Writing the Body, Translating Resistance:

A Reflective Inquiry into AJSADOUNA-أجسادنا's Feminist Expression



أجسادنا AJSADOUNA

Rita Barotta (2026)
AJSADOUNA - أجسادنا's Internal Research

تقاطع INTERSECTION

أتعرف يا غسان
ما مصير

الحكايات

التي لا نكتبها؟
إنها تصبح ملكاً لأعدائنا.

إبراهيم نصرالله، أعراس آمنة

Translation: “Do you know what happens to the stories we don’t write down? I will tell you what happens to them: they become enemy property”
Ibrahim Nasrallah - Gaza Weddings

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Designer's note

About the cover

The cover of this research features an illustration of The Venus of Hohle Fels-also known as the 'immodest Venus'- the oldest depiction of a Human being ever found.

The Immodest Venus, symbol of sexuality and reproduction, rejects usual beauty standards by bringing her body forward in a raw and unapologetic feminine way.

Theories differ on the true interpretation of the Venus of Hohle Fels. These opinions vary between the Male gaze and Female gaze.

Some interpret this figurine as a purely pornographic object, a body devoid of a face because her identity wasn't the focus.

Other attributed the lack of a head and limbs to the statue being a self portrait sculpted by a woman, recording her body as she saw it. The breasts, stomach and vulva are in this case the result of a woman's eye view.

Who really controls the narrative? Should the male gaze be given the same weight in a discussion about a female body?

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I. Introduction: Writing the Body, Translating Resistance

In many contexts, the body is usually spoken about, and this, clinically, politically, and symbolically. And yet, the body is rarely "spoken from". When bodily expression comes from marginalised identities and experiences, it remains constrained by cultural taboos, institutional language, and internalized silence. *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا was born in response to this silence. Positioned within the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), the project created space for feminist, queer, and creative forms of storytelling to emerge across text, image, language, and affect.

Over the course of four issues, *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا invited participants to write, visualize, and speak from their own embodied realities. Through poetry, essays, short narratives, hybrid texts, and digital collages and artwork, participants engaged with themes that are often difficult to articulate: shame, desire, pain, queerness, gendered vulnerability, and moments of bodily joy. Each piece, in its own way, challenged the limits of normative SRHR discourse and offered new modes of articulating the unspeakable.

This internal research is a collective and critical reflection on what *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا made possible, not only in terms of content, but also in terms of process. How was expression shaped by the spaces we created, digital and physical, verbal and visual? What forms of writing and image-making became available to participants? What remained unsayable, and why? How did the team navigate discomfort, difference, and translation, both linguistic and conceptual?

Our approach is deliberately reflexive. We do not stand outside the project as neutral observers; we write from within. This inquiry draws on a mix of textual, visual, and affective materials: selected creative submissions, participant reflections, digital collage work, and internal insights from the editorial team. It engages a feminist and queer framework, attending to the politics of expression, the ethics of curation, and the material realities of SRHR storytelling in our region.

As originally framed in the project's research design, this inquiry responds to a series of direct questions: Are our normative tools of expression sufficient to talk about our bodies? Is the digital world more liberating than the physical when it comes to expressing bodily experience? What were the most powerful or recurring themes related to the body across the magazine's issues? And how did the audience engage with the creative outcomes? These questions serve as an anchor, guiding the multi-layered analysis that follows.

To hold the complexity of this work, the research is divided into several sections. It begins with a detailed reflection on our methodological choices and positionality, followed by a mapping of the theoretical frameworks that informed our lens, ranging from feminist and queer theory to visual culture and translation studies. We then move into the thematic findings, analyzing both textual and visual contributions under emergent themes. These are followed by sections that explore the editorial team's internal reflections, the challenges of translating bodily experience across mediums and languages, and the key insights gathered from participants' feedback. The report concludes with reflections and recommendations for future SRHR-centred creative practice.

II. Methodology and Positionality

This research did not follow a single methodological framework. Instead, it is informed by a constellation of feminist thinkers who reshaped how we understand knowledge, power, and participation, not as neutral categories, but as embodied, situated, and affectively emotional. The research emerged through practice, but it echoes with a feminist refusal position: a refusal to separate knowing from feeling, expression from ethics, and the personal from the political. The paradigm is built around the following theorists, with argumentation around why we chose them within this methodology.

- **Patricia Hill Collins**[1] argued that knowledge is never universal. It is "situated in particular social locations" and shaped by lived experience (p. 257). In *Black Feminist Thought* (2000), she insists that marginalized communities produce their own epistemologies, and that these should not be forced into dominant academic moulds. Her belief reinforces our refusal to extract participants' stories for analysis alone. Instead, we hold them as co-authored truths, partial, relational, and grounded in their emotional weight.
- **Donna Haraway** (1988)[2] similarly challenges the idea of an objective researcher. In her call for *situated knowledges*, she writes: "Feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges" (p. 581). Our process of reflection, coming from inside *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا, takes seriously this invitation to know not from above, but from within, through proximity, contradiction, and involvement. Haraway's refusal of the "god trick"[3] (the view from

[1] Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

[2] Haraway, D. J. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies, 14*(3), 575–599

[3] Haraway's critique of the so-called "god trick, or the pretension of observing from a neutral, universal point, challenges the myth of uninvolved, objective knowledge. She writes that this vision, which she calls "a conquering gaze from nowhere," claims a false neutrality while actually reflecting the specific standpoint of the powerful, typically male, white, Western, which renders other perspectives invisible and dismissible. In contrast, she advocates for situated knowledges, which are claims grounded in embodied, locatable, and accountable perspectives, where knowledge is partial but more ethically and epistemically robust. As she puts it:
"Feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1988, p. 581).
She urges us to ask not "What can see everything from nowhere?", but instead, "With whose eyes, and from which vantage point do we see, and how are we accountable for what we see?

nowhere) legitimises our own refusal to distance ourselves from the aesthetic, emotional, and curatorial tensions we inhabited.

- **bell hooks**[4] offers the possibility of using care as a method. “Our work cannot be sustained if we do not collectively nurture our souls and our spirits” (hooks, 1994, p. 214). For us, this meant understanding facilitation not as control, but as accompaniment; editing not as correction, but as dialogue. Discomfort was never a methodological flaw, but rather a part of the ethical territory. hooks reminds us that care and discomfort are not opposites, but necessary companions in any liberating process.

This research also follows a participatory feminist ethos that resists the binary of researcher and subject. Andrea Cornwall (2002)[5] argues that feminist participatory research is not simply about including marginalized voices, but about redistributing authorship, interpretation, and meaning-making. From workshop to publication, *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا treated participants not as data producers but as co-creators of knowledge and expression. Feedback loops, editorial conversations, and shared decision-making were not logistical steps but crucial parts of the method.

In this sense, participation also meant recognizing that the team members of Intersection, who were also participants in both the creative writing workshop and the digital art workshop, are at the same time decision-makers. They were themselves recognised as part of the research process.

