluency” about my work.

Process Input

The first three texts started out as short stories and were more like design pieces. They could be seen as more autoethnographic than the rest. I was well, enjoying my writing and had a good supportive system. This sadly did not stop me getting ill. My second psychotic break took place in between the two different scenes on pages thirty-six and thirty-seven. There is an abrupt, almost jarring, change in style and voice from one scene to another. As I assembled the texts, I thought I would add a connecting piece in there to make it flow a bit better for the reader. I thought I’d do the same again between pages fifty-five and fifty-six. I’m suddenly back with my family, back with the tribe, seeing a suitor with no connecting piece. I can only say that this reflected my experiences of these events. One day I was well, the next I was ill. One day I was in Edinburgh the next I went back to Kuwait on a leave of absence for health reasons. The decisions I made “under the influence” (drugs, bipolar disorder, I don’t know) were chaotic, senseless and disruptive to my work, sense of self and my fiancé. I do not know what to do with myself and I have to live with the aftermath every day.

Bochner compares writing an autoethnography to “opening our veins” (Bochner, 2007, p.197) and I felt a sense of relief in thinking I was not alone in my pain in writing this. I had begun to wonder whether I had become emotionally disturbed in my upset and days of avoidance of writing. In the handbook of qualitative research (Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S., 1994), Carolyn Ellis (2004) mentions that we needed to “live an autoethnographic life” before we could write it and it was in part two that my autoethnography began.

Bochner (2007) argues that autoethnographers are sometimes tempted to “make a good story”, to put events into neat storylines and to create what can be seen as “narrative tightness” (p.200) and so events as they are written about may not be what they were like at the time. Whilst some facts are not negotiable (i.e. timing, actions etc.), it is, in my belief, our relationship to them and to their intentions that can change. In this thesis I talk about love towards my family and to my country and I at times have seen love back some time later. That exists along with the hate and distrust we sometimes felt towards one another. I feel that it is very important to hold on to our memories (the factual ones that do exist i.e. imprisonment.) even as our feelings to them change and evolve (if they do) as it is my belief that we need our experiences to anchor us rather than leave us fragmented and incoherent. At the start of this thesis, I argue for the idea of incoherence as a base state, thus naming my doctoral thesis In/coherence. Towards the end of my work, after living through the scenes that took place, I realized that I

needed my experiences to be concrete if I was to survive. I needed to hold on to my own position rather than doubt it in trying to identify with the other in the relationship. In this, I refused to be “academic” and take a reasoned approach to my own life.

In doing so I lose my incoherence, I lose my stuttering, I lose my lostness. This may have signified a return to a state of what could be seen as “naivety”, of black or white thinking, or right or wrong. It does however feel to me to be a stronger and more grounded place. I feel defensive here and I remember again Bochner’s (2007, p.201) words, “acts of remembering labour under the demand for coherence for the rest of our lives”. Again I feel the pull to incoherence. Is it just my need as a human being? Or is my experience valid enough. I choose my experience.

I turn over to my right side and look at my mum sleeping peacefully in her flowery jumper. She looked tired and vulnerable. I could see her wheezy chest rise and fall with every intake of breath. Again, I feel the resurgence of guilt. Was I just being ungrateful? Surely I could just keep my mouth shut. Maybe things needed to be kept silent. Do I compulsively have to splurge family secrets and worst of all, publish them in a thesis for all to see? I hear the words of my therapist in my head.

“Never forget what was done”

Sometimes I do forget, or perhaps I want to forget. I just cannot hold both love and hate in my heart. Respecting the elders is one of the unbreakable rules in my tribe and yet here I am. I feel the need to mention my reflexive process to my readers; the doubts and fears I have felt in writing this thesis. I do, however, much like Carolyn Ellis in her paper “With mother/with child: A true story (2001) feel that I want and need to reach out to other people who have had similar experiences. To create the dialogue that I so desperately need in order to self-actualise. I need to share and show the conflict and pain at rewriting cultural scripts, of individuation and moving beyond the story that had already been written for me by other people.

There is much shame in my culture in speaking about my family in this way. I write earlier of the Tunisian woman Amina Sboui, now known as Amina Tyler who posed topless on facebook and I think to myself, am I not similar to her in what I am doing? Embracing Western counselling traditions and ideas concerning the emancipatory potential of research whilst forgetting my own culture of origin and its ideas concerning “sitr” and respect. The suitor story may prejudice my readers against Kuwaiti men. I have to state here that I have not met many of them in such close proximity and so I will never know. It would be wrong, or shall I say inaccurate, of me to assume that all Kuwaiti men think in the same way. It was, however, an important experience for me as a bipolar woman with a “past” to know that in the position I was in there was no going back to the tribe and community in general through no fault to my own. The pain I felt on realising this was acute, though I did love a man from another culture; I had another life I could go back to. It was around that time that I realised how enmeshed I was with Kuwait and my family. I still wanted desperately to belong and be accepted. I had lived my life up till that point following all the rules only to have the “narrative framework of it”

destroyed by my manic episodes. I sometimes wonder whether my family would have preferred it if I had died with a “pure” story line rather than see me in those manic states. Thus, there is a form of narrative nostalgia that hangs above the scenes that I have written. In my writing I try to defend the suitor, I talk about sharing chocolate twists with baba in the cafe, being met with a loving mum in the airport and going to have Starbucks with my sister. There was much that I loved and missed inwardly as I knew in my heart that I was a stranger and outsider.

Being a stranger and outsider is not something new as in this thesis I also talk about being a former doctor and being upper class. I was and still am in this almost impossible position of having one foot in a privileged and powerful tribe and one foot in the marginalised community of the mentally ill. I am also unmarried and have no children. I had never considered this before but as such, my lens was coloured by power relations and conversely handicap.

Money has meant that the illness could be hushed up and power relations meant that if I had the approval of significant elders I would be unharmed. This brings to attention the ethical considerations in writing this thesis.

What would I do if my story was relayed back to my parents or if they read it of their own accord? The answer is, I don't know. I do not think they would be happy with the way I have portrayed them in my work. In Kuwait, as in other Arab cultures, the family secrets stay secret and above all else, reputation and social standing are revered. I have kept these things in mind throughout the writing of this thesis, questioning myself, again and again, about the ethics of writing about intimate relationships that are easily identifiable.

I, as mentioned before, have had conversations with my parents about what I had been writing. Mainly that my work was about my journey as a bipolar Kuwaiti woman and some of the events that happened pre- and post-psychosis. I also mentioned writing about hate, anger and confusion from my perspective at the time.

There are several reasons why I have not been precise about what I have included. As Christine Kiesinger mentions in 2002, there is the fear that sharing this story will “damage our current relationship in irreparable ways” (p.111) and as Carolyn Ellis (2007) mentions “protecting our relationship was more important to me than being able to say I had revealed every word (p.19). Furthermore, I was and still am not “emotionally prepared to confront” my parents about their behaviour (Kiesinger, 2002, p.111)

As is evidenced by my previous writing, there is still a lot of anger towards my parents for what has happened and I cannot deny this. Whether this work has an element of vengefulness, I don't know. I cannot censor my feelings from what I write in this kind of research. The feelings drive the process of this work and rage is not unusual in writing about familial and social issues as evidenced by Alec Grant (2010b) in his paper “Autoethnographic ethics and rewriting the fragmented self”. I think my work goes to challenge the idealization of the family unit, an important and undisputed part of Arab and Islamic culture. My experience of being forcibly searched and manhandled during my illness by members of my own family outside of the

hospital are experiences I can never forget. These, amongst other transgressions “tarnish my thoughts about and interactions with” (Adams, 2006, p.718) them and possibly vice versa. Much like Tony Adams (2006) again, I cannot “bracket these images away from the relationship itself” (p.719). I do, however, take responsibility for my part in the relational dynamic. As Arthur Bochner (2004, p.2) mentions, the relational view enables us to realise that relationships are complex and they let us “share responsibility” in defining what is going on in the “dynamic”. Now as I go on to mention in this thesis in my discussion around the “ethics of memory”, certain facts did exist. I know that they did. Yet, in my view, there are different ways to make meaning from experiences. When Carolyn Ellis (2007) is questioned by her students as to their responsibilities towards intimate others who had caused hurt and had kept secrets, she sometimes answers “write to understand how they put their worlds together, how you can be a survivor of the world they thrust upon you” (p.26). Whilst it hurts for me to do that, I must also acknowledge that the situation/s that took place were frightening and disturbing to my family. To see such a personality flip in a conservative society was undoubtedly alarming and whilst I feel that the concept of the “nexus” applies here I make myself step back from theory and I try to empathise. I do not want to “perpetuate defensive aggression in response to others perceived aggression”, making my family out to be “monsters” (Bochner, 2004, p.8). Despite this, I cannot deny how I feel. The traumatic events took place years ago and yet to this day I am reduced to tears.

Bochner’s (2004) relational perspective, in giving agency to both parties in the relational perspective claims that “together you created this and together you will fix it” (p.6). Since there is a refusal to dialogue about these experiences, I do not see how this situation can be fixed. This means that for me, writing this story, in addition to my other aims (i.e. social justice and constitutive narrative resources) is a “gift to the self, a reflexive attempt to construct meaning in our lives and heal or grow from our pain” (Ellis, 2007, p.26). In writing this, I attempt to acknowledge my “relational responsibilities” (Ellis, 2007, p.14) and at the same time convey my experiences as truthfully as possible. I could not write about my experiences without identifying these intimate others, I had to acknowledge the familial relationships and the roles they played in my life.

As Carolyn Ellis (2007) mentions in her paper I try to include “multiple voices” and “multiple interpretations” in my work (p. 23). For this reason, I have included the scenes entitled “For mama” and “For baba”. Through these scenes I try to “initiate and maintain” conversations with my parents demonstrating our changing relationship thereby enabling me to navigate ethical considerations more easily though “there is no one set of rules to follow” (Ellis, 2007, p.23).

In the words of Arthur Frank (2004)

We do not act on principles that hold for all times. We act as best as we can at a particular time guided by certain stories that speak to that time and other people’s dialogical affirmation that we have chosen the right stories (p.191-193).

Thus, the principles I acted on in my work were specific to the time when I was living the “experience of doing the research” (Ellis, 2007, p. 22). These principles cannot be replicated. I have to stay true to my judgement and feelings and protect the integrity of my work. The ethical choices I made were also informed by my extensive reading around other researchers’ ethical choices. I draw heavily here on the work of Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams and Arthur Bochner amongst others.

Development of writing

As the writing developed, I got closer to it. I became “in it” as mentioned above. In a sense, the work had become more embodied. I wasn’t a character in a story anymore as I was in there, directly participating in my own life and growing as a relational being through conversing with others. I grew more separate in the process as I began to know myself through the embodied response of other people towards me. The conversation became deeper and richer as I wrote myself into a more functional state. I started to question myself, the authority of my voice, looking at the scenes and people in my life from different angles. The characters also grew and became more layered as I will go on to discuss later in ‘Nuts and bolts’.

In a sense throughout the pain, I began to live to connect with myself, others and with the theories I wrote about. I started to feel the pain of other writers I have read about, not solely because I feel a kinship, but also a deep sort of empathy. I used to see such stories as beautiful in their pain as I viewed them as a detached observer and later began to see others in what I would call a more “human light”. I began to see that through my trauma I had developed a “locked-in-self” (Higdon, 2004, p130). I had lost my ability to relate to people outside my clients and family. Sometimes I wonder if I ever really had it. I am reminded here of Donald Winnicott’s work on cross-identification. Winnicott (Higdon, 2011, p.128) writes of the child’s requirement of a “potential space” between him/her and the mother in order to feel separate. At the mother’s initial separation, the child would feel angry upset and angry and will begin to retaliate as he “finds an identity of his own” (Higdon, 2011, p.129). It is important here that the mother withstand the attacks and allow the child to use her. The baby at this point no longer needs to comply with another’s demands and can be his true creative self. The baby is then able to empathise with others through a process known as “cross-identification”. There is finally a separation from the “me” and “not me” (Higdon, 2011, p.129). This would facilitate the child being concerned for the mother and imagining what it is like to be her. I feel that my experiences with my mother were similar to what I have described earlier. In this, however, I think that it is important to mention here that there is a cultural dimension to this that I have not discussed. The Kuwaiti culture that I was raised in was a collectivist one. It was a strong and determined “we”. We all are “one”. Thus the dominant script is to be subservient to one’s parents and obey them. There is little opportunity to separate and grow into a “creative true self” (Higdon, 2011, p.128) as mentioned previously and so in the community, a false self presides. There is little escape from a narrative that, in my case, I did not write which is why this thesis is so important for me. I am rewriting the narrative I was born into both for myself

and for others who want to share their stories.

'Speaking my mind': illness and narrative

Writing the diseased mind

Reading (1977, p703) defines disease as "structural disorders of the individual's tissues and organs that give rise to the signs of ill health". These are not accessible to the patient and not experienced by him." In using the word disease, I know I am inviting the dis "ease" of the readers. I know there will be voices saying, "mania has such creative potential" and others that will be saying "that's really negative". I can feel the recoil from psychotherapists as to the "reductionist" nature of my subheading. I can also feel my Doctor-self coming to the fore to ground myself against such dissent and validate my point of view. Though I have discussed mistreatment of my psychotic episodes and their cultural implications/ causations there remains a core to this experience, that of the Bipolar disorder.

In bipolar disorder, there is not much evidence as to such structural changes to the brain but I would argue that there are severe changes to the "structure" of my mind. In my conceptualisation of this disorder, I assume that my mind has a structure. In my case, my mind "runs away with me" to places that are unknown and unfamiliar and puts me in situations that are detrimental to my health and to the welfare of people I love. Whilst it can be argued that these situations occur as part of everyday life, it is the speed and uncontrolled nature of the thinking as well as its fictional elements (i.e. falling in love with a prince) that are perilous in mania along with the depressive episodes that give rise to feeling ill and unwell with a diminished ability to function in day-to-day life. Maybe my mind sees too much too quickly, I will never know.

I have found much in the literature about writing the "diseased body" but not much about writing the diseased mind. I use the word mind here rather than brain, as I wish to talk about my perceptions, feelings and the core of who I perceive myself to be. In this thesis, there have been fluctuations in all three domains. I have written through these "abnormalities" or shall we say "experiences that have not been rooted in reality" and I then presented the contents of my diseased mind in the very language I used, the way I presented my writing, the scenes and the silences. I presented you with my psychic landscape.

The diseased mind is also a useful boundary between "diseased" and "well" states of being. This binary can be containing for both the "diseased" person and for those around them. It can be dealt with much like a wild animal, that which, in the words of my supervisor, can be likened to a bull in a tea shop". Chemically imprison it and keep it hostage so it doesn't damage the "order" of tribe and society it finds itself in. I find myself having conflicting feelings towards this "diseased" part. Part of me hates it for the chaos that it has caused and part of me feels protective of it. It belongs to me, the chaos is not its fault. In this paragraph, I start to take ownership of this "diseased" part and attempt to integrate it into the "well" part so it is no longer alone and hated. Thank you dear reader for being with me at this moment.

Illness Narrative

How does one pick up the frayed edges of their internal psychic tapestry post trauma? Illness

can cause the disruption of the old stories the mind and body tell about themselves and so there is a call for new stories. Narratives usually underpin stories and in this section I will be looking at illness narratives.

As an individual, post-trauma and post-illness, I felt stripped from the “shared cultural resources that provide words, meaning and the boundaries that segment the flow of time into episodes” (Frank, 2013, p.xiii), and so was unable to have experiences. This inability to have experiences, as a result of the inability to dialogue with others about my illness through narrative, meant that until now I was unable to reconstitute myself after I had my psychotic episode.

In deciding how to tell my story, what to include, the format of it including how others would interpret it, I had to look into “shared ways of narrating illness”. These shared ways could also be seen as ways in which illness is experienced. As a way of structuring and making sense of illness stories there are three narratives that story tellers employ. These are restitution, chaos and quest narratives (Frank, 2013, p.xiv). My story fit within the criteria of chaos narratives. It comprised disconnection with reality, through the process of hearing voices, and claustrophobia. Much like Arthur Frank (2013) in his book “the wounded storyteller”, it was difficult to be faced with people’s “inability to see what I so clearly felt.” (p.xv) I had to get over it, move beyond it and ignore the suffering I endured at having to join the real world of people and their voices. Much like Rose Richards (2008), whose dysfunctional family did not unite in the battle to save her life, as the kidney transplant script dictated, my dysfunctional family dynamics during my illness meant that I had to be kept in hospital for longer than I needed in order to prevent further stress from my family. I had to leave my University and my home to come and live in Kuwait.

People like me, with chaos narratives, find it the most difficult to tell stories as their perceptions of a viable future are diminished and so “life is reduced to a series of present-tense assaults” (Frank, 2013, p.xv). Chaos narratives then do not demonstrate temporal progression and so could be seen as anti-narrative.

The loss of the destination and map with which I had navigated my world meant that I had to find new ways of being and construct “new perceptions of my relationship to the world” (Frank, 2013, p.1). Through writing my story, absorbing others’ reactions and going through the process of my stories being shared, a new personal map began to take shape.

In my diary entries, I mention how I use the work of other writers to make me feel less alone. It was almost like “I needed the insight and articulations of other ill people to assure myself I wasn’t crazy” (Frank, 2013, p.xi). I also began to gain a different perspective on my illness as I began to read first account illness narratives on dying, the ending of a life. It was incredibly painful to see how my story was being written into existence and how theirs’ was being on the way out of it.

“The voices that speak to us at particular moments in our lives especially during transitions or crises, imprint themselves with a force that later voices never quite displace” (Frank, 2013,

p.xii)

Those voices spoke to me in my time of need and I found them ingrained in me as I wrote the “well” part of this thesis. I found that much like the fear of a diminished self in the dying process being worse than the dying itself (Broyard, 1992, p.52), it was fear of the madness from my end that was worse than the madness itself (Lucas, 2013). I have to live with that fear constantly and writing it out did not make it feel any better. Writing does however, allow me to restructure and validate my experience in both the telling of it and seeing it written down and sharing it with others for a story always has a social aspect (Frank, 2013). It is always told to another person, regardless of them being there or not and includes the internalisation of rhetorical expectations from those surrounding the story teller (i.e. friends, family, popular culture, other illness narratives). From these sources, storytellers acquire formal narrative frameworks, imagery and “conventional metaphors” (Frank, 2013, p.3) as well as a sense of appropriateness in what to tell.

In telling my story I hope to invite the reader into a “story telling relation” (Frank, 2000, p.354), through my autoethnographic thick and dense descriptions into my world. My illness is so closely entwined with who I am as a researcher that the reader will note that it is sometimes difficult for me to focus. In many ways, my illness narrative is not only chaotic, it is destabilising (Frank, 2000) both to myself and to my readers. As mentioned before, there are different viewpoints to my experiences and my writing avoids the idea of singular truth whilst showing what theoretical assumptions have been employed. The writing is open ended and it is up to the reader to decide what to think. This kind of writing shows how “messy and contingent reality can be” (Richards, 2008, p.1723). As a way of increasing resonance within the readers, this postmodern representation of narrative gives the reader an opportunity to share in creating meaning. The reader would then be able to as a result, find out what their own stance is, given a certain context.

As a narrative that makes the invisible visible, the researcher here writes of the complexity inherent in his/her life through their story telling and invites the readers to develop alongside them, never giving them closure but expecting them to come to their own conclusion.

Writing as Therapeutic

This thesis has been therapeutic for me as mentioned before, in many ways. Frank (2000) claims that when “one tells one’s story, one is in fact repairing a damaged self” (cited in Richards, 2008, pg.1721). That the emergence of a self is the product of a narrative and not the cause. Through creating a dialogue with you, the reader, I am able to write my true self into existence having been able to express and share my inner life with others and being “made” or constituted in the process.

Narrative impairment and coherence

As Clive Baldwin (2005, p.1023) describes, we are “narrative beings” living in a “storytelling world”. It is through our narratives that we are able to relate to each other, to constitute ourselves and make “real” our experiences of life. In many ways, we make our stories and our

stories make us. Thus the implications of an “incoherent” narrative, defined, as mainstream ideas would suggest by the absence of linearity and coherence, are a loss of self-concept and identity. If we cannot tell our stories and are consequently not “made” by them, who are we in ourselves and to other people? Whilst this sense of loss can have a massive impact on people in general, it has profound implications for those with severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) where loss of narrativity due to incoherence amongst other things is a feature. Those individuals can find great difficulty in engaging with others and with the therapy they need to “recover” or “function” in day-to-day activities.

Throughout this thesis there have been fluctuations in my coherence due to improvements and “worsenings” of my mental health and I have been lucky enough to be able to write, albeit sparingly, throughout this time. In the process of researching incoherence and consequently incoherent narratives

I found myself caught between clear medical objectives advocating “narrative repair” and my loyalty to postmodern, post-structural principles. These principles, in addition to some of the clear tenets of psychotherapy, advocated non-directivity, staying with the individual and through my adopted postmodern lens, accepting the self as fragmented, incoherent and mostly unknowable. Writers such as Patti Lather (2007) put forth theories such as getting lost as a way of learning and there is frequent mention of the “messy text” (Marcus, 1994). I found myself inspired and identifying with these concepts on an academic level and yet on another level, like Tamas (2009b), I couldn’t reconcile them with my personal needs as a traumatized bipolar patient. I needed my story to make sense in order to function and to heal. I worried about the very real repercussions to my mental health and wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of the clients I worked with since the evidence base for people with severe mental illness suggests that narrative coherence is an integral part of the narrative approach to people with these illnesses.

Witnessing

At the beginning of this thesis, I wrote for myself. As I progressed through it, I started to think about you, the reader and how you would feel, reading it. I could make no prediction as to how my writing, or the story behind it, would be received. It could go either way I thought, though the journey through my intimate landscape has been a long and emotional one, at least from my end. A journey that required both writer and reader being with one another and allowing us both to “live within and with the stories we tell and hear from others” (Ellis & Rawicki, 2013, p.378). Though the overarching story in this thesis is mine, as you read it, it becomes ours for you are now a “participant and co-owner” (Ellis & Rawicki, 2013, p.378) of this story attending to my struggles as well as your own. It could bring up personal history for you or cause you pain and unrest. Whilst I want to share the “bewilderment, confusion, pain and dread (Laub, 1992, p57-58) that I feel as a trauma “survivor”. I also feel partly responsible for how this layered account may affect you.

Acceptance of bipolar disorder

My partner once said to me “you are your illness” and your “illness is you”. I found the idea distasteful. I wanted nothing to do with that horrible disease that made me act “funny”. There was almost a sense that I was too good for it. I was better than the others I saw at the hospital I was in or on u-tube channels. I didn’t want to look or act like them. I didn’t respect that part of me and it is that I feel that made me get “sick” again. I lacked the ability to integrate these mad parts or to even acknowledge that they existed so ingrained in me was the culture/ faith that I had. I had to be a certain way, in control and rigid in my beliefs and if I wasn’t then it was shameful. Madness and consequently disinhibition was “bad”. In the process of writing this thesis, as I dialogued with others as well as myself, I started to take up a new position that was somewhere between enmeshment within a tribe and individuation. Through this new position and its partial release from cultural scripts and consequent empowerment, my relationship to my “madness” and its consequent label as “bipolar” started to change. I started to look at this madness as being an organic part of me that needed nurturing, love and acceptance. Through the writing of the diary entries, I realised that in making madness my friend, rather than treating it as some unwanted “spat out” thing that I was plagued with, I began to grow in coherence. Through being incoherently coherent or coherently incoherent, I was able to integrate being bipolar into my identity rather than it being my identity.

Process Input

As we are continually shaped and reformed by our experiences and interactions with people in relationships, it would follow that we look at the past in a different way from a different lens, so our memory is constantly changing. In this, I am tempted to follow in the wake of many writers and take up an almost apologetic stance in saying that the truth is elusive and we can never really know it or know anything. Whilst I do take up that stance earlier on in my work in my discussion of my ability to know. I will however, interject here again and say that facts about our, or in this case me, did exist. Certain things did happen. Door were locked, credit cards were taken, time was taken off work. Those facts are true. It can be tempting to also take a passive stance and say it was protection and love. I am not sure of that.

Hacking (1995) and later Bochner (2007, p.199), in their discussion on the ethics of memory, state that we should “not place old actions under new descriptions”. That we or I should consider the “interpretive structure of the community in which I was raised” (Bochner, 2007, p.199). In my case then, if I were to use my community’s interpretation about that event I was “protected” or loved”.

It didn’t feel like that then and it still doesn’t. I don’t feel like I have changed in that respect. The facts are indisputable; I know what I know. I saw hate and fear. I didn’t see love. Again, I surprise myself as I write myself down this alleyway. It all comes back to that “imprisonment” episode. I wrote about many things in my thesis, things I remembered and yet it all comes back to the one event I didn’t write about. It is the background thread to my thesis.

Madness and the family

Interviewer: Well it's a different point of view, isn't it?

Ruth: Yes, it's just a different point of view.

Interviewer: But do you feel you have to agree with what most of the people around you believe?

Ruth: Well if I don't I usually land in hospital

(Laing & Esterson, 2016)

Theory

In his paper entitled "Madness, the family and psychiatry", David Jones (2002, p.249) describes amongst other things, the role of the family in the "identification and definition of madness". The definition of family here being not a "distinct entity, but rather a way of interpreting, representing and ordering social relations" (Gubrium and Holstein, 1987, p.250). The link between the family and mental illness goes as far back as the 18th century, most notably through the idea of the "moral treatment of insanity" (Jones, 2002, p.251), an idea that revolutionized the practice of psychiatry leading to the justification and opening up of numerous asylums in the 18th and 19th century. The key features of the moral treatment were the decent and moral treatment of patients in a well-ordered environment, one that was also "family-like" (Jones, 2002). The common perception of the time was that such a practice and environment would increase the patient's chances of recovering their sanity. Active families were seen to be "patrons of the asylum" and were heavily involved in "policing the borderline between sanity and madness" propagating the resurgence of asylums by placing their relatives there (Jones, 2002).

Whilst I was not placed in an asylum (the first time), it was my family along with several doctors who negotiated my diagnosis after a second "manic" episode. This was after I was treated for my first psychotic break. Whilst Jones (2002), in his paper exploring the link between the family and discourses on psychiatry, mentions that literature on the subject tended to be family blaming, as a patient myself I found it sinister and alarming that historically, and currently, families were "active agents in creating psychiatric definitions of sanity and insanity" (Jones, 2002, p.264). The criteria for sanity being "the ability to operate successfully within the sphere of family life" (Jones, 2002, p.261). With such a highly charged concentrated small web of relationships, one can never hope to be fair or unbiased. This state was further compounded by the power relations involved in being from a tribe that gave power to the elders. "Problems" or "unfortunate events" concerning the younger generation were seen to be "child blaming". Parents know best was the motto. With such an upbringing it was very difficult for me to develop an "authorial and autonomous voice" in my writing as it is still something I am working on. My previous experience of "imprisonment" or "domestic section" meant that fear ruled me and I began to lead what was seen to be a highly "edited life" as I mention in one of the scenes I write about. On reading Laing and Esterson's (2016) book entitled "Sanity, Madness and the Family", I found my experience echoed in some of the women whose families were

interviewed. Ruth (p.14) for example, as mentioned above, is seen to be ill when she doesn't conform to the idea or position that her family put her in. When she is disagreeable, lashes out and dresses differently she is again seen to be ill. Sarah (p.130) also speaks "out of turn" against her father and though this was also done by her brother John and her mother, her enforced position in her family dynamics was different. This was seen to be a major problem in the family and one of the main reasons why her family wanted her hospitalized. These stories or interviews happened in Britain, a world I thought was very far removed from the one in Kuwait. It was startling and disturbing to see parts of my story echoed in other people's lives. One of my diary entries comes to mind "my family will always see me as sick". Of course the researcher in me wants to ask questions, wants to understand, why did this happen? If it's not just me and my own familial situation as evidenced by my reading of other women' stories what could explain the dynamics that seemed to arise post-psychotically in families? I refer here to R.D. Laing's theory of the nexus as through my reading I felt I connected with it the most.

In his paper entitled "Series and Nexus in the family", Laing (1962) describes the interconnected web that is a family. He starts with describing individuals as "centres of orientation to the world" (Laing, 1962, paragraph 1) whose interactions and reciprocal influences are difficult to describe in terms of interpersonal theory. Thus, from the onset the person should theoretically be considered in terms of his "group metamorphoses" and not as an individual or separate object (Laing, 1962). Then, following on from Jean Paul Sartre's work in *Critique de la raison Dialectique* (Sartre, 1960), Laing uses Sartre's ideas of praxis and process to build on his theories of the series and nexus. In this thesis, I will describe Sartre's ideas briefly and then move on to talking about the family as a nexus.

Sartre's idea of praxis is when an action can be attributed to a certain individual or member of the group. Process being, when the actions, happenings or events are divorced from one person and take on a life of their own. The central issue, as I see it here and in my own situation is the issue of responsibility or in other words authorship. Who is the instigator? When something happens or is "done" is it there a person behind it or a set of processes that have as Laing (1962) would put it "no author". Was it my mother, my parents or just the way the group (family) functioned as a "nexus", intent on preserving the interiority of its members at whatever cost to the individuals themselves. Nexus here meaning "a group whose unification is achieved through the reciprocal interiorisation by each of each other in which neither a 'common object', nor organizational or institutional etc. have a primary function as a kind of group 'cement'" (Laing, 1962).

Process Input

Now I talk a lot about the collective throughout my thesis. I was initially tempted to locate my "collective" in the culture of Kuwait. I do however feel the need to mention that Kuwait is a multicultural place. It has no "singular" culture. I mention earlier that the family unit is the

gatekeeper to life and I also refer to the family as a tribe and therefore I will, for this thesis locate my collective in my tribe, my family who are of Kuwaiti origin. Thus the theory of the nexus, in my point of view, is applicable and fits well here.

I have changed a lot along the years and my eleven years in Britain have had a major influence on my belief systems and behaviour. My position in my family has shifted from that of being a surrogate parent and carer to that of an independent woman living her own life. When I began to have different opinions and behave in a way that was seen by my family to be outside of societal norms (i.e wearing sleeveless in unscripted, having a British fiancé, manic episodes) and cultural expectations I was then attacked or in a way “excommunicated” as evidenced by the diary entries. Events to support this included being eviction from the place I was living in and being shunned by members of my family. My eventual return to my tribe was under their terms and necessitated my leaving Edinburgh and my fiancé. Thus, the interiority of the nexus is maintained.

The situation was complicated by the fact that I did actually have a mental illness. In this, it becomes difficult for my family and for myself to distinguish between the “me” and the “not me” as mentioned in one of the vignettes. Which self was it? Was it even a self? I strangely find that the self I occupied depended on the person/group I interacted with. With my family, for example I was the obedient, studious daughter intent on following cultural norms and pleasing the tribe. With my fiancé, I was the free spirited nature girl who loved the countryside and “danced in the rain” so to speak. Where was my “essence”, my “core” if there existed one in all of this and where did the word “bipolar” feature?

'Nuts and bolts': crafting this thesis

Backstage

Contrary to popular belief, autoethnography, as a method, has its own rigour. In addition to the core principles mentioned previously, it has to have elements of "excellent craftsmanship" and engage the reader on an emotional level (Behar, 1997; Ellis, 1997). It also needs to be "critically reflexive and employ relational language" (Goodall, 1998). As an experience, it is exposing and it was a difficult decision to decide the extent of exposure of my personal life. It was hard to expose and at the same time to not expose. As Behar (1997, p.13-14) mentions

vulnerability doesn't mean that anything personal goes. The exposure of the self who is also a spectacle has to take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise get to. It has to be essential to the argument, not a decorative flourish, not exposure for its own sake. I tried to stay true to my work in this and portray my research as authentically as I could whilst keeping to an autoethnographic work frame. I have therefore had to censor or collapse some of the events and give fictitious names to certain characters, i.e. "Grey lady".

In creating the "felt text" (Spry, 2001, p.714) of the vignettes, I used myself as an "auto ethnographic exemplar" and in doing so was able to be freed from the "traditional conventions of writing" (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p.14). I played with the use of voice, sometimes alternating between first person and second person. I used scripts and stories in the form of "scenes" as well as diary entries to create my creative text. I also used devices such as zooming in and out and alternating place and scene, playing with the idea of space and time. My extensive experience of drama and theatre work proved to be essential in this process. I found this part hugely enjoyable and personally fulfilling as my previous childhood aspiration of becoming a writer was slowly becoming a reality. With fear and curiosity guiding me, I carefully made my way through the "scenes" of my life in an order that felt right for me (chronological). As the body began to come alive I felt the terror and the despair come again. I found it difficult to cut the story back as I tried to keep to the core principles of my chosen methodology. I also found great difficulty in trying to structure these "scenes" as by definition I could not give coherence to that which was incoherent. Thus using the Derridian concept of "irreducibility" this "incoherence" thesis was and is irreducible (Horner, 2014, p.9) in that "any attempt to codify, thematise or objectivise" it "immediately betrayed it by trying to contain it/reduce it" (Horner, 2014, p.9) Common sense and advice suggested that I should give it form in order for people to "metabolise it". Form just didn't fit and I got angry in the process as I was trying to sanitise my stories for public viewing. That wasn't what my work was about.

Characters

I mostly used real characters in this thesis as opposed to composite ones. This, I felt, made the story more powerful and less "diluted". Messages and feelings were transmitted directly from person to person.

Throughout this thesis, there were certain characters in my life that stayed constant. These characters were the people that were closest to me. These were Steve (Aidan), my mum and dad, doctor, therapist and research supervisor. As the thesis took shape, the characters began

to grow in complexity as my relationship towards them deepened and developed. My relationship with Aidan, my partner, started off as being that of friendly companionship, moving through to being distant with annoyance or anger at me and my family, to being apart when I see the suitor and finally to love and pain at separation in “madness remembered”, the final piece. With Mama, there is anger and some hate as shown in “unscripted” moving towards love as she picks me up from the airport in “Grey lady”. With my father I move from aloofness and upset at his blunt comments to companionship in café Nero. As for my sister who only appears in one scene, there is love and appreciation. With regards to Doctor and Therapist, I found myself exploring new sides of me that moved from what I would call flowery rhetoric to “speaking from the gut”. Thus, the characters or my relationship to them and the subsequent conversations we had deepened or changed as I myself along with my personal process changed.

Plot development

Since this work is based on real events, it was a lot easier to write the characters into being. The text was created through either amalgamating the different conversations I have had with people (i.e. in unscripted), directly writing down exact words that were said by specific individuals (i.e. conversations with suitor) or writing fictitious accounts based on what I imagined specific characters would say (i.e. conversation between Em and Bill). As I started writing some of the fictional texts such as the ones in research supervision, loosely based on comments I had heard from different sources, the writing began to flow as I started to see those fictional characters as real. I began to hear their voices in my mind speaking to one another. I made sure, like Carolyn Ellis (2004) in her methodological novel “The ethnographic I”, that I didn’t try to guess the characters inner thoughts. I merely made sure to respond to their direct comments and actions. The plot started to focus on these different characters and their conversations and it was a challenge sometimes to make them flow due to the content of the text itself as well as my fragmented approach. An example of this lies in the scene describing the three conversations with the suitor. These conversations are disjointed, covering a variety of topics. Rather than trying to make them flow artificially, I decided to structure each of them separately in one scene where they became almost bullet-like, an assault on the senses. I also used scene changes as well as zooming in and out as devices that linked different scenes together. As mentioned before these “quilted” scenes are linked by meaning rather than direct chronological flow.

The reader will note that there are also different voice positions or layers to my work. There is the base layer where I write from the position of being in the story, the middle layer where I write about writing the story and then the final layer or position of being the “observing observer”. In this final position, marked by bold italics in the scripts, I am the director in my own life script. Using bold italics is another technique that I used to navigate the fragmented texts as well as to emphasise the dramatic effect of the events.

Scene Setting

With the plot and characters established, it became easy to set the scene as I tried to put the dramatic script in context. Since I was attempting to create scenes mirroring real life events, I tried to choose locations that were either similar to if not actually where the events took place. I use the word "mirroring" here rather than recreating as I can only hope to convey the essence of the experience rather than its full experience. A reflection does not have sound, smell, taste or physicality and I tried my best to convey that through expressions in brackets and stage directions conveying a person's physical location or facial expression (i.e. doctor looking at my thighs).

Process Input

I took inspiration from Rose Richards (2008) when I first started writing the scenes by removing myself and past as much as possible from the story, distancing myself using terminology such as "mistreatment" and a pseudonym "Layla". Using my own name Fejer and my fiancé's name Aidan was too close. It felt threatening. I wasn't ready in the beginning of this thesis to take ownership of my work and situation since there was and still is a lot of shame around the events that took place. As I wrote the later sections, I had reached a point of processing where I was able to inhabit Layla and give Aidan his role back.

I battle with criticisms that this thesis is "self-indulgent" (Coffey, 1999, p.155) or "navel gazing" (Sparkes, 2002, p.215) as I am obviously gaining so much out of it. I wonder whether I am "too emotional" and "not academic enough". I can only say that as I read and write this thesis, I begin to connect with theory and live with it. I am living and showing theory in these "moments of meeting". I feel that there is a place for this theory in the literature base associated with first hand experiences of psychosis as I mentioned previously. Whilst there are many literary accounts in books, articles, podcasts and forums, there is very little that is written academically on the subject and I can understand why. By reliving, writing and rewriting these experiences a person can feel like they are being "sucked into a trauma vortex" (Bolton, 2003, p.32) feeling helpless, distressed and stuck because there is no escaping such a condition, one's future is coloured by it. The important thing, I feel, is to stay with the feeling and allow yourself to feel the pain.

I speak a lot about my own pain and "desperation" for dialogue. I would like to argue that a lot of research is self-indulgent. There is a need to get our work out there and share it with each other as academics or doctoral students and with the world for whatever intents or purposes be they for knowledge seeking or a search for truth.

Ending, beginning and letting go

Sharing my story

I want to share this story to encourage other people to tell their stories. I want to hear about the chaos of those destabilised narratives that have the power to illuminate the world on what it is like to live with the aftermath of a psychotic episode and its consequent long-term impact on an individual's life and psychosocial problems that arise. Reading Baldwin's, Lysaker, Lysaker and Dimaggio's (2005; 2006; 2003) work inspired me to find new ways of communicating with other people with severe mental illness and yet there is no information on what happens after. What happens long-term in the intimate details of these people's lives (our lives)? I worry that a lot of the literature in the medical field is recovery or outcome-based and with regards to psychotherapy literature there is a lot of information on possible aetiologies and ways of working with psychotic patients but very little on how to specifically manage families and create safe support systems. The voice of the bipolar individual is under-represented in academia and is "othered" in that he/she/I are studied as if we are on another level to those writing about us. In this, I feel that my work can be very useful in providing a post-psychotic "I" voice.

I speak here, as being both bipolar and Kuwaiti. Whilst this thesis focuses on incoherence in the aftermath of a severe mental illness such as Bipolar disorder with psychotic features, there is a further dimension, as I have also mentioned, of the consequent violation of "cultural scripts" and being "written out" of or being forced out of the "master narratives" of my country (Grant & Zeeman, 2012). Those traditional and religious narratives that have become imperative for a woman to function in the culture and society I was born into.

As a stigmatized bipolar woman, I have what Alec Grant (2010b , p.581) would describe as "limited access to cultural and linguistic resources for a positive identity" due to the need for secrecy about "my condition" and the lack of availability of material (personal accounts) from other Kuwaiti, or in fact, Arab women. My silence has meant that outside my immediate family who have their own personal and somewhat raw experience of my madness and its associated events, I was unable to get the support I needed in my world both culturally and socially. This diminished ability to dialogue about my experience, due to cultural reasons in addition to my having a severe mental illness (Baldwin, 2005) has forced me into further isolation and despair due to the lack of acceptance into the way of life for which I have been carefully reared.

Thus, I hope that my work, in addition to its therapeutic and witnessing functions (Custer, 2014; Adams, 2009; Ellis & Rawicki, 2013), as mentioned in the process input of "Speaking my mind", will present first account narrative resources to Kuwaiti bipolar people, especially the women whose identities have been exhausted due to fears of stigmatisation and isolation (Grant & Zeeman, 2012). I would hope that recourse to an alternative story line may be of use in empowering and giving choice to these women, as it has to me, as well as people from marginalised communities who might see parallels between their stories and mine. I also wish to make such stories available to the international counselling community so as to give an

insight into what it is like for a Kuwaiti woman to lose her mind. I feel that this would be helpful in working with future Kuwaiti clients as well as be a platform for social justice in issues concerning abuse and imprisonment of Kuwaiti women who are unable to dialogue about their experiences.

Letting go

This thesis has helped to lay down the final layer in my growth as a separate being as I wrote my anger, fear, hate and vulnerability down. It has provided me with a much-needed containing facility for my experience (Bion, 1962) with its structure, time line and hand-in as well as supervision.

As I submit my work, I also submit my theorised life experiences for evaluation. It is a curious position I find myself in. My life so far has turned into my biggest work. Would the examiner critique my academic performance? Or what I stand for in what has happened? As Tony Adams (2009) mentions,

an auto ethnography is not a disembodied text. A body, a subject, a vulnerable body and subject, is intertwined with and constituted by this text. As such, it becomes difficult to disentangle an autoethnographic representation from its corresponding, constituted-via-this-representation body and subject, thus making a critique of the text a critique of the life (p.169).

In order for me to move forward, I must now separate myself from this thesis with its associated events, working with the remnants I now live with to create a new story, more scenes, this time for my own personal viewing.

I say goodbye to this thesis and goodbye to the self that wrote it. I want to let it go, move beyond it, throw it away and embrace the next level of my life though I mention earlier that a "thesis is never finished". This act of goodbye is indicative of the way I deal with trauma, I just dissociate. I know the experiences will never go away though I must take control of my person now and restrict access. In many ways, I wonder if I had sold my soul for a doctorate. The events and people I speak about are so close both to me and to the people I am close to or rather was close to in the past.

Ending

I look at the text in this thesis and I feel like it's not mine. That this thesis is a very interesting project that someone else has written and if it were my own, I would do it differently. The writing seems dead, haunted by a ghost. Like the flat I used to inhabit. I went to see my flat with my fiancé after I was released from hospital and it looked nothing like the loving home I used to cherish. It was dark and dreary and had the feel of evil around it. I wonder about what it is that makes a spirit such as mine inhabit a text and what happens after the spirit leaves having done the work it has done. Ideas of possession comes to mind which are sometimes a "religious" explanation for "mad episodes", a further example of the marks of, in this case culture that are "already etched into me" (Wyatt, 2014, p.22). I had possession of the text in this work and I wonder sometimes if the text has possessed me or was I possessed in writing

it? "It", "something" came over me and I started to write. It then went away and I stopped writing.

For Mama

Fejer and Mama are sitting on the two sofas in the living room.

Mama: How's the thesis coming along?

Fejer: It's going ok. I'm trying to finish it but I'm kind of stuck with the ending. There's a lot of sensitive material in it and I have to find a way of writing it in a way that I feel comfortable with. I have moved on from the place I was and I'm not sure how to incorporate that without compromising the essence of my experience at the time.

Mama: You need a plan.

Fejer: I've tried that. My writing doesn't work like that.

Mama (picking up a nearby note pad and pen): I can help you!

Fejer: It's ok, it's got to be my own work.

Mama: You've been talking about your work for weeks now. I can't just let you be stuck anymore. We are all behind you, all of us. You are us and we are you. We're there for you.

Fejer: Thank you. I really appreciate that.

Mama (scribbling on notepad): Ok, so what percentage have you accomplished already?

Fejer: Well, it's just the final touches really. The references and the ending.

Mama: That sounds really simple. I think it'll take you two hours for the references and one hour for the conclusion and you're done! You can hand in by this weekend!

Fejer (laughing): I think it'll take longer than that.

Mama (looking confused): Why? It's about time management. When I was at MIT it was all about being efficient and having a good study plan.

Fejer: I just want to say thank you for trying to help. I really appreciate it.

Mama: Of course. I just can't stand to sit here and watch my daughter be stuck.

Fejer: What makes you just function like that?

Mama: My faith. I would have never been able to sustain the shocks in my life if it wasn't for my faith in Allah.

Fejer: I see.

Mama: How's your faith doing?

Fejer: I'm trying.

Mama: Are you praying?

Fejer: In my heart, always.

Mama: What about physically, the way we do it?

Fejer: I really want to. I've been thinking about it a lot.

Mama: In your own time, darling. It will come.

For Baba

Phone rings

Fejer: Hello?

Baba: Hi, how are you doing?

Fejer: I'm good thank you.

Baba: Have you seen the weather recently?

Fejer: It's been awful. Everything looks orange!

Baba (quietly): Still working on that thesis?

Fejer: Yes.

Baba: How's that going?

Fejer: I'm finding it hard to finish it.

Baba: You can do it! You've come this far.

Fejer: Thank you. I'm trying my best.

Baba (with a break in his voice): I just want to say I'm really proud of you. I remember back when you were in hospital you only had four sentences. Now you tell me you're nearly done! You have shown me a different kind of woman than the one I was used to in doing your doctorate. The women I saw in the past who had studied to this level always ended up losing a part of themselves in the process of their work. You haven't.

Fejer: It means a lot to hear that from you, baba.

Baba: You deserve it.

Fejer: I've written about you.

Baba: oh?

Fejer: I was angry and in a bad place. I'm sorry.

Baba: What did you say?

Fejer: I'm not ready to talk about that yet but I want to thank you for funding this doctorate and for your recent support. I wouldn't be where I was today if it wasn't for you.

Baba: It's all for you. I do it all for all of you, my children. I'd quit tomorrow if I could. I've made my mark and I'm happy with where I am professionally but until you're on your feet I will keep working.

Fejer (tearing up): I just wanted to be your daughter. I wrote about that woman in your office the day I came to tell you I was leaving for Scotland.

Baba: She reminded me of you. She was like a daughter to me. I don't get to see you as often as I would like. I will try harder to do that.

Fejer: I always felt like I was an appointment to you, another client.

Baba: I'm sorry.

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