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TRAUMA THROUGH AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF FAUZIYA  
KASSINDJA'S *DO THEY HEAR YOU WHEN YOU CRY*

MARIAM BIN SAMIR<sup>1</sup>, RIYAD ABDURAHMAN MANQOUSH<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>English Language Department, Hadhramout University, Yemen  
E-mail: [smaroom@gmail.com](mailto:smaroom@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>English Language Department, Seiyun University, Yemen  
E-mail: [riyadmanqoush@seiyunu.edu.ye](mailto:riyadmanqoush@seiyunu.edu.ye)



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ABSTRACT

This paper is intended to examine Fauziya Kassindja's autobiography, *Do They Hear You When you Cry* (1998), with the aim of exploring the author's traumatic experience and its effect on her psyche and character as a woman. This autobiography has been selected for the present research because it draws attention to how people can psychologically be evolved and destroyed in an adolescent age due to the impact of former incidents. The current paper contributes to the scholarly studies for it analyzes an example of women's autobiographies to uncover their traumatic agony and particularly to shed light on the negative consequences of trauma on women's psyches and characters. The theoretical framework and methodology of the study depend mainly on Judith Herman's theoretical perceptive of trauma theory, the notions of captivity and finding a survival mission as exposed in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992). Based on the discussions and analysis, the researchers conclude that Kassindja's autobiography uncovers the trauma of women who suffer from cultural norms that restrict them from taking their own decisions in life. Using Herman's theory of trauma and its relation to captivity the research asserts that Kassindja's prolonged trauma has a major effect on her psyche and character. This is because Kassindja faced horrible events that dreadfully changed her life. In her autobiography, she highlights that women are maltreated and forced to migrate and they can also be imprisoned because of false rituals. The author of this autobiography is indeed one example of many other women who confront horrible incidents that completely change their lives forever. Kassindja confesses in her autobiography that it was hard for her to write about the events that happened to her and share them with the others in public. Yet, she proficiently explained them in detail. Through a deep analysis of the text, the study reinforces Herman's theory of trauma as well as it confirms that the author is psychologically distressed due to her past experiences that made her suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

**Keywords:** Fauziya Kassindja; Autobiography; *Do They Hear You When you Cry*.

## 1. Introduction

Humans in nature are exposed to traumatic experiences that are beyond their ability to control. According to Eve Carlson & Constance Dalenberg (2000: 5), traumatic experiences include three elements: "suddenness, lack of controllability, and an extremely negative valence." The consequence of traumatic experiences may develop a serious mental disturbance. Individuals can sometimes be victims of depression, instability or post-traumatic stress disorder (from now on PTSD). Victims can experience a psychological dissociation that results in losing their ability to incorporate either cognitively or emotionally.

The traumatic events, which women confront, are generally relevant to patriarchal ideologies, cultures and traditions. Through their lives, women suffer from abusive behaviors: emotionally, physically, and even sexually. This happens because patriarchal societies in general devalue women and force women to undergo some cultural rituals that devastatingly affect women's characters and psyches. Fauziya Kassindja's autobiography, *Do They Hear You When you Cry* (1998), which has been selected for the present research, tells the story life of the author herself. She is a young woman who published her life experience in a book to expose her trauma to readers all over the world. She expressed herself explicitly and gave a forthright voice to her emotions and experiences. The present study attempts to examine Kassindja's autobiography with the aim of exploring the author's traumatic experience and its effect on her psyche and character as a woman. This autobiography has been selected for the present research for it draws attention to how people can psychologically be evolved and destroyed in an adolescent age because of the past incidents. The current paper contributes to the scholarly studies for it analyzes women's autobiographies to uncover their traumatic agony and particularly for it sheds light on the negative consequences of trauma on women's psyches and characters.

David Martin (2005) examines the case of Kassindja and another one called Abnakwah for the two are gender-related asylum cases. While Kassindja was forced to undergo the female genital mutilation (from now on FGM) because of the ritual practices in her tribe, Abnakwah was subjected to FGM as a punishment because the elders of her tribe discovered that she was not virgin. Both women suffered in prisons. For instance, Kassindja suffered from humiliation and mistreatment used by the guards against her. Martin (2005) confirms that Kassindja's publicity shook her patriarchal society. This also led migration judges to sympathize such asylum cases. Martin (2005) also suggests lessons about cross-culture complication in considering asylum application such as the negative stereotypes about homeland that eventually damages the cause of asylum seekers.