My own role, shifting between trainer and researcher, also belongs to this continuum. Writing, and producing knowledge were not separate from the creative process; they were its extension. This fluidity of roles reflects a feminist refusal of hierarchy, making the entire cycle of knowledge production, from expression to analysis, a shared act of authorship. Michelle Fine[6] believes that

[4] hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom.* Routledge.

[5] Cornwall, A. (2002). *Making spaces, changing places: Situating participation in development.* Institute of Development Studies

[6] Fine, M. (1994). Working the hyphens: Reinventing self and other in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 70–82). Sage

participatory feminist research requires researchers to "work the hyphen" and to acknowledge and inhabit the shifting space between researcher and researched (Fine, 1994, p. 72).

This orientation also opened us to non-linear, affective, and creative methods. The influence of Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner's[7] work on autoethnography is used to analyze reflective writing, emotional feedback, and visual works not as side notes, but as central texts. "Good autoethnographic writing," they write, "should make the reader feel... care... reflect... and sometimes cry" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744). This ethos shaped our approach to the participant letters, the fragmented collages, and our own researcher reflections.

Finally, we find kinship in feminist zine and DIY traditions, particularly in what Lora Mathis coined as "radical softness as a weapon." This framing helped us consider vulnerability not as a methodological gap, but as an intentional stance. The choice to keep some texts fragmented, some statements unresolved, or some feelings contradictory was not a sign of incoherence but of loyalty to what is real.

In our use of a feminist methodology of multiplicity, we tried to draw a paradigm that values sensation, contradiction, and co-creation over detachment and mastery. It is a methodology that listens with the body, writes with the wound, and builds with what's at hand.

II.1 Data Sources

The materials analyzed in this research span five interlinked domains:

- **Creative Submissions**

  A curated selection of 14 texts (Arabic and English) from across *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا's four issues, chosen for their thematic richness and range of voice. These include poetry, personal essays, testimonies, and hybrid narratives.

[7] Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 733–768). Sage.

- **Digital Collages and Artworks**

  A set of 4 collages and digital artworks produced during the digital art workshops. These visual pieces were treated not as illustrations but as primary texts, where the expressions of bodily experience happen through fragmentation and metaphor.

- **Participants Feedback**

  Reflections shared by participants following their engagement in the workshops and/or publication process. This includes written testimonials, responses to open-ended survey questions, and informal notes. These were coded thematically with attention to tone, tension, and affect.

- **Internal Team Reflections**

  Structured prompts were shared with three core team members to explore editorial tensions, facilitation dynamics, translation decisions, and moments of discomfort or breakthrough.

II.2 Tools of Analysis

Each data type was approached with its own logic:

- **Texts** were analyzed using thematic and narrative inquiry, tracing emotional arcs, silences, and embodied language.
- **Collages and artworks** were examined using a simplified visual coding grid tailored to the four selected pieces. The analysis focused on imagery, composition, textual inserts, color and texture, and affective charge. These visual works were read as non-verbal modes of expression, revealing what may be unspeakable through normative linguistic forms.
- **Feedback and reflections** were treated not as evaluation, but as expressions in their own right, bearing traces of vulnerability, resistance, and care.

The project resisted rigid coding schemes. Instead, it remained open to fragmentation, contradiction, and excess, qualities that are often seen as methodologically "messy" but are central to feminist knowledge production.

II.3 Researcher Positionality

As the lead researcher, I held multiple roles throughout this process: creative writing facilitator and, now, internal analyst. These roles cannot and should not be untangled. This research was conducted not from a neutral standpoint, but from within the web of relationships, emotions, and power dynamics that shaped *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا.

My positionality is marked by linguistic fluidity (between Arabic, English, and French), feminist commitment, and an ongoing inquiry into what it means to write the body in contexts where that body is regulated, erased, or politicized. I am aware that my presence shaped the workshop dynamics. This research is also a space for me to reflect on that complicity and care.

II.4 Ethics & Reflexivity

Rather than applying formal consent forms, this project worked through mutual trust, open cycles of exchange and adjustment, and editorial transparency. Participants were involved in how their pieces were edited and shared; no visual or written material is included in this analysis without prior contribution and acknowledgement.

Reflexivity, for us, meant staying with the discomfort. It meant holding space for pieces that unsettled us, for contradictions within the same paragraph, and for silences that felt heavier than words. It also meant making peace with the fact that not everything could—or should—be translated into research language.

III. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical grounding of this research draws from feminist, queer, and visual theory, used not as fixed lenses but as co-conspirators in the search for meaning. These frameworks were not imposed, but rather present throughout the process, during writing workshops, editorial discussions, and the quiet moments of collage-making. What follows is not a comprehensive literature review, but rather a constellation of thinkers and concepts that have shaped our approach to expression, discomfort, translation, and voice.

III.1.a Feminist and Queer Theories of Expression

Judith Butler's[8] work on bodily norms and performativity reinforces much of this inquiry. In *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا, participants frequently wrote from or against socially legible scripts: the mother, the menstruating girl, the queer child, the violated body. These texts do not just reflect identity but they perform resistance. As Butler reminds us, bodies are never merely given; they are enacted through repetition and rupture. In our corpus, many texts "fail" to conform to narrative coherence and in that failure lies their political charge.

Sara Ahmed[9] worked on affect and orientation, and her work helped us trace emotional texture. Shame, for instance, is not just a feeling: it is a social positioning. Several contributions show how certain bodily experiences "stick" to shame, while others are lifted into pride or resistance. Ahmed's[10] insistence on discomfort as a method guided our reading of both text and image, and also shaped the ethical posture of this research: to stay with the awkward, the fragmented, the painful.

With Audre Lorde[11], we turned to the erotic, not in its sexualized form, but in its expansive potential as knowledge and survival. For many participants, writing was not only a form of

[8] *1.* Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* Routledge.
[9] Ahmed, S. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion.* Routledge.
[10] Ahmed, S. (2017*). Living a Feminist Life.* Duke University Press.
[11] Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.* Crossing Press

expression but a reclaiming of sensation, even when that sensation was pain. In this sense, the erotic, exactly like silence, is not the opposite of expression, but its precondition.

In our guiding choice to use Hélène Cixous[12], we approached the body as a site of writing itself. The concept of *écriture féminine* (the feminine writing), which emerges from the body, echoes in the stylistic ruptures of several submissions. The non-linearity, the linguistic hybridity, the movement between voice and image, all gesture toward a refusal to write the body "correctly."

III.1.b Power, Legitimacy, and the Limits of Speech

From Pierre Bourdieu[13], we borrowed a critical understanding of symbolic power and legitimacy, particularly as they relate to language and expression. In the context of SRHR, certain ways of speaking about the body are seen as acceptable (medical, clinical, advocacy-driven), while others are dismissed as vulgar, naïve, or excessive. *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا resisted this symbolic order by privileging affect over expertise, rupture over readability.

His concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 52), also helped us understand how internalized limits shape what participants feel permitted to say. Some wrote explicitly about censorship, others gestured toward it through metaphor or omission. The *doxa*[14], or the taken-for-granted beliefs that structure perception and limit expression, often goes unspoken until it is disrupted (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 94). The doxa was constantly being unsettled in the pages of the magazine. *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا became a space of heterodoxy[15]: not a perfect alternative, but a site of tension where competing norms clashed, leaked, and transformed.

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[12] Cixous, H. (1976). *The Laugh of the Medusa. Signs*, 1(4), 875–893

[13] Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power.* Harvard University Press

[14] In Bourdieu's theory, *doxa* refers to the realm of unquestioned, self-evident beliefs, or what is considered "normal," "natural," or beyond debate within a particular field or social space. These beliefs do not need to be stated because they are deeply internalized. In *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا, many contributions implicitly challenged the *doxa* around bodily speech, especially taboos related to menstruation, sexuality, or queer desire, by making visible what is typically kept silent.

[15] Heterodoxy happens when the "obvious truths" are questioned or contested. A heterodox position does not align with the dominant worldview; it challenges the doxa, either explicitly or implicitly.

III.1.c Translation and Epistemic Friction

Translation, in this project, was more than a linguistic task. It was a site of epistemic friction[16] (Spivak, 1993; de Sousa Santos, 2014)[17], where meaning was not only carried across, but reconfigured, lost, or made strange.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's[18] work reminds us that translation is always political: to translate is to make choices, to risk betrayal, to confront the limits of representation. In *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا, translation operated across several registers: Arabic to English, body to word, image to narrative, silence to utterance. In some cases, the refusal to translate became a form of resistance.
Emily Apter's[18] notion of "untranslatables" guided our reading of certain textual gestures and collages, where what is felt cannot be rendered in another code. Rather than forcing clarity, the project often embraced ambiguity, echo, and slippage.

III.1.d Visual Theory and Collage as Feminist Practice

Collage, as both a form and a method, allowed participants to express what could not be said. Here we drew from feminist visual theorists who treat collage as a subversive, embodied, and fragmented art form resistant to totalization.

Roland Barthes[19] helped us treat images as texts, layered with cultural signs, absence, and affect. In reading the digital collages, we asked: what is being cut? What is being exposed? What is centered or erased?

Laura Mulvey's[20] early work on the gaze, though originally rooted in cinema, reminded us to consider who is being looked at in these visual pieces and who is doing the looking. Some collages deliberately disrupted the gaze; others reclaimed it.

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[16] In *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا, translation and expression did not flow seamlessly; they often encountered epistemic friction, where body, language, and meaning rubbed against dominant norms and resisted coherence.
[17] de Sousa Santos, B. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. Routledge.
[18] Spivak, G. C. (1993). *Outside in the Teaching Machine.* Routledge.
[18] Apter, E. (2013). *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability.* Verso.
[19] Barthes, R. (1977*). Image—Music—Text.* Fontana Press.
[20] Mulvey, L. (1975). *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. Screen*, 16(3), 6–18.

Collage here was not decorative but political, a feminist refusal of narrative closure and a way to hold multiplicity without resolving it.

III.2 In Lieu of a Conclusion: Theory as Practice

These theoretical tools did not sit on the margins of the research, but they shaped every stage of it. They helped us stay with difficulty, resist extraction, and honor expression in all its messy, unfinished, and luminous forms.

If the framework appears vast, it is because the material demanded it. The act of writing the body, especially in contexts of gendered violence, linguistic plurality, and institutional silence, cannot be approached through a single lens. *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا held too many textures for that: shame and pleasure, resistance and doubt, rupture and retreat. No single theorist could carry the full weight of these contradictions. Each participant text, each collage, each moment of silence or fragmentation invited us to think alongside different traditions.

We are aware that the theoretical scope of this research stretches across feminist, queer, decolonial, and visual frameworks. But to simplify it would be to flatten the very complexities we are trying to hold. This isn't academic inflation but an ethical decision. To insist on multiplicity is to remain honest to the nature of the archive, and to the voices that inhabit it. The refusal to simplify is, in itself, a feminist act. As Audre Lorde[21] reminds us, reducing experience to what is palatable or coherent often serves power; multiplicity is not excess, it is survival (Lorde, 1984).

Feminist theory has long resisted universality, insisting instead on situated knowledges, truths that emerge from particular bodies, positions, and power relations (Haraway, 1988)[22]. It teaches us to sit with contradiction, to let multiple truths coexist. The work of *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا emerged from a similar ethic: one that honors uncertainty, that privileges affect, and that allows for the co-presence of pain and beauty.

[21] Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.* Crossing Press

[22] Haraway, D. J. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*. Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575–599

Theory here is not a toolbox or a framework but an accompaniment. These thinkers walked with us, not to explain or domesticate, but to help us stay with what felt hard to name, emotionally charged, or unspeakable. Theory, in this research, becomes a practice of care, a politics of reading, and a commitment to listening differently.

IV. Thematic Findings: Text, Artwork and Collage Analysis

The creative productions of *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا analysed in this section, covering fourteen texts (Annexe 3), four collages and artworks, constitute an affective archive of how bodies are imagined, narrated, and contested. Our task was not to extract transparent meanings, but rather to read these works as situated articulations of experience, shaped by the conditions of their production. Following our feminist methodology, we approach the material as co-created knowledge rather than data, attending to how participants expressed, withheld, and transformed their embodied realities.

We chose to work with fourteen texts, preserving each in its original language, English or Arabic. This decision was not only practical but political. Translation, as Spivak[23] (1993) argues, can enact epistemic violence by domesticating difference. As for Apter [24](2013), the "untranslatable" is itself a productive space of friction. By leaving each text in its original form, we sought to honour its rhythm, affective register, and linguistic intimacy, while recognizing that bilinguality is itself part of the project's landscape. Anzaldúa's[25] claim that *"I am my language"* (1987, p. 81) guided this choice: to translate everything into one tongue would have risked erasing the multiplicity of voices.

Collages and artworks were analyzed using a structured grid attentive to both form and affect. This tool allowed us to move beyond impressionistic description and attend to how meaning was produced through visual strategies:

Element	Example Prompts
Imagery	What body parts are visible/invisible? Are they cut, layered, distorted?
Symbols	Are there objects (e.g., flowers, blood, locks, mirrors)? What might they represent?
Textual Inserts	Are there words in the collage or artwork? Which language? Are they whole or fragmented?

[23] Spivak, G. C. (1993). *Outside in the Teaching Machine.* Routledge. Specifically, chapter: *The Politics of Translation*, esp. pp. 179–200. And p. 179: On translation as epistemic violence, and the danger of domesticating what is foreign.

[24] Apter, E. (2013). *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability.* Verso. Introduction, pp. 6–10: "Untranslatables" as productive sites of friction rather than failures.

[25] Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza.* Aunt Lute Books. *"Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language." (*p. 81).

