‘Talking about something much larger’: Script Development and Creating Metaphor and Meaning in Jocelyne Saab’s *Dunia*

*Margaret McVeigh*

I received many threats of death already when I was shooting [*Dunia*] and when the film went out [. . .] because [. . .] the image was strong and I think they didn’t realise that it was strong because I didn’t tackle the problem in a direct way [. . .] but in fact I was talking about something much larger.

– Jocelyne Saab (2016)

This chapter considers the narrative and aesthetic decisions Franco-Lebanese writer/director, war correspondent and documentary filmmaker, Jocelyne Saab, faced in writing and making the feature film *Dunia* (*Kiss Me Not on the Eyes*) (2005). *Dunia* was a ‘reinvention’ and exploration of many real issues facing Arab women at the time. The film took writer/director Saab seven years to make, was filmed in Egypt and produced in Egypt, France, Libya and Morocco, and was selected in competition for the Sundance Film Festival. Confronted with stark issues facing women in then-contemporary Egypt, documentary filmmaker Saab, no longer able to consider making stories with real images about Middle Eastern conflicts, turned to the fictional world of feature film. In *Dunia*, Saab deploys metaphor and experimental narrative techniques to blend truth and reality in creating the story of Dunia, a young Egyptian student of dance and poetry whose journey to ‘free her body and dance with her soul’ resonates with cultural meaning.

This chapter, based on my 2016 interview with Saab at her Paris home, takes an interdisciplinary approach to consider the creative decisions she faced while researching, writing, directing and co-producing *Dunia*. In discussing Saab’s multifaceted creative process of developing story, metaphor and meaning for the screen, it melds the established field of Screen Studies and the emerging
fields of Script Development and Screenwriting (Batty et al. 2017). To this end, it includes a textual and structural analysis of the narrative and aesthetics of Dunia, to consider how Saab adapts reality in her work, including her creative treatment of reality, via metaphor, as one way of exploring the ‘truth.’

Craig Batty et al. (2017) interrogate the definition of script development, noting that different perspectives have emerged in defining what script development in the field of screenwriting means. In particular, they note that

The literature on script development – whether explicit in its focus or implicitly referring to its practice – is wide, varied and multi-faceted; and [...] arguably fragile and still emerging, in the sense that it does not collectively purport to add incremental, scholarly insights into the practice, and/or does not necessarily refer to other literature. (Batty et al. 2017: 240)

They highlight the facet of script development that involves the individual and their negotiations with self in the development of ideas. They note that considerations of plot, character, story, theme and emotional impact are paramount, but they also question ‘what development actually entails: which aspects of screenwriting craft beyond plot are used in/by/for script development, and what tools are used to achieve this?’ (Batty et al. 2017: 228). However, they do not mention the importance and power of metaphor as a tool in the creation of story and meaning. This chapter contributes to the field of Screen Studies and Screenwriting by considering metaphor as it contributes to and underlines the script development considerations of ‘plot, character, story, theme and emotional impact’. I investigate the script development decisions Jocelyne Saab makes around metaphor in Dunia and analyse the tools inspired by metaphor in cinematic storytelling including mise-en-scène, colour, character movement and cinematography.

JOCELYNE SAAB, WRITER/DIRECTOR:
CREATING MEANING FOR THE SCREEN

Jocelyne Saab is widely recognised as one of the most important political and artistic filmmakers of the Arab world. She worked as a newsreader, journalist, war reporter, filmmaker and artist photographer and lived between Beirut, Paris and Cairo. She was a news reporter during the civil war in Lebanon and then a war reporter in the Middle East and Iran. As Stefanie Van de Peer notes, this ‘really brought her to the front line, in the field, as a war reporter. The physical risks she took to report on the war in Lebanon made her the first woman in the Arab world to bear witness to the horrors of war around the
globe’ (2017: 55). Saab directed more than thirty documentaries, as well as four feature films screened worldwide. She filmed in Lebanon, Egypt, Iran, Syria, Kurdistan, Western Sahara and Vietnam. Saab was the main writer for all of her films, with the exception of Beirut, Never Again (1976), Letter From Beirut (1978), A Suspended Life (1985, which was written by Gérard Brach) and One Dollar a Day (2015, to which Etel Adnan contributed).

In our interview, one of the first questions I asked her was why – after almost thirty years as a reporter and documentary maker – she switched from documentary filmmaking to feature filmmaking. Her answer was simple. Saab said she moved to fiction filmmaking when she found ‘the truth was too hard to tell’. It is the way in which Saab renders this truth via the tools of cinematic storytelling – specifically metaphor – that I explore in this chapter. Elsewhere, I have discussed the ways we may conceive of truth and reality in documentary and fiction film (McVeigh 2018: 70). In this chapter, I reaffirm my discussion of the parameters around truth and reality as presented in fiction film as a means of illustrating the ‘truth’ explored by cinematic storytelling as noted by Macedonian writer/director Milcho Manchevski:

Every piece of art has to contain the truth. But, not the truth of what happened. It needs to contain the truth of how things are – and the difference between what happened and how things are, is what is important. Is it the events (and by extension the facts) of what happened, or is it the emotional and conceptual underpinning and thus understanding of how things are? (Manchevski 2012: 70)

In order to explore how this ‘truth’ is presented in Dunia, we may consider the ways in which both filmmakers and audiences create, experience and comprehend a cinematic narrative via tools such as metaphor, with ‘a certain trust and faith in the artwork to render, not the factual truth, per se, but the importantly shared experience of trusting what artist and audience can see and feel together: what feels real becomes the world we inhabit’ (McVeigh 2018: 70).

In screenwriting theory, the central precept of metaphor is a compelling tool used to create narrative, as well as the formal elements of form, style and visual sub-text. Screenwriter Paul Schrader (Taxi Driver, Martin Scorsese, 1976) emphasises the power of metaphor in underscoring narrative, thematics and aesthetics in discussing the central metaphor of Taxi Driver:

To be a writer you should first examine and confront your own most pressing personal problems. When you find your problem, then come up with a metaphor for it. A metaphor is something that stands in place of the problem. It is not like the problem; it is another variation of the problem. Where this first came to me was with Taxi Driver; the
problem was loneliness. The metaphor was the taxicab. The steel gaudy coffin floating through the sewers of New York, an iron box with a man inside who looked like he was in the middle of society, but in fact he was completely alone. The metaphor of the cab is so powerful that it can be treated as a metaphor for loneliness. (Schrader quoted in McGrath and MacDermott 2003: 14)

In what follows, I consider how Saab uses metaphor to represent or allude to reality and in doing so uncover the ‘truths’ that she wishes to create for audiences via the use of metaphor to represent ‘the problem’ in the cinematic narrative of Dunia (2005).

METAPHOR AND MAKING MEANING IN DUNIA

On her inspirations for Dunia, Saab has noted that she had always wanted to make a feature film in Egypt, as Egyptian neorealist films were the films she saw growing up. However, she was also aware she wanted to make a film that distanced her from the reality of war as investigated in her documentary work, and instead make a fiction film that commented on social reality. On this creative dichotomy, Saab says:

At the same time there was a dream of making a feature film because I was raised with Egyptian films on TV. There was only the beginning of television when I was a child and there were only black and white Egyptian films [. . .] which were in a way imitating Italian Neo-Realism films. So, it was a dream for me to go there and make a feature. But [. . .] we were still in war and that changes you. You don’t have enough distance to talk about everything. That’s my story.

In her exploration of the lingering emotional and sexual atrocities committed against young women in contemporary Arab society in Dunia, Saab has taken elements of the neorealist style so inspirational to her and developed a feature film with a complex and experimental narrative structure, aligned with an equally complex use of metaphor.

In her discussion of Saab’s documentary work, Van de Peer notes that ‘Saab’s earliest experimental documentaries [. . .] deal with an enfolded historiography as they are unfolding their matryoshka doll structure, and reveal a preoccupation with the future’ (2017: 82). In Dunia the multi-strand narrative structure is akin to that of a tapestry with independent coloured strands of metaphor and meaning. The film has at its core Dunia’s quest to be both an educated woman and the daughter of her mother, a belly dancer, a profession
regarded by her culture as akin to being a prostitute. One of the key themes of the film is Dunia’s driven struggle to find her identity reflected in how she searches to express desire through both her study of dance and in classic Arabic poetry, which becomes the subject of her Master’s thesis. While on one level these key narrative threads appear to trace the reality of her quest to become a dancer and be a student, the potential pathways that her life could take are actually reflected in her relationship with the adults in her life – her teacher, her husband and the women in her family.

‘Dunia’ is the Arab word for ‘life’ or ‘world’ and is the name of the main character, Dunia, played by Egyptian actress Hanan Turk (Mostafa 2015: 46). Dunia is a student of belly dance and Sufi poetry and she aspires to be a professional dancer like her famous mother. Dunia is also an exploration of real issues facing Arab women in life. We follow Dunia’s journey via a number of elliptical and interweaving narrative strands. All of these strands reflect the constraints of a traditional past, the promise of a liberated future and the failure of the institutions of society to liberate women. While Saab’s stylistic and narrative work in Dunia displays vestiges of a neorealist style, it is deeply symbolic and metaphorical in its treatment of reality. For example, in the film’s intimate roving camera work we are made party to the conversations between Dunia and her female friends and relatives as she weaves her way through life in streets, public institutions and apartments in Cairo. Ironically, while Dunia studies the poetry of desire, she suffers emotional and psychological distress from being circumcised as a little girl – a fact which is only alluded to very late on in the narrative. As Van de Peer notes, Saab’s work is connected by the overarching theme of ‘identity-formation and coming-of-age experiences of urban women’ (2017: 57). Dunia exposes perhaps the most confrontational of the realities facing Egyptian women today: that of female genital mutilation.

The opening images of Dunia introduce the stylistic and symbolic elements that will be embroidered into the narrative tapestry of the film. In handheld documentary-realist style we first follow Dunia as she weaves through the busy streets of Cairo. We also see the unexpected but delightful image of a bright red, heart-shaped taxi light atop a taxi. We learn later that this taxi belongs to Dunia’s seemingly independent working-woman friend, Inayate. We then see the title sequence.

In a previous piece (2018) I have considered Dunia’s elliptical narrative structure and proposed that each narrative strand was metaphorically reflective of a potential pathway that Dunia’s life could take. I categorised four main strands: the quest for freedom of expression through Sufi poetry and learning, the quest for love via traditional marriage or true partnership, the quest for freedom of expression/self-identity through dance, and lastly, the pathways of tradition as reflected by the roles of women in her life (McVeigh 2018: 75).
In this chapter, I revisit this earlier discussion to build on observations regarding narrative as metaphor, in order to consider Saab’s use of metaphor as developed via *mise-en-scène* and cinematography, including symbolism, colour and movement, which drive both plot and theme.

**POETRY AS METAPHOR**

The narrative strand that deals with Dunia’s quest to educate herself is deeply significant. It provides the overarching metaphor of Dunia’s desire to escape tradition in her search for liberation through a mastery of Arabic poetry and dance. To this end Saab presents key story moments in her elliptical use of narrative, rather than a complex plot-driven narrative. These include the moments in which we learn that Dr Bashir, Dunia’s mentor in poetry, wishes to publish an uncensored version of the erotic Arabian story of Scheherazade’s *Thousand and One Nights*. In one of the tragedies of the film we later learn he is blinded by unknown authorities in retaliation for this insurrection. As I have observed elsewhere,

> It is in Dunia’s encounters with Bechir [Bashir] that much of the multifaceted and beautiful symbolism and metaphor around seeing reality and divining the truth is developed. Dunia’s thesis is on Love in Arab Poetry, ironically the poetry of erotic desire, which women like Dunia (whom we later learn has been circumcised) are unable to experience sexually. (McVeigh 2018: 76)
As I also noted previously, in an early sequence of the film Dunia listens to a lecture given by Dr Bashir and is heckled for noting that ‘A kiss is forbidden.’ In a later sequence Dunia tells Bashir, who is now blinded, that ‘when I first met you, I was scared of your eyes’. The ability to see the real with one’s eyes is the ultimate irony, and acts as a metaphor for the ability to see the truth, because now this learned man literally cannot see. One of the pivotal scenes in the crystallisation of Saab’s use of this metaphor is in the music shop scene where Dunia and Bashir meet. In the background we hear the soundtrack to the song ‘Kiss Me Not on the Eyes’ by the famous Egyptian singer and composer, Mohammed Abdel Wahab, who was noted for his passionate love songs (Mostafa 2015: 46). This song, ‘Kiss Me Not on the Eyes’, also became the title for the film when it was released in English. It is in this scene that the lines of the song become deeply metaphorical. In Dunia’s relationship with Bashir, we see what her life could be like, as he opens her eyes to the honesty and acceptance of real love. This is particularly evident in the scene where Dunia and Bashir sing together: ‘Kiss me not on the eyes / A kiss on the eyes means parting / Leave our goodbyes without kisses / Leave me hope.’ Dunia says to Bashir, ‘Our songs speak only of sad tears and suffering’ and Bashir says in response, ‘This is what I wanted to tell you. We are afraid of love and of pleasure, we steal them. But you can’t dissociate pleasure from Arabic literature.’ As Saab noted in our interview, the themes of Dunia – including the desire to experience pleasure and self-actualisation – are emblematic of what she as a director had hoped for a modern Arab woman: ‘She had better things to do than marriage, [. . .] why hide behind the veil of traditions to get her freedom?’

RELATIONSHIPS AS METAPHOR

Saab’s sustained use of the metaphor of seeing, as developed in Dunia’s relationship with Dr Bashir, and her use of the metaphor of desire, as developed in Dunia’s quest to study the poetry of desire, is masterful and pivotal to the overall narrative and meaning of Dunia. The importance of this metaphor as a way of showing how young Arab women like Dunia can escape the strictures of practices like female circumcision is also highlighted in Saab’s use of metaphor in Dunia’s relationship with her boyfriend and husband, Mamdouh. One of the key themes of the film is Dunia’s desire to find her identity reflected in the ways in which she searches to express her own desire. The film portrays her struggles to come to terms with her physical desires, sensations and movements through dance, through the memory of her late mother, as well as through the idea of pleasure and sexual desire as expressed in classic Arabic poetry.
However, in the development of Dunia’s relationship with Mamdouh, we can see how the patriarchal strictures and impositions placed on women in society thwart a woman’s ability to be herself and claim her identity. Dunia is able to express her personality and have an equal footing in the relationship when she and Mamdouh are only girlfriend and boyfriend. During this period of their relationship, when he pushes her for intimacy, she resists him and the potential compromise of her reputation. Eventually she gives in to his proposal of marriage and we see a happy Dunia marry in a beautiful white wedding dress. It is interesting to note that scenes of Dunia and Mamdouh in their bedroom were challenging to film, as in Egyptian films male and female actors are not permitted to touch. However, once Dunia and Mamdouh are married, she is no longer free to be herself and have an equal footing in the relationship. This is particularly evident as we see her facing the attempts of her husband to control her in the marriage by demanding that, for example, she put her hair up and stop learning to dance.

Perhaps more pertinent to the metaphorical power of the image is the research Saab did and the inspiration she found in reality for the pivotal scene where Dunia declares her need to have independent thought and for her husband not to be privy to what she is thinking. Dunia confronts Mamdouh with who she is and why she needs to be herself in one of the most compelling scenes of the film. She says the dreaded words, ‘We have to talk’, and continues: ‘You want my body, take it. But I can’t kiss you. From here to there it’s mine alone. I’ll look for pleasure in there. My head is my kingdom. I won’t share it. Anybody can fill this bed. But here. No.’

Figure 10.2 Dunia, ‘From here to there it’s mine’
In discussing the inspiration for this scene, Saab notes its basis in reality. In her research for the film, she conducted many interviews with young female Beaux Arts students whom she felt may have been more liberal in discussing their approach to contemporary sexual reality. However, she said she was still shocked by what she learned, in particular when she learnt of how the girls were sexually ‘broken upside down’ and how men still did not know how to treat them as modern women. One girl in particular, who had been circumcised and had boyfriends, stood out. Saab told me:

The girl was speaking on a more private level [. . .] she was having boy-
friends, she’d hidden, she was living normally her sexuality [. . .] so we met [. . .] and she talked to me much more frankly about her life. She said ‘I had a relationship with a boy and he didn’t understand what my feelings were and I explained to him that this was mine’ and she did this gesture. I thought my God I’ve got my scene at the moment she did that! (Jocelyne frames the space between the top of her head and her chin with her hands as does Dunia in the movie scene.)

In her script development of Dunia it is evident that Saab’s documentary-style research and background as a reporter strongly inform the fictional elements of her film, which in turn inform the development of metaphor and meaning in, for example, this scene where character gesture is as important as dialogue.

COLOUR AS METAPHOR

I have proposed that in the film the potential pathways that Dunia’s life could take are represented in the lives of Dunia’s seemingly liberated taxi driver friend Inayat, Inayat’s traditional mother and daughter Yasmine, who in her youth represents the promise of a liberated future, as well as her female professor, Arwa. The tragic irony of the film is that despite living in this household of women, in the film’s climatic scene, the grandmother circumcises her own granddaughter, Yasmine.

Saab’s use of colour and carefully orchestrated colour palette as metaphorically underlining Dunia’s relationships with these women in her life is one of the striking features of Dunia. It underlines the truths and themes she is developing across all the narrative strands. The colour red is set up from the start as a significant metaphor. As noted earlier, we first see Dunia’s friend Inayat, an outspoken taxi driver with a red heart as the light on the top of her taxi. Dunia is always dressed in red, the colour of desire, passion and love. Saab also notes that Dunia was dressed in red because ‘She was determined [. . .] She is in red because she has already been genitally mutilated. Red is the colour of
blood, red is the colour of desire. There are many meanings for the colour of red.’ Dunia’s female friends and family are dressed in colours that symbolise their status as females in Egyptian life. Through this use of colour, they also metaphorically represent the potential pathways through which Dunia could live out her life. Saab notes:

The popular woman was green. Green is the colour of the country. Of Islam. Life. Of hope. She is hope, she was going to be protecting her daughter. The intellectual was in blue. It was a soft colour to say she thinks. That she has been saved from mutilation? The sensual woman is black.

The colour red is also inspiration in the closing scenes of the film, where Dunia appears to be liberated: she is dancing dream-like on a plateau with the city behind her. As Anny Gaul notes, ‘The film achieves its resolution not with a relationship or on a stage, but in a performance through which Dunia finally embodies the ideas she has struggled with, unties her mother’s scarf from her wrist and sends it to the wind’ (2011: 5).

One of the most visceral uses of the colour red as metaphor can be seen in the pivotal circumcision scene, only obliquely referred to in the narrative. Early in the film we witness, from the point of view of Dunia – who is a sort of voyeur to the action – the first conversation between Inayat and her mother, about having Yasmine’s clitoris cut. Next, we witness, again from Dunia’s perspective, the grandmother preparing Yasmine for the circumcision. She is bathing the girl whilst advising her that ‘it’s just a small wound. To be clean. You’ll be a real woman. Be respectable. What do you say?’ In the final sequence of this narrative strand, during the actual circumcision, Dunia is witness to Yasmine being hunched in a reflection of the exact position Dunia assumed at the start of the film, when she declared she has not seen her body. The grandmother advises: ‘Come on, my pretty. What are you afraid of? We are about to remove a small good for nothing piece of skin so you grow up to be beautiful.’ It is ironic, ‘it seems no matter what Dunia is doing to liberate herself, the reality is that the tradition of female mutilation continues a generation later’ (McVeigh 2018: 80). Again, in stark neorealist style, we are confronted with the razor used to perform the circumcision and the red blood that is the result of the operation. As if we were Dunia, we hear Yasmine’s tortured screams as the operation is performed on the kitchen table.

Dunia has been unable to change the relentless course of tradition. She confronts Inayat and Yasmine’s grandmother with the truth: ‘You’ve done it. Made her just like you. You think you are protecting her, but you put her out [. . .] You wanted to make her a lady but, in the end, you butchered her.’ Saab does not dwell on the scene. But the final image of the film is prose text, noting the stark facts of genital mutilation of young girls in Egypt: ‘According to Amnesty International and the UNDP, 97% of Egyptian women are genitally mutilated.’
Ultimately, Saab’s inclusion of the circumcision scene was, as she notes, ‘born of her desire to expose a confronting truth in Egyptian society. This, in turn, grew out of her documentary work and her desire to make films about women in society as a reflection of elements of herself’ (McVeigh 2018: 81). She said:

I was always giving attention to women as if it were my own image reflected in a mirror [. . .] I decided it was enough to talk about war and I was at a moment of my life I should speak about gender. And, in fact, reality, as I felt in my own country that I couldn’t, even in my family, express myself as I wished. And there was a sort of mental excision and I needed a subject to write this. (Saab in McVeigh 2018: 81)

However, while the exposure of the startling facts and truth around female genital mutilation is a part of the film, it is not the focus of the film. Saab notes:

The drama is built from within the psychology of these young circumcised women [. . .] It is a disturbed sexuality. The whole movie is a projection of what we can be because it shows an image of a young woman who chose herself, and who could be free. This is what they didn’t tolerate in the movie.

For Saab, ‘This was the truth of the film – Saab’s observation in Dunia’s resolution to be herself and to confront tradition in order to free herself’ (McVeigh 2018: 82).

DANCE AS METAPHOR

Dance as a driver of narrative and dance as the creation of meaning via metaphor is set up from the very beginning of the film. In this narrative strand, we first see Dunia at a dance competition where she attempts to dance like her dead mother. She is confronted by the judges and assumes a foetal sitting position in response. This is a pose Yasmine will also assume as she tries to resist circumcision later in the movie. Dunia wraps her hands around her knees and declares that she has never seen her body, as women are not allowed mirrors in her society. Saab said that Dunia is the ‘story of a girl who buys a mirror to watch herself. She needed to see her body.’

Perhaps the most aesthetically beautiful and metaphorically constructed scenes of the film are those of the actual dance sequences where we see Dunia learning the art of Sufi dance from her dance master. He continually challenges Dunia to express her body and free herself. Saab discusses the way in which she developed the dance narrative in tandem with the ideas she wished
to explore. The intricacy of the way in which Saab created a hybrid of the classical-traditional dance mastered by Dunia, the daughter of a famous belly dancer, is based on the in-depth research by Saab the documentary filmmaker but also on her ability to create a fictional story that comments on life as it is via the metaphor of the dance. In our interview she said:

I studied dancers and then we had to construct Dunia, because dancing was kind of a ‘bad’ thing for women. I had to work on codes. I had to invent an Arab dancing style that was related to classical dance, because classical dance is accepted by the bourgeoisie [. . .] I had to invent a dance located between oriental dance, Sufi dance and classical dance, [. . .] so as to upgrade dancing. I did not want people to say that my hero, Dunia, was a belly dancing girl in a pejorative way. So, there were a lot of things to work on. You have to be from the region to understand. This is very interesting, because that is what makes the film so rich, if you know about all these details. Why is she studying Sufism? Because Sufism liberates the body. It allows you to pass through your body.

In the closing scenes of the film, the colour red, associated so closely with Dunia’s state of mind and her preoccupations, and the style of dancing she has mastered to express herself, come together. It is a dream-like sequence, where Dunia is dancing on a plateau with a panoramic view of the city of Cairo behind her. This dance is the one that expresses her sense of liberation. As noted earlier, she releases her mother’s scarf from her wrist and throws it to the
wind. The closing song reverberates with poetic hope: ‘You are Dunia. You are the world. You are Dunia. You are life.’

Saab notes of Dunia’s liberation in the film:

You see, when you get into gender problems – and for women the gender problems are deep – the way to treat them, it took me seven years, it was long and hard [. . .] but Dunia is a sort of turning point film in the Arab world. Nobody treated a subject like this and went as far [. . .] It’s the first film that talks so clearly about a young woman without treating the cliché image of the relation with the man [. . .] Here the woman is totally liberated, and this had to come from a liberated filmmaker and that is why it took me such a long time.

Although Saab explored and exposed many truths in her film via her intricate use of metaphor, the reality of the treatment of women in Egypt she was exposing was shocking. She notes, in our interview:

I wasn’t conscious of the impact I was going to have with images in trying to shape the image of a young woman who is just trying to find herself, to decide what she wants to be. She wants to become a dancer, after all it’s just natural. But this was a bad thing in the country because her doing Arab dancing is like saying she is a whore [. . .] I was shaping in my idea the image of a young free modern Arab woman. Then when the film went out and the culmination of the film was the scene of the genital mutilation [. . .] I took a huge problem, which had been there for 4,000 years, and talked about it very easily and even showed the scene of genital mutilation in a very smooth way, not in a pornographic way, nor to show shock. This made them crazy and the whole society was against me. I received many death threats when I was shooting and when the film went out, because the image was strong. I think they didn’t realise that it was strong because I didn’t tackle the problem in a direct way, it was like climax and it’s as though I had delivered a family secret hidden for so many years.

‘TALKING ABOUT SOMETHING MUCH LARGER’

In Saab’s discussion of the reception of Dunia, she demonstrated her ability to create both the poetic and the philosophical through a masterful ability to use metaphor. Van de Peer’s observation of Saab’s documentary work, of its ‘non-linear structure, poetic voice and the trust she places in her audience when it comes to understanding the experimental representation’ (Van de Peer 2017: 59), can also be applied to her fiction work in Dunia.
In the field of screenwriting, one of the most complex elements in developing a script for a poetic visual story is the ability to create metaphor to deploy and inform the language of cinema – narrative and image via cinematography, *mise-en-scène*, editing and sound – with a masterful hand. *Dunia* and Saab’s opus stand testament to her work as one of cinema’s great unsung poets. Through the subtle and clever writing, and specifically, as I have shown here, the complex interweaving of several metaphors in this film, Saab does not only talk about the details of poetry, relationships, dance and colour, but about ‘something much larger’: the universal metaphysical and physical experiences of growing up and finding freedom as a woman in the Arab world.

I conclude with a comment from Jocelyne, as she expressed herself in our interview. She shows how her fictional work is grounded in the reality of what she proposes to explore via metaphor:

> For me, coming from documentary, you must observe reality very well, because from this reality you will invent new things. This is cinema – to invent a new language. Everyone is an entity and has to express themselves in the most authentic way and not be afraid of stories you have to tell.

In her brave and relentless metaphorical and literal work in *Dunia*, Saab has managed to expose the concrete and contemporary realities of life for women in the Arab world that for many may still go unobserved. In her life and her art, she was not afraid to face and uncover age-old truths.

**NOTE**

1. All original quotes in this chapter come from an interview I conducted with the filmmaker in Paris, 4 September 2016. The aim of the interview was to discuss her fiction film *Dunia* for the Griffith Film School course, Asia Pacific Film Online developed and taught by Jocelyne’s good friend and colleague, Dr Anne Demy-Geroe, who introduced me to Jocelyne. Thank you, Anne.

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