By the same token, Lisa Frydman and Kim Seelinger (2008) discuss the development of decisions that involve the female genital cutting (from now on FGC) and referring it to Kassindja. They explain that the board of migration appeals had come with more decisions involved FGC. Firstly, in the case of women who had already undergone FGC, their asylum was denied because they would not undergo the procedure again so there is no fear left. Secondly, parents who are eligible for withholding of removal fear to their daughters' safety from FGC are denied and the claim is to be found "derivative" and the parents own lives are not threatened upon the removal (Frydman & Seelinger 2008).

Similarly, Alex Kotlowitz (2007) reveals that the U.S immigration authorities began to recognize sex-based precaution as grounds for asylum seekers. Kassindja's story has also been mentioned by other women's struggle seeking asylum. She was granted asylum as she was considered as a member of a "social group" (Kotlowitz 2007). She was a member of a particular tribe that had special characteristics that could not be changed.

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The methodology of this study is a combination of two theoretical perceptions derived from Judith Herman's trauma theory as illustrated in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992). This section provides a detailed explanation about Herman's theoretical approach that can assist in understanding the trauma in Kassindja's text. Before the era of psychological theories which took place in patience of mental illnesses, the formulation

of hysteria was examined in the scientific and religious explanations. Male scientific experiments on women's hysteria were as an approval of men's domination over women. This strengthens men's power as an enlightened view that women in general should be opposed to higher professions because of their higher risks are mentally instable as illustrated by Stewart in the except below:

The fact that many of Freud's early patients were women was a factor which complicated matters, not merely because they seemed to have been victims of a sexist denial of the reality of their abuse, but also because hysteria, the primary form of traumatic neurosis under discussion at this point, was thus gendered female. (Stewart 2003: 7).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Freud's discovery and conclusion were much relatable to the early life experience of childhood abuse, sexuality and violence. This led to establish the main roots behind women's hysteria. Yet, the study of psychological trauma was farther discussed. According to Herman (1992a), there was a need to psychological interference after the failure of medical interference to analyze men's hysteria who experienced exposures of horrors, break downs and witnessed multination and faced death. They also revealed symptoms of traumatic memory or losing their memory and the lack of capacity to feel and respond to the surrounding. Gradually, Freudian theory of trauma was adjusted and included to analyze male patients. In other words, Freudian works established the main grounds for the contemporary trauma theories.

Judith Lewis Herman is an American psychiatrist, researcher and trauma specialist. She is a professor of clinical psychiatry at Harvard University Medical School. She is also a founding member of the Women's Mental Health Collective. Her books — *Father Daughter Incest* (1981) and *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) — widely contributed in investigating the trauma theory. Herman (1992a: 3) defines the psychological trauma and also suggests treatments and the fundamental recovery stages which are “in safety, restoring the trauma story and restoring the connection between survivors and their community.” She stresses on the domestic abuse and she defines trauma as to bear witness to horrible events. The individual either was subjected to a “natural disasters” or “human design” (Herman 1992a: 7). According to Herman (1992a: 33), trauma is “a feeling of intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation.” As she explains, there are similarities between survivors of battered women at homes and political prisons. She gives an emphasis to the psychological disorder that it is not only related to men in wars but also to women in family life such as domestic violence. Herman emphasizes on the response of catastrophic events that deeply weaken human beings and evoke characteristics of helplessness and terror. According to Herman (1992a: 34), when neither “resistance nor escape is possible, human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized.” Hence, people who face danger are more likely to reflect traumatic reactions.

People who endure in an oppressive environment usually afterwards suffer from complex PTSD. This can be in the soldiers in wars who were taken as captives and also women who undertake domestic violence. In this research, Kassindja, the victim has been held in a political and domestic captivity. These syndromes essentially exist in victims who suffer a lot and at the same time cannot escape from their tribulations. Herman (1992a: 74) emphasizes on the complicated symptoms that come as a consequence of “domestic captivity that physical barriers to escape are rare.” In other words, women and children, who are set free of physical barriers, can also provoke responses of these syndromes. Based on Herman's explanation, victims may experience negative emotions including extreme sadness, explosive anger, feelings of hopelessness and shame. Consequently, the International Classification of Diseases consider these symptoms as “personality changes from catastrophic experience” (Herman 1992a: 122). Thus, victim's personality might be reformed and deconstructed according to how much intense the experience is.

Victims of chronic trauma may feel as not herself any more. Herman (1992b) discerns that people with PTSD usually suffer from multiple symptoms. They may reveal significant problems in multiple domains such as somatic, cognitive, affective, behavioral and relational. According to Herman (1992b: 382), “every aspect of the experience of prolonged trauma combines to aggravate depressive symptoms.” This is because victims cannot express their rage or their feeling of humiliation because it puts their survival at risk.

Traumatized people experience an intrusive and hyperarousal symptoms even after being released. Herman (1992b) gives an example of prisoners in the Second World War or the Korean War who still had nightmares, flashbacks and severe responses to reminders of their prison experiences. Others express their distress as types of somatic symptoms such as abdominal pain, headaches, body disturbance or rapid heartbeat. After they reduced their goals to survival, they apply it in every aspect of their lives, relationships, sensations and memories. Their state in captivity can lead to a "kind of atrophy in the psychological capacities that have been suppressed and to overdevelopment of a solitary inner life"(1992a: 87). In this research, the victim in captivity suffer from a deep self-conflict while trying to adjust with her situation in prison.

In captivity, the human mind alters the unbearable reality of suppression, denial and minimization. It directs the consciousness towards memories and emotions in the unconsciousness. In fact, this complex practice adjusts in the traumatizing state as balancing the human mentality. Herman mentions Orwell's conception called "doublethink" which is identified as "the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them" (Herman 1992a: 87). Prisoners tend to practice and instruct one another to achieve contentment through chanting, praying and simple hypnotic and meditation techniques. This method can ironically be developed in some prisoners to the state of creating either positive or negative hallucinations to "dissociate parts of their personality" (Herman 1992a: 88). Due to prolonged experience which is considered powerful and clear, prisoners might concentrate on the double consciousness.

The intensity of captivity may disturb the meaning of the past and future for some prisoners. They develop a sense of control regarding their perspective the future, and consequently, they feel disappointed and depressed. To avoid that, they "narrow their attention focusing on limited goals. For them, the future is minimized to a matter of hours and days" (Herman 1992a: 89). After liberation, they consciously avoid the memories of their past time in prison. They lose the sense of continuity and they see no difference between the past and the future. They believe that life is not fare and painful to bear.

Since prisoners are always busy with tasks in jail, they switch their focus from escaping to surviving. Herman suggests that humans determine to find ways to make life in prison more "bearable". For example, "a concentration group inmates' schemes to obtain a pair of shoes, a spoon, a blanket"; political prisoners may tend to grow vegetables; prostitute play tricks to hide money from her pimp; an abused women teaches her children to hide when an attack is coming (Herman 1992a: 90). According to Herman (1992a: 90), "narrowing in the range of initiative" turn out into a basic routine in the prisoner's lives to the extent that some find it hard to abandon such habits.

Political prisoners, who are usually isolated from other prisoners, establish a malicious relationship with the perpetrator. Others, who could maintain a good company with other prisoners, devote themselves to them and their human manners come to its extremist. The bond between prisoners cannot be destroyed in any condition.

Prisoners characters change and the value of their previous image is destroyed including their image of their bodies, ideals, beliefs and personalities. This is because the victims' names are replaced with numbers as an act of dehumanization. Women in political or religious cults and sexual exploitation are stigmatized with inhuman designation number to "signify the total obliteration of her previous identity and her submission to the new order" (Herman 1992a: 93). Thus, this highlights the inhuman treatment, which is practiced against women in particular in prisoners in general, during captivity and its effect on their identities.

Prisoners tend to question their faith and values which were once strong. Their beliefs of God and his justice are shaken. Herman (1992a: 97) quotes a statement from one of the Holocaust survivors Wiesel who described his bitterness: "Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live .... Those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust ..., even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never." Jails systems are built to "produce negative, long-lasting change" (Haney 2002: 97). The brain washing systems are biased on inflecting the psychological trauma and are designated to implant terror and helplessness to destroy the victim's sense of self, autonomy and human being relations. The most effective methods practiced are violence, deprivation of food, sleep, shelter,

exercise and personal hygiene or any privacy. The perpetrator attempts to forbid any attachment with the surrounding. Therefore, victims reach the point of breaking down and question the evil nature in human beings and not an act of God.

However, with Herman's understanding of captivity, women and children can also be prisoners in man's home. The psychological force that the perpetrator apply on women and children is seen as a kind of oppression and subordination. Women come to the fact that they cannot escape because of economic, social, psychological or legal burden. This will apparently be exposed when analyzing the Kassindja's story in the next section.

### 3. Discussions and Analysis

As discussed earlier, Kassindja's text illustrates the traumatic experience of the author herself who was put in a jail in the United States as being an illegal migrant. The core of the story is structured around the author's life that changed because of tribal customs and long struggle to gain freedom. The experience of hostages, political prisoners and survivors from all over the world have a strange similarity even in domestic situations. Kassindja described her uncle: "How he could be so cruel? Did he feel no sympathy for us at all? No love for his own brother? .... I buried my face in my hands and sobbed" (Kassindja 1998: 89). She later adds: "My aunt stood watching my reaction. No! she would not see me crumble" (Kassindja 1998: 89). Her struggle started when she was living according to her father's notions in education especially his recusant opinion about arranged marriages and female circumcision. In other words, Kassindja's father was open-minded as his daughter confirms in the following quotation: "My father was a modern man in a traditional culture who neither repudiated that culture nor let himself be bound by it" (Kassindja 1998: 56). However, after the death of her father, her guardians considered his aforementioned opinions as the reason that spoiled the mind of the daughter.

Victims of domestic violence are always forced to be isolated and away from their families. Kassindja suffered a lot from the customs of her tribe. She was forced to stay at home while her brother completed his education. This can obviously be seen in her aunt's opinion who told Kassindja that: "You're just going to end up married and spending the rest of your life in the kitchen. You don't need any more schooling. You 've had enough" (Kassindja 1998: 94). In addition to that, due to the death of her father and the absence of her mother, Kassindja's guardians mainly her uncle reduced her connection with her closest members of the family. Kassindja expressed her situation of being loneliness and her sad feelings when she knew that she would not see her mother again. She said: "I'd lost my father. And now I'd lost my mother too. I went hysterical with rage and grief" (Kassindja 1998: 91). This reinforces what has been illustrated earlier that the victims of trauma are forced to be away from close members of their families and also away from any assistance. Though this kind of captivity did not have a physical hurt, it she psychologically and emotionally affected her character.

Women in patriarchal societies have traumatic experience of different forms of captivity. This can obviously be seen in Kassindja's autobiography when the author indicated that she could not resist and did not try to escape from way miserable situation. As illustrated earlier, Kassindja's father refused to treat his daughter in a tough manner but after his death she was a victim of overwhelming painful events. However, these chocking events were considered as normal to the other women of her tribe. Kassindja described her shock from her aunt in the following quotation: "My stomach got queasy. She couldn't be serious. She wouldn't take that away from me too. She couldn't. It was all I had" (Kassindja 1998: 94). In fact, her aunt, as most women in Kassindja's tribe in Togo, believed that school was a waste of money and time. Being able to read and write was enough for her.

Depression and sadness are the mostly expected effects after the notion of the series traumatic events from being an orphan. This can be seen when Kassindja lived away from her mother and forbidden of completing her study. This deprivation made her feelings collapse into depression. Her mentality and emotions got worse when her aunt wanted her to be circumcized and preparing her for a polygamous marriage for a man who was three times her age—45 years old. Though her mother and sisters tried to stop it, they could not

because her legal guardian was her uncle. Kassindja thinks that: "this was some kind of a bad dream, I was their property now. They could do with me as they liked" (Kassindja 1998: 97-98). In fact, her opinion about her uncle changed as he became the most powerful person in controlling her life. Then, she described her attitude as "I'd never yelled at my aunt before, she was enraged. She kicked hard at the edge of the seat. I was sitting in and sent it to tumbling over backward, with me in it. The back of my head struck the floor a loud thwack" (Kassindja 1998: 99). As she showed her rejection and raised her voice over her aunt, Kassindja had not only a verbal abuse but also a physical one for she could not change decisions. Her mental and emotional status became strong.

The perpetrators against Kassindja were extremely powerful and their impact of such subordination changed her life psychological. Kassindja tried to be strong by saying "no" every time her aunt tried to familiarize the idea of marriage to her: "I thought she was waiting for my final surrender.... I'd keep saying no forever. She won't force me I thought. As long as I keep saying no, she 'll wait" (Kassindja 1998: 100). Kassindja's perspective of her house and mainly her room changed. She wrote: "where once it had been full to overflowing, it was just a small, barren room ... Empty, empty— everything was empty now" (Kassindja 1998: 103). Though her guardians knew that their attitude was against the beliefs of Kassindja's father, they justified their deeds and related their actions to customs and traditions.

Kassindja was chained by the culture she adopted before she knew the dark side of her tribal culture. Her shock led her to a total surrender to her destiny and to a psychological numbness. During the preparation of her wedding ceremony, she had not been notified about its time, she exploded "I began sobbing hysterically" and arguing her aunt "please! Don't do this! Don't do this to me" (Kassindja 1998: 102). And later she added: "I was a rag doll. I let them do what they wanted" (Kassindja 1998: 103). Her dreams of completing her education was destroyed. She writes, "I was dressed like a princess and all I wanted to do was die ... was dressed for a funeral. My own" (Kassindja 1998: 109). She also described her depression: "I just saw nothing but blackness. It was the black of my future, a long, dark, endless suffocating tunnel from which I could see no escape. This was the end for me. A death sentence" (Kassindja 1998: 209). These traumatic events changed her from a girl filled with life to a hopeless one. She considered that arranged marriage as a death sentence. As a result, there was an internal conflict between surrendering and resisting. On one hand, she described her loss in this excerpt: "my aunt has won ... Trying to grasp the reality. I would never go back to school. That part of my life was over ... I felt like the weight of the world had just been draped over me" (Kassindja 1998: 104-105). On the other hand, she rejected her thoughts of weakness and tried to defeat them as she had to survive a ritual custom, (FGM), as seen in this quotation: "No! I couldn't think like that! I had to fight this. They were going to cut me. It would hurt terribly ... my mind raced with thoughts of death" (Kassindja 1998: 104). Her mental state was no longer stable. She was in great conflict between what her father taught her to fight for and what the culture drives her to be.

The distressing events, which Kassindja had undergone, had a huge influence on her life. She was a victim of a patriarchal culture and particularly domestic pressure. The domestic captivity, for more than one year and a half, destroyed her sense of warm home. As a result, she illustrated her struggle since her uncle became her guardian. She explained in the first chapters the culture, traditions, and how she and her family lived in Togo. After she fled with a totally stranger from Togo with her sister's help and her mother's money, her traumatic experience continued. Though she could escape from being circumcised at last minutes, her life was still in danger. She had not traveled or lived away from Togo. She left the house just when she went to school. Even when she lived in foreign countries, she was not free for she was always frightened carrying an illegal passport. The effect of captivity can obviously be seen in Kassindja's identity for instance when she was a stranger in the German airport where a Chinese woman helped her, Kassindja writes "there I was, scurrying along in my blue cotton dress ... Rudina calling after me. I felt like a circus animal following behind its handler" (Kassindja 1998: 131) and later she adds: "like some kind of wild animal in a cage!" (Kassindja 1998: 323). She also described how badly she was treated by the officers in the prison especially when she was menstruating as quoted below:

A man's face was looking at the narrow window, looking in on me as I sat naked on the toilet seat. Oh, God. This wasn't happening to me. I lowered my head and covered my face with my hands. My body was no longer my own. Anyone could look at it. I had been stripped naked and put on display like an animal in a zoo. (Kassindja 1998: 175)

This act of dehumanization reflects what has been confirmed by Herman (1992a: 84) that "prisoners who lived through this psychological state often describe themselves as having been reduced to nonhuman life form." Similarly, Kassindja feels "like luggage gone astray" (284). Prolonged captivity leads prisoners to lose their identities. They also lose their ideas of the self and their values. This happened also to Kassindja for she lost her identity. She writes that "my whole sense of myself, who I was, what I could expect from the world, my faith in fairness and justice, all this had been shattered" (Kassindja 1998: 452). In other words, her values and faith collapsed under the pressure of the prison.

In addition to that, Kassindja was treated by the officers with racism and humiliation. For instance, the officers asked her not to worry about the situation in prison for "it's not a bad prison. You will meet other Africans there" (Kassindja 1998: 168). Another officer adds: "I don't know why these people can't stay in their countries" (Kassindja 1998: 169). This racist treatment led Kassindja's psychological status to be traumatized. She was always frightened. Fear and terror preoccupied her mind. This reinforces what has been discussed earlier that the feelings of the victim of chronic trauma might change due to the depressed events that they experience. In the same autobiography, she portrays the scene when the officers striped her from clothes. she writes: "I took my underpants and stood in front of her completely naked, soiled pad exposed, shamed beyond words" (Kassindja 1998: 171). She also adds that as the officer asked her to squat and cough. She said: "I did as she told ... I turned around and do it again.. it didn't matter ... I wasn't there anymore. I had gone some-place far away" (Kassindja 1998: 171). Under such stressed moments, Kassindja's psyche altered from rushing feelings to total surrender because as illustrated in the quotation above she even lost her dignity and honor in the jail.

The shock of living in prison and moving from prison to another increased Kassindja's feelings of depression and numbness. Herman (1992a: 84) explains that "there is a shutting down of feelings, thoughts, initiative and judgment." Kassindja has lost the chances of getting out of prison and this led her consciousness to develop a kind of solitary inner life. For instance, she writes: "I was becoming more and more depressed. One unending day of prison life after another, ... I didn't have to think. I didn't have to feel. I could just watch TV" (Kassindja 1998: 212-213). This coincides with the arguments of the American sociologist Kai T. Erikson as quoted below:

Something alien breaks in on you, smashing through whatever barriers your mind has set up as a line of defense. It invades you, possesses you, takes you over, becomes a dominating feature of your interior landscape, and in the process threatens to drain you and leave you empty. (Erkison 1994 in Walkerdine & Jimenez 2012:83).

Being captive in prison led Kassindja to alter between periods of obedience and resistances. She sometimes surrendered to the reality that she would not be able escape set free and at the same times she tried her best to resist and fight from time to time as quoted here: "it felt like sickness trying to take hold. I was determined to fight it, ... I only had to hang in, hold on, be strong for little longer" (Kassindja 1998: 224-225). The human survival instinct made Kassindja refuse to be defeated. She believes that the only way to keep her consciousness from damage is to fight.

The mind of prisoners can alter the intolerable reality by shifting the consciousness and unconsciousness. This has been discussed earlier as "double thinking". Herman (1992a: 89) illustrates that the mind plays "tricks with the reality ... also satisfies himself that reality is not violated." The human psyche has the ability to modify the traumatic situations as it holds two contradictory beliefs to evoke specific emotions and to enter trance between consciousness and unconsciousness. This state is arisen by memories, prayers and simple hypnotic techniques. Kassindja consciously tries to adjust by remembering emotions of her home and family. These flashbacks can be seen when she said: "I was outside. Out in the fresh air and sunshine ... It

reminded me of Kpalimé” (Kassindja 1998: 295). She tried to seize anything that would remind her of her roots and bring warm feelings to her. She tried to find thin line to memory to keep herself in moments of diversity. As a result, she remembered her father's new car with her cousin who helped her when she stayed in prison. She wrote: “I'd stood beside my father as he showed it off. Rahuf had walked around it, admiring it ... My father had smiled and winked at me....I'd felt so proud! So special! so loved, so happy. It seemed like a dream to me now” (Kassindja 1998: 298). Moreover, she prayed as part of balancing between her emotion and reality. She said: “The only comfort I found in my misery those days was prayer” (Kassindja 1998: 212). She limited her physical perception of pain and emotional reactions by concentrating on spiritual comfort in prayers. During her prolong traumatic experience, Kassindja reduced her feelings of terror and humiliation by altering her sense of reality.

During her captivity, Kassindja was isolated from other prisoners for a long time. At this time, her mind faced delusion that led her to hallucinate. This status developed trance which can be seen in hypnotizable people. Those people have the ability to form positive and negative hallucinations as an attempt to disconnect parts of their personality from the reality. Kassindja described her segregation as staying in a “box”. She adds: “I remember standing at my metal toilet-and-sink unit.... talking to myself... Then I'd laugh hysterically” and “I'd begun talking to those fuzzy phantom people on television” (Kassindja 1998: 325). This method was applied as she was in extremely physical illness and psychological pain. The smoke and the air in the prison cells made her asthma worse and the strong lights affected her eyesight. She also had a chronic stomach pain. In fact, segregation is established to control and increase prisoner's psychological trauma and, in Herman words, it is used “to destroy the victim's sense of self in relation to others” (Kassindja 1998: 78). In this way, the prisoners would live profoundly in physical and mental struggle as long as they stay in prison.

In addition to the effect of her isolation, Kassindja restricted and suppressed her notion of the future. The hope that she waited for collapsed. This emotion made her vulnerable and disappointed. As a result, she cohabited her miserable reality just to survive. Her mind focused merely on limited goals without future plans. Her trauma made her think more about the present. For instance, she said: “I started to lose track of time” (Kassindja 1998: 212). She also elaborated: “I made it through the day. I made it through the night. I had learned how to survive” (Kassindja 1998: 299). In other words, Kassindja thought that she had nothing to live for. She tried to keep herself busy by doing in prison. She devoted her time not to think about escaping but about how to stay alive. As she wrote, “I volunteered to hand out and collect the food trays” (Kassindja 1998: 225). She also exposed that: “I was very glad to have my work in the laundry. It passed the time, and it took my mind off things” (Kassindja 1998: 227). While she participated for a fashion show for two weeks in prison, she said: “it was my best day at Esmor, my best day in prison” (Kassindja 1998: 258). She tried to bury her unwanted emotions of depression, shame and the inability as a way to accept from her destiny. Though she tried to pass time by sleeping more hours and volunteering to work, there was a certainty that the negative emotions did not find a place in her mind again. This coincides with an argument by Jack Derrida as quoted below:

Granted, every human can, within the space of doxic phenomenality, have the consciousness of covering its tracks. But who could ever judge the affectivity of such a gesture? Is it necessary to recall that every erased trace, in consciousness, can leave a trace of its erasure whose symptom (individual or social, historical, political, etc.) will always be capable of ensuring its return?. (Derrida 2008: 135-136).

In addition to that, Kassindja was able to befriend other prisoners who share with her the same destiny. According to Herman (1992a: 91), “prisoners who have the good fortune to bond with others know the generosity, courage, and devotion that people can muster in extremity.” They also have “the capacity to form strong attachments” (Herman 1992a: 91). For instance, in the story, Sylvie was one of the prisoners and he usually called Kassindja “my baby”, “my daughter” and Kassindja considered her as her “mom” (Kassindja 1998: 296). In general, Kassindja's relationship with the other women in the jail was very strong.



Kassindja as a migrant in the hostland kept the small symbols that reminded her of her close friends and family in the homeland. She kept some pictures, letters and her father's watch. For Kassindja, preserving these symbolic minor objects is a kind of indirect resistance to her miserable and traumatic situation. This can be seen in the coming excerpt: "when the police man had me on the wrist with the baton, my watch must have taken much of the force of impact. It was Yaya, still protecting me" (Kassindja 1998: 275). In other words, she considered the watch that her father, Yahya, gave her as something that would give her luck and protection. In addition to that, when she looked at the photo of her family, she said: "I didn't have them anymore. But I had this picture now. I could look at their sweet faces. I wiped away my tears and sat looking at them, one by one" (Kassindja 1998: 231). These symbolic objects coincide with Herman's "transitional objects" as elaborated earlier (1992a: 93). In fact, people become attached to symbolic and memorial objects as a kind of nostalgia because they are homesick.

Even though Kassindja was disappointed because of the people who harmed her, she was grateful to the others who supported and assisted her. According to Herman (1992a: 92), "there are only a limited number of roles: one can be a perpetrator, a passive witness, an ally, or a rescuer." The perpetrators in Kassindja's story were her guardians, the patriarchal society, illegal migrant prisons especially Esmor. In contrast, her allies were her cousin, Rahuff, her friends in prison, Layli Miller, Karen Musalo and her team of lawyers. In addition to that, the passive witness was her uncle who was in America and refused to help her as quoted: "I could not believe that the man who had known me since childhood, ... had refused to help me when I needed him the most" (Kassindja 1998: 203). This reinforces what has been illustrated earlier that some survivors of trauma hate their passive witnesses. Kassindja indeed did not express hatred but rather she expressed her feeling of being denied and betrayed by her own family.

Even after her trauma had ended, Kassindja suffered of its consequences. While remembering and writing, she showed that she was still unhealed. For instance, she wrote that: "many memories were painful to recall and difficult to share" (Kassindja 1998: 513). In general, victims of prolonged trauma usually suffer from PTSD. However, Herman (1992a: 211) assures that such trauma is not easy to overcome and it is "never final; recovery is never complete. The impact of a traumatic event continues to reverberate throughout the survivor's lifecycle." Kassindja's trauma was not a normal personal trauma that consisted only of one traumatic event. It is multiple, more severe and intense.

#### 4. Conclusion

Using Herman's theory of trauma and its relation to captivity the researchers asserted that Kassindja's prolonged trauma had a major effect on her psyche and character. Based on the discussions and analysis, Kassindja was the youngest daughter in her family and she was brought up in a good family. However, her traumatic experience had an impact of her personality and psyche. She went through depression and sadness in her homeland as well as when she migrated to the USA, she suffered a lot in prison for being illegal migrant. Since the American and African cultures are different, she lived in-between spaces. She had to adjust a lot of her the cultural heritage and the ideologies that she learnt in Africa. She also suffered from symptoms of complex PTSD. This happened due to her young age that did not allow her to resist the traumatic and painful events that she faced in her country and also in the USA. She was burdened with overwhelming emotional status, extreme anxiety symptoms, flashbacks and nightmares.

As indicated earlier by Herman, a prolonged trauma is not easy to recover from and the treatment occurs in long stages. The symptoms are not to appear immediately after the end of the trauma; they may take months and years. This confirms the argument of Rogers, Leydesdorff & Dawson (1999: 16) who explain that trauma "define the shape of a life and a life narrative by conditioning all other intellectual, emotional, and sensory processes." For instance, Kassindja wrote her story after a long time from release i.e. more than eighteen months. Her autobiography was covered specific details about her suffering. She explained her connection with her family with passion and admiration. She also reflected the disconnection she felt from her roots through mentioning specific details about her homeland. In other words, the symptoms of PTSD were very obvious in the story of her life. Nevertheless she was famous and appeared in some TV shows such as

CNN International and Nightline, the overwhelming feeling of freedom and the victory of granting asylum were a matter of temporary reaction.

In brief, *Do They Hear you When You Cry* is one of many references to what women suffer because of culture norms that restrict them from deciding their own choices in life. Kassindja is one example of many others who confronted such horrible experience. It completely changed her life forever. While writing her story, she confessed that it was hard for her to write about the intimate things that happened to her and share it with in public. Yet, she proficiently explained them in detail. This means she wanted to show how in some countries women are maltreated and forced to migrate and they can be imprisoned because of false rituals. Through deep analysis of the autobiography, the study reinforced Herman's theory of trauma. The research revealed that Kassindja suffered from PTSD which affected her character and psyche.

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