Element	Example Prompts
Color & Texture	Do colors evoke certain emotions (warmth, rage, shame, softness)?
Composition	Are things ordered, chaotic, censored, framed, overlapping?
Affective Impact	What does the collage or artwork feel like? Erotic, painful, celebratory, ambivalent?

Collage, artwork and text are read together as complementary languages of expression. Where writing tended towards consistency, collage embraced fragmentation; where images went to evoke unspeakable sensations, words provided a more tangible anchoring. What guided our query here is Cixous's[26] call for *écriture feminine*, where writing the body takes place through forms that exceed grammar (1976), and extend it to the visual, where cut-outs and layers enact embodied knowledge.

The analysis of the whole corpus is thematic. Rather than beginning with fixed categories, we allow the texts, collages and artwork to guide us toward recurrent affects and gestures, what Ahmed[27] (2004) calls the "stickiness" of emotions, and how they attach to bodies, words, and images. These themes do not claim universality, but emerge from fragments, contradictions, and resonances across the corpus.

What follows, then, is a thematic synthesis of the material. These are not rigid categories but affective constellations, where words and images meet, collide, or resist each other. To read *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا in this way is to honor its multiplicity and to take seriously what is voiced and what is left unsaid, and the linear prose and the fragmented collage as part of a feminist archive of bodies.

[26] Cixous, H. (1976). *The Laugh of the Medusa. Signs, 1*(4), 875–893.
[27] Ahmed, S. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion.* Routledge

IV.1a Textual Theme 1: Shame

Shame emerges as one of the most pervasive themes across the texts. It appears not only as an affective state but also as a disciplinary mechanism[28] (Foucault, 1977), shaping how participants relate to their bodies, desires, and voices. The language of prohibition is immediate and forceful. As one text begins: *"Three minutes. That's all it took to strip me of myself… I felt filthy, soiled, and unworthy".*

This disciplining voice is not abstract, but rather an embodiment of shame that inhabits posture, gesture, and movement. As one participant writes, "أمشي صغيرة… كي لا يلتفت أحد" ("I walk small… so that no one turns to look"). The shrinking of the body becomes a strategy of survival, an attempt to minimize exposure to the gaze of others. In this sense, shame functions as what Teresa de Lauretis[29] calls a technology of gender, a regulatory practice that inscribes norms onto the body itself.

Yet, shame is rarely singular. It is almost always entangled with desire. Several texts highlight moments of longing or attraction, only to depict their immediate interruption. Desire is palpable, but it collides with the paralyzing force of shame, producing uncertainty rather than erasure. This dynamic echoes Judith Butler's[30] reflections on how bodies are both constrained by normative regimes and capable of subverting them through gestures that exceed control.

At the same time, shame is not only silencing. As Sara Ahmed[31] argues, shame turns the subject back toward itself, producing both withdrawal and the possibility of reorientation. Several texts illustrate this transformation. One participant noted: "كتبتُ ما لم أقدر أن أقول" ("I wrote what I could not say"). In this act, shame becomes a catalyst for expression: what cannot be spoken is nonetheless inscribed through writing. The very texts produced in this project are evidence of this paradox. When shame is narrated, it generates new forms of voice and testimony. One participant wrote: "*Some whisper it's wrong, a sin to begin*".

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[28] Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books

[29] de Lauretis, T. (1987). *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

[30] Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge.

[31] Ahmed, S. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Pres

Thus, shame in these writings is verbal, embodied, inherited, and hesitant. It disciplines, yet it also produces; it silences, yet it can catalyze writing. Its persistence across the narratives underscores how deeply embedded shame is in the lived realities of participants, but also the potential it has to be transformed into an act of resistance through writing.

IV.1b Theme 2: Silence and Voice

If shame is one of the most visible disciplining forces, its companion is often silence. Across the texts, participants describe being unable to speak, their voices interrupted or withdrawn. One notes: *"I couldn't speak. The words stayed stuck in my throat."* Another reflects in Arabic: "الصمت أصدق من الكلام أحياناً" ("Silence is sometimes truer than speech").

Much of the silence described is externally imposed, reflecting what Adrienne Rich (1979) called the *politics of silence*[3233]. Women, queer subjects, and marginalized bodies are not simply "quiet" but are rendered voiceless by structures that decide what is allowed to be said. In one text, one participant explains: *"The room was too heavy for my voice."* The environment itself becomes oppressive, thick with prohibition.

As one participant puts it: "عَنْ كُلِّ مَرَّةٍ كَتَمْتُ صَوْتَكَ وَ أَنَا أَعْرِفُ أَنَّكَ كُنْتَ عَلَى حَقٍّ"

("For every time I hushed your voice while knowing you were in the right.")

Michel Foucault's[34] notion of discourse helps us see how silence is not the absence of speech but a regulated boundary. What cannot be said is as crucial to social control as what is allowed. These participants' silences reveal the normative limits of speech, particularly around gender and sexuality. One participant chose to keep silent, instead of yelling:

"I should have yelled

at the doctor

at the room

at the clock, still ticking –

[32] Rich, A. (1979). *When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision*. In *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose,*
[33] *–1978* (pp. 33–49). New York: W. W. Norton
[34] Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. New York: Pantheon Books.
[35] Sedgwick, E. K. (1990). *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

like it didn't just witness my world collapse;

but I just sat there"

Not all silences are forced. Some are chosen as protective strategies. One participant admits: *"I swallowed my words, not because I was weak, but because I wanted to survive the night".* This recalls Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1990)[35] analysis of the "closet": Silence may reflect oppression, but it also functions tactically as a refusal to expose oneself to danger.

In this sense, silence is not always an absence of agency. It may carry what José Esteban Muñoz (1999) calls *disidentification*: a minoritarian strategy that negotiates survival within oppressive systems. To remain silent can be a form of saying "no," an act of refusal rather than compliance.

Much of the silence described is externally imposed. One text uses haunting imagery to describe silencing: *"ذئبٌ آخر... أخاط فمي باللهيب"* ("Another wolf sewed my mouth shut with fire"). Another participant writes of being muted by violation: *"I just sat there… unable to make a sound. The room was too heavy for my voice"*.

Many participants insist that when the spoken voice was denied, writing became the alternative outlet. *"كتبتُ صمتي"* ("I wrote my silence"), one explains. Another echoes: *"My pen spoke when my mouth couldn't".*

bell hooks (1989)[35] claims that "talking back" does not always mean raising one's voice; it can mean crafting new languages of expression. Here, the act of writing becomes what Judith Butler (1997)[36] might describe as a *performative counter-act*, transforming imposed muteness into a narrative of resistance.

Perhaps most powerfully, silence in these texts is never simply a void. One participant captures this with: *"The silence between us was louder than any scream."* This resonates with feminist thinkers like Gayatri Spivak (1988)[37], who cautions against imagining the subaltern as a blank space waiting to be given voice. Silence can be full of meaning, refusal, affect, and memory. It resists reduction to absence. Silence never means defeat.

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[35] hooks, b. (1989). *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston: South End Press

[36] Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge

[37] Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271–313). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

In these writings, silence emerges as both imposed and chosen, violent and protective, constraining and generative**.** By situating their silences in writing, participants complicate any simple narrative of "voicelessness". They reveal silence as a layered, ambivalent practice sometimes enforced by power, sometimes wielded as resistance, yet full of resonance.

IV.1c Theme 3: Desire and the Body

Desire appears insistently across the texts, often in tension with shame and silence. It flows through metaphors of rivers, salt, and skin, presenting the body as a site of both regulation and longing. One participant writes: *"Your textured skin… You are an entity, you are art… I wanna worship you till the end of time".* Another confesses in Arabic: "جسدي يرتجف من الشوق ولا أقدر أن أقول شيئاً" ("My body trembles with longing and I cannot say a word").

Desire here is instinctual, embodied, and often unspeakable. One participant wrote: "The first time I wanted, I almost ran".

The body, as Judith Butler (1993)[38] argues, is never simply natural. It is a surface where power is inscribed. In these texts, the body is policed and surveilled and is instructed to cover, to behave, and to remain silent. One participant notes: *"My hands betrayed me."* The sense of betrayal signals the gap between bodily impulses and normative control, what Butler might call the instability of performativity.

Desire, then, is not outside regulation but produced in its very heart. Michel Foucault's[40] analysis of sexuality as a discourse applies here: prohibition does not erase desire but multiplies it, making it more visible and more charged. On this, he claims: "far from constituting a limit, [prohibition and censorship] are rather the elements that make possible the production of discourses on sex" (Foucault, 1978, p. 33). On regulation, one participant wrote: "The first time I allowed myself to want, it felt wrong".

Even under regulation, desire destabilises normative expectations. Several texts hint at same-sex attraction, often indirectly: through metaphors, sensory detail, or gestures. For example: *"I*

[38] Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge [40] Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. New York: Pantheon Books
[41] Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

wanted to touch her hair, but my hand froze. The room became heavy with something unnamed." The desire is palpable, but it resists the heterosexual matrix, echoing Butler's[41] critique of compulsory heterosexuality.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler draws on Adrienne Rich's[39] earlier notion of "compulsory heterosexuality" to argue that heterosexuality is not natural, but a regulatory ideal that structures what kinds of desire are thinkable, spoken of, and livable.

These texts do not present desire as an open declaration of queer identity, but as a set of gestures, silences, and fragments that exceed heteronormativity. This aligns with Butler's insight that gender and sexuality are never fully stable performances: They can pause, diverge, and expose cracks in the normative order. Desire here functions precisely through such cracks: it appears briefly, in the trembling hand or the heavy silence, but in doing so, it unsettles the dominance of the heterosexual frame.

This resonates with José Esteban Muñoz's[40] (2009) idea of *queer futurity*: desire gestures toward a world not yet realized, where bodies can be with one another outside the confines of shame and prohibition. The texts create fleeting windows into this possibility.

Audre Lorde[44] (1984) reframed the erotic as a source of power, not merely sexual but deeply creative. In some writings, desire often overlaps with creativity itself. One participant explains: *"I wrote with my skin when I couldn't speak with my mouth."* Here, the erotic is not only about intimacy with others but about reclaiming one's body as a medium of expression.

The body appears fragmented ("my hands," "her hair," "my mouth"), but also sometimes whole when desire is acknowledged. This fragmentation reflects how desire under oppression is experienced in parts and glimpses.

Another participant reclaims sovereignty by declaring the body a territory of freedom*: "*جسدي

[39] Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 5*(4), 631–660

[40] Muñoz, J. E. (2009). *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press

[44] Lorde, A. (1984). *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*. In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (pp. 53–59). Freedom, CA: Crossing Pres

لحن يتراقص بحرية… مملكة هو، حدودها أنا، قوانينها أنا، حريتها أنا". And another declared: *"A woman, a man, it's my choice, My Flesh, my voice, I will always rejoice!"*

In these narratives, desire is never simple**.** It is at once regulated and subversive, fragmented and whole, silenced and overflowing. The body is both a site of control and of reclamation, producing what Butler calls the paradox of performativity: where norms constrain, they also open the space for resistance. These texts embody that paradox, inscribing desire as both burden and possibility, silence and creation.

IV.1d Theme 4: Memory and Violence

Violence is one of the most visceral threads in the corpus, surfacing as assault, medical intrusion, and cultural policing. Memory, in turn, is not a passive recall but an embodied archive, imprinted into the skin, the breath, and the silence.

Several texts recount violence as a permanent rupture. One participant reflects: *"I came here fleeing death, but death is a patient hunter"*. Another wrote:

"في شي كمان لازم قوله بعد

إنو خفت كتير بس أخدني بالقوة عالتخت"

(There's something else I need to say: I was very scared, when he forced me onto the bed). This reflects what Cathy Caruth[41] (1996) terms traumatic memory: an experience that is not fully grasped when it occurs but returns repeatedly, inscribed into the subject's sense of self. It also echoes Michel Foucault's (1977) notion of discipline over bodies: violence becomes a technology that seeks to regulate and control, leaving marks that structure future behaviour. Another participant stages this violence through metaphor, recounting how patriarchal domination sought to claim his very being:

"خلتم جسدي ملكيّةً عامّة، استبحتموه… أردتم أن ترعبوا جوفي"

Here, violence is both intimate and systemic, a reminder of what Judith Butler (1993) calls the regulatory ideal: norms and power systems are enacted through harm to the body, making the personal inseparable from the political.

[41] Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Violence is also detoured through the allegory of a doll subjected to predators, as one participant drew it: "أنا دميةٌ ألبسُ ورديًا، تشتهي الذئاب لحمي، مُعلقّةٌ في متجر" (I am a doll in a pink dress, my flesh desired by wolves, hung on display in a shop).

The imagery of the pink dress, wolves, and public display highlights the spectacular nature of violence. It is not hidden but staged, consumed by the gaze of others.

This aligns with Laura Mulvey's (1975)[42] concept of the male gaze, where women's bodies are placed on display as objects of desire and control. The text shows how violence becomes theatrical, turning memory into a tableau of dehumanization. At the same time, the doll's silence "أخاط فمي باللهيب" ("he sewed my mouth shut with fire"), demonstrates Gayatri Spivak's[43](1988) claim that the subaltern is forced into silence, reduced to spectacle rather than subject. Another participant's, on violence disguised as fear wrote: "سلبتم منّي حق الاختيار ،أردتم أن ترعبوا جوفي" (You sought to scare my very core; you robbed me of the right to choose).

And another to write: "*I cannot outrun what I carry*".

Here, memory is marked not by overt physical harm but by structural violence (Farmer, 2004[44]), where institutional processes produce suffering.

Even as violence inscribes itself into bodies, memory is not purely a site of victimization. Some participants turn to memory as a place of reclamation. In one text, the participant refuses to forget a traumatic experience but reframes it as a basis for solidarity with the self: "ومن هلأ ورايح، القرار عندي" ("From now on, the decision is mine")

Similarly, memory becomes a political act of refusal: "جسدي رحب بفضائه... مملكة هو، حدودها أنا، قوانينها أنا" (My body welcomed its own expanse… It is a kingdom; I am its borders, I am its laws). Here, memory aligns with Audre Lorde's (1984)[45] reframing of the erotic as power: reclaiming one's

[42] Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen, 16*(3), 6–18.

[43] Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271–313). Urbana: University of Illinois Press

[44] Farmer, P. (2004). *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[45] Lorde, A. (1984). *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*. In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (pp. 53–59). Freedom, CA: Crossing Press.

body, desires, and choices becomes an act of defiance. José Esteban Muñoz [46](1999) would call this a disidentificatory practice, using memory not to assimilate into dominant narratives, but to build an alternative self, a resistant archive.

Memory and violence appear inseparable in these narratives**.** Violence imprints itself onto bodies and language, but memory is not a passive reproduction but an act of agency. Through testimony, participants transform silence into counter-speech, embodying Butler's idea of the "performative counter-act"[47] that states that narrating trauma does not merely describe harm, it reconstitutes the subject against it.

Memory here is both a scar and a weapon: it carries pain but also opens the possibility of resistance, carving space for agency in the very sites where violence sought to annihilate it.

IV.1.e Theme 5: Resilience and Resistance

Even in the presence of shame, silence, desire, and violence, the texts repeatedly circle back to moments of resilience. Participants claim their bodies, their voices, and their futures in defiance of regulation. Resistance here is not always spectacular, but it often takes the form of everyday affirmation, indirect refusals, or acts of self-love. Like how one participant ended her text: "ومن هلأ ورايح، القرار عندي" (Form now on, the decision is mine).

Resilience, as it emerges in these texts, is not the neoliberal fantasy of "bouncing back", unchanged after harm. Instead, it aligns with feminist and queer understandings of survival as a political and embodied practice. That's how we understand it, and how we backed our understanding with sufficient theoretical frames:

Judith Butler (1997[48]**)** saw that resilience can take the form of a performative counter-act, speech, writing, or gesture that resignifies harm and reconstitutes the subject. Resilience here is not passive endurance but active re-making. bell hooks (1989)[49] frames resilience as the capacity to

[46] Muñoz, J. E. (1999). *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

[47] Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge.

[48] Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge

[49] hooks, b. (1989). *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston: South End Press.

"talk back," to craft new languages of resistance when silence is imposed. For our participants, resilience is expressed in writing with the body, with memory, with silence itself. When it comes to Audre Lorde (1984)[50], she pushes resilience beyond survival into erotic power: the reclaiming of pleasure, creativity, and desire as acts of resistance. To insist on joy and intimacy after violence is itself resilience. Finally, José Esteban Muñoz (1999, 2009)[51] extends resilience into collective futurity. For him, survival is not assimilation but *disidentification*, inhabiting systems differently, crafting tactics of endurance. Resilience also gestures toward *queer futurity*, imagining worlds where life can be lived otherwise, beyond regulation and harm.

Resilience, then, is best understood as a layered practice of survival, refusal, and creation. It is both personal and collective, rooted in scars yet oriented toward possibility. It does not deny violence but transforms its imprint into testimony, art, and alternative futures.

Several participants reassert bodily sovereignty. In جسدي لي, the speaker insists:

"لطالما كان جسدي ملكٌ لي، لي وحدي، أرقص كيفما أشاء... بصلابتها، وشموخها، ومقاومتها"

("My body has always belonged to me, to me alone. I dance as I wish… with its strength, its pride, its resistance").

Similarly, the body becomes a homeland, a free space of belonging:

"جسدي رحب بفضائه... مملكة هو، حدودها أنا، قوانينها أنا، حريتها أنا"

("My body is vast in its space… It is a kingdom, its borders are me, its laws are me, its freedom is me"). Another: *"There, I am alive. Here, I am becoming*".

These affirmations embody what Audre Lorde (1984) calls the erotic as power: reclaiming pleasure and presence becomes a political act of resistance against erasure.

In حطيني بالبحر, resilience emerges through a pact with the self: "ومن هلأ ورايح، القرار عندي" ("From now on, the decision is mine").

Several texts transform injury into creation. In *The Portal*, the participant insists:

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[50] Lorde, A. (1984). *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*. In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (pp. 53–59). Freedom, CA: Crossing Press.

[51] Muñoz, J. E. (1999). *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press./ Muñoz, J. E. (2009). *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.

“Oh portal between my thighs,

How ecstatic and how divine”.

And another confessed: “*Here, I am alive. Here, I am becoming”.*

Writing becomes the ground of resilience, echoing bell hooks’ (1989) claim that speaking or writing back is a radical act. Judith Butler (1997) similarly frames speech as performative: each narrative here functions as a counter-act, refusing silence and testifying to survival.

Resilience in these writings is not about forgetting or erasing harm. It is about living with scars and still insisting on freedom, desire, and voice. Resistance manifests in reclaimed bodies, in small refusals, in writing, and in imagining other futures. These narratives remind us that survival itself, as in to continue, to create, to love, is already a profound form of resistance.

IV.2 Collage and Artwork Analysis

This section turns to the visual part of the corpus, examining three collages and one artwork through the analytical grid introduced earlier. Each piece is read along six dimensions: imagery, symbols, textual inserts, color and texture, composition, and affective impact. The aim is not to isolate individual readings but to draw out recurrent themes and resonances with the textual narratives. By placing collages and texts side by side, we trace how themes of shame, silence, desire, violence, and resilience emerge across different expressive registers, sometimes echoing one another, unsettling the other’s coherence.

Artwork 1- Hadi A. Photograph of Apartment Blocks ("In the open, I remain untouched")



Imagery: The building is cracked, windows uneven, balconies cluttered with clothes and cables. No human figures are visible, but only traces of life (laundry, curtains, satellite dishes). The body is absent but implied, fragmented into objects and residues.

Symbols: The decaying façade becomes a metaphor for precarity and survival. The urban ruin symbolizes the fragility of existence under surveillance and poverty.

Textual Insert: *"In the open, I remain untouched"* in yellow creates a contradiction: openness is usually exposure, but here it is reframed as protection. This paradox mirrors the texts where silence/desire coexist with shame.

Color & Texture: The monochrome greyscale strips the image of vibrancy, evoking bleakness. Yet the yellow text disrupts the grey.

Composition: The juxtaposition of the crumbling old block and the clean, geometric high-rise creates social fragmentation: ruin beside order.

Affective Impact: Ambivalence and the exposure feels both vulnerable and resilient. Butler's (2009) *Frames of War*[52] reminds us that precarity can expose bodies to harm, yet also demand recognition.

[52] Butler, J. (2009). *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* London: Verso.

Artwork 2 – Hiba. Floral/Green Collage with Arabic Text Inserts



Imagery: At the center, flowers bloom over an abstract, colorful background. Around them, fragments of text in Arabic are scattered, torn, and pasted at angles.

Symbols: Flowers (roses, petals) symbolize life, rebirth, and the erotic. Yet the abundance also suggests mourning rituals. They embody Lorde's (1984) *erotic as power*: softness that resists erasure.

Textual Inserts: Phrases are fragmented, highlighting how language frames gender. Torn text reveals that writing the body goes beyond grammar, and can happen through interruptions cuts, and changes of fonts.

Color & Texture: Green fabric as a background evokes fertility and renewal. Bright colors (orange, pink) radiate energy, contrasting with the darker fragments of pasted text.

Composition: Chaotic layering, when flowers and texts overlap, with no central hierarchy. This fragmentation mirrors Ahmed's (2004) view of affect as orientation[53]: emotion circulates through proximity and clash.

[53] Ahmed, S. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Affective Impact: Both celebratory and unsettling. The collage feels alive, but also fragmented, where joy is entangled with critique.

Artwork 3 – Isabell and Andrew. Dolls, Children, Pink, and "Dead End"



Imagery: Doll-like figures in pink dresses, children's faces partially censored, a doll with wings, tulips in a vase. Around them, worms and textures of decay intrude.

Symbols: The doll is central, as a symbol of girlhood, innocence, but also objectification: the doll embodies mute femininity, silenced and consumed. The text "Dead End" across a child's eyes is a stark metaphor of erasure.

Textual Inserts: Arabic words such as "التعبير عن مشاعر" ("expressing emotions"), "الجسد مدخلاً لسيطرة" ("the body as an entry point for domination"), appear fragmented. Language itself becomes broken, partial, censored.

Color & Texture: Dominated by pink as a symbol of exaggerated femininity, evoking imposed gender norms. Tulips are bright, yet surrounded by worms, and beauty is consequently framed by threat.

Composition: Disjointed children, dolls, and textures all collide with little coherence. A story of violence emerges as scattered images, not a cohesive narrative.

Affective Impact: Unsettling, claustrophobic. Mulvey's (1975)[54] theory of the male gaze resonates here: the child/doll is staged for others, denied subjectivity. Violence lingers in the cheerful pinks.

Artwork 4 – Maria. Mannequin, Nude Bodies, Eye, "هل أجسادنا لنا؟"



Imagery: A headless mannequin torso, a reclining nude woman, a muscular man shielding his face, an eye projecting lines of sight. Surrounding: flowers, plants, fragments of classical art (Venus figures).

Symbols: The mannequin is a body emptied of subjectivity in plastic, while surveilled. The eye is surveillance itself, echoing Foucault's (1977) panopticon[55]. Yet the reclining nude recalls art history's eroticized female body, reclaimed here among other fragments. The question "هل أجسادنا لنا؟" ("Are our bodies ours?") confronts ownership directly.

Textual Inserts: The question in Arabic operates as counter-discourse: challenging patriarchy, medicine, and gaze.

[54] Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen, 16*(3), 6–18

[55] Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Vintage Book. Foucault developed the metaphor of the *panopticon* within Jeremy Bentham's circular prison design as a way of theorizing modern power. In the panopticon, subjects are potentially under constant observation without knowing if they are being watched, which leads them to internalize surveillance and regulate their own behavior. The concept has since been used widely in feminist and queer theory to describe how bodies, particularly gendered and sexualized bodies, are disciplined under the gaze of institutions, media, and culture.

Color & Texture: Bold contrasts, flesh tones against deep greens and blues. The collage is lush but also disorienting.

Composition: Overlapping bodies from different traditions (classical Venus, contemporary man, mannequin, reclining nude) create a genealogy of fragmented representation. Butler's (1993) *Bodies That Matter*[56] resonates: bodies are constructed by norms, yet capable of re-signification.

Affective Impact: Ambivalent, both erotic and unsettling. Lorde's[57](1984) erotic resurfaces here as survival, while Muñoz's (2009) queer futurity[58] appears in the collision of past and present, male and female, natural and artificial.

IV.2 b Analysis

Collage, artwork, and text are read here as complementary languages of expression**.** Where writing tended toward narrative consistency, the collages and artwork embraced fragmentation. Words in the texts often provided anchoring, while images reached for sensations that escaped speech. These works "write the body" beyond grammar: Cut-outs, ruptures, layering, and absences, all enact forms of embodied knowledge that resist linear narration.

Across all four visuals, fragmentation is the dominant grammar. In the black-and-white photograph (*In the open, I remain untouched*), fragmentation emerges through decay: peeling walls, broken windows, social fractures between old and new buildings. The absence of human figures becomes its own cut, what Barthes (1977)[59] called the *punctum*, a presence only through a residue.

The floral collage layers torn text around blooming flowers, scattering meaning across the surface. Language here is not stable but fragmented into slips of Arabic phrases that exceed coherence.

[56] Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge

[57] Lorde, A. (1984). *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*. In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (pp. 53–59). Freedom, CA: Crossing Press.

[58] Muñoz, J. E. (2009). *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.

[59] Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, Music, Text* (S. Heath, Trans.). New York: Hill and Wang

This visual echoes Ahmed's (2004) idea of affective circulation[60]: meaning is felt as disorientation rather than clarity.

The pink doll/child collage presents fragmentation through violence: censored faces, broken bodies of dolls, cheerful femininity invaded by worms. Caruth's (1996)[61] trauma theory is visible here: memory emerges not as continuity but as scattered, disjointed images.

The mannequin collage performs fragmentation directly: torsos without heads, classical and modern nudes colliding, the surveilling eye cutting across the frame. Butler (1993)[62] argues that bodies are never natural wholes but are assembled and disassembled by norms. Here, fragmentation becomes the visual enactment of that paradox.

Symbols echo the themes of the texts. Dolls and children, dressed in pink and silenced by "Dead End," represent shame and silence, embodying what Spivak's (1988)[63] subalterns were forced into muteness.

Flowers, on the other hand, symbolize desire and resilience. Their recurrence across the collages resonates with Lorde's (1984) *erotic as power*: softness and creativity that resist erasure.

The eye and the grid recall surveillance and violence, Foucault's (1977) panopticon transposed onto flesh. Yet the handwritten and torn textual fragments ("هل أجسادنا لنا؟") reclaim the visual field for resistance.

The collages rely heavily on textual fragments: *"Dead End"*, *"الجسد مدخلاً لسيطرة"* ("the body as an entry point for domination"), *"هل أجسادنا لنا؟"* ("Are our bodies ours?"). These inserts rupture the image with language, echoing Butler's (1997)[64] claim that speech itself can be a performative counter-act.

[60] Ahmed, S. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

[61] Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

[62] Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge

[63] Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271–313). Urbana: University of Illinois Pres

[64] Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge

The scattered, overlapping words embody Cixous's (1976)[65] vision of feminine writing: grammar undone, words exceeding their limits to carve space for other ways of knowing. Silence is not absence here but textual fragmentation that signals refusal.

In what comes to colour and texture, they oscillate between extremes: Greyscale bleakness of the photograph suggests exposure, ruin, precarity; Pink excess in the doll collage evokes the violence of enforced femininity; Green and floral abundance suggests renewal, echoing resilience; Deep blues and flesh tones in the mannequin collage evoke eroticism entangled with surveillance.

This ambivalence is central: the visuals do not settle on pain or joy, but insist on both. Ahmed (2004) reminds us that affect is sticky; shame and desire, violence and resilience cling to one another.

The collages and artworks resonate powerfully with the five themes identified in the texts, translating them into a visual grammar of fragmentation, layering, and rupture. Shame appears in the silenced dolls, censored eyes, and the decaying surfaces of urban buildings that expose without protecting.

Silence and voice emerge in the torn textual fragments, the absence of bodies, and the scattered inserts that rupture the visual field with counter-speech.

Desire and the body find expression in blooming flowers, erotic postures, and moments of softness that persist even under regimes of regulation. Memory and violence are refracted through images of dolls, worms, surveillance, and architectural decay, presenting trauma not as a linear narrative but as scattered, unsettling traces. Finally, resilience and resistance appear in the declarations written onto the collages "هل أجسادنا لنا؟" ("Are our bodies ours?") in the bright colors, and in the overlapping fragments that insist on survival.

Taken together, the collages and artwork enact visually what the texts narrate linguistically: bodies fragmented yet insistent, silenced yet speaking, wounded yet resilient. By embracing cut-outs, layering, and contradiction, they extend Cixous's concept into the visual register, crafting embodied archives that speak precisely where words falter. The visual does not simply illustrate the textual; it complements and unsettles it, producing a multi-modal testimony. Through this

[65] Cixous, H. (1976). The laugh of the Medusa (K. Cohen & P. Cohen, Trans.). *Signs, 1*(4), 875–893.

interplay, shame, silence, desire, and violence are inscribed onto bodies, but resilience and resistance are too. Read side by side, the textual and the visual create a fuller account of lived experiences that refuses coherence yet insists on presence, making visible both the wounds inflicted by power and the possibilities of survival and self-assertion.

V. Team Reflection Insights: Internal Tensions, Editing, Translation, Curatorial Decisions

The team's reflections are not external commentaries or a set of questions asked, independently of the whole process. Those reflections are continuations of the project itself. They emerge from inside *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا, where the lines between participant, editor, trainer, and decision-maker were deliberately blurred. These voices are not "after the fact" evaluations but integral to the research process, embodying the participatory feminist ethos that shaped every stage of the project.

Reflecting on the workshops and the magazine, the team revealed what was produced, but also how it was produced, and this through negotiation, hesitation, and a lot of care. Their insights bring to the surface the dilemmas of editing for safety, the frictions of translation, the liberating potential of collage, and the silences that persist even in spaces of expression. In this way, reflection itself becomes a method: a practice of accountability, of staying with tensions rather than smoothing them over.

These testimonies also show that *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا was never a straightforward publication project. It was a living process, one that entangled creation with curation, affect with aesthetics, politics with embodiment. What follows in this section, consequently, is not a detached summary of opinions but a thematic synthesis of the team's reflections, organized around the same categories that guided our inquiry.

V.1 Moments that Stayed

Asking the team to recall *what stayed* with them is not a matter of nostalgia, but of method. In feminist research, what remains is often as important as what was said at the time. The memories and impressions that persist reveal the affective weight of the project and the traces it left on bodies, relationships, and ways of knowing. They act as reminders that research is not only about producing outputs but also about shaping lived experience.

Patricia Hill Collins[66] argues that knowledge is always situated, carried by those who live it: *"Subjugated knowledges are designed to illuminate the standpoint of the group whose experiences they seek to represent"* (2000, p. 257). To attend to "moments that stayed" is to center lived experience as a source of epistemic authority.

For Raed, the most striking moment came when a close friend of seven years revealed something deeply personal during the workshop: *"I realized that even the people closest to me carry entire archives of silence… and when they open, it feels like the beginning of something, new doors opening"*. Sally recalled how introductions shaped the entire writing process: *"Each participant's baggage contextualized their text"*. HC emphasized the collective energy: *"The preparation, the intuition in selecting participants, the flow of the sessions. This was what carried us"*.

These reflections underline how affect and context framed the work. What stayed was not technique or theory, but relational intensity—moments of disclosure, the weight of histories carried into the room, and the embodied energy that allowed creation to unfold.

V.2 Editing & Safety

Editing in *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا was never a neutral act of polishing texts. It was an ethical and political practice shaped by Lebanon's sociopolitical context, where questions of visibility can carry real risks. To ask how the team handled editing is to ask how they navigated the tension between expression and protection, between fidelity to participants' voices and the realities of censorship, surveillance, and stigma.

Feminist theorists ferociously argue that care and discomfort must coexist in liberating practices. As bell hooks[67] notes: *"There can be no love without justice… no community of care without the willingness to confront pain and risk"* (1994, p. 15). In *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا, editing itself became a form of care, while not in the sense of softening voices, but of protecting them from harm while allowing them to circulate.

[66] Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.* Routledge.
[67] hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom.* Routledge.

Raed is explicit about this balancing act: *"In Lebanon, some artwork is censored… queer art that shows two bodies from the same sex… or extensive sexual content. Sally (safety and security) did have some notes rooted in laws and previous similar work and we adapted to her notes."* HC echoes this: *"Some of the very revealing artworks, we asked Sally to assess them, and we went with her recommendations".* Sally herself frames the process differently: *"We did not face such tensions… we took extra care to respect each contributor's voice and agency while voicing out some revealing artwork to protect the safety and security aspect of the project."*

What emerges from these reflections is that "editing" was not about silencing, but about negotiating thresholds of risk. This echoes Donna Haraway's[68] call for "responsibility in partial perspective" (1988, p. 583): there is no god's-eye neutrality, only accountable decisions made from within specific contexts. The team's choices illuminate a feminist praxis where editing becomes an act of accountability to participants, to the socio-political landscape of Lebanon, and to the archive that is being created.

V.3 Language, Expression & Silence

Language is not just a vehicle for meaning but a threshold, a resource, and at times, a wound. To ask whether participants had "enough tools to express their bodily experiences" is to confront the paradox of language and its power to disclose and its limits in holding sensation, trauma, or desire. In feminist research, expression cannot be measured simply by the quantity of words, but by what becomes possible, and what remains withheld, when bodies are invited to speak. Judith Butler[69] argues that *"If language can injure, then it can sustain the body's exposure to the other: language sustains the body, but it can also threaten the body with dissolution"* (1997, p. 5). Gloria Anzaldúa[70] echoes this duality: *"So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language"* (1987, p. 81). And Spivak[71]

[68] Haraway, D. J. (1988). *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. Feminist Studies, 14*(3), 575–599.
[69] Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative.* Routledge
[70] Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza.* Aunt Lute Books.
[71] Spivak, G. C. (1988). "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.

warns of the limits of discourse itself: *"The subaltern cannot speak… the female subaltern is even more deeply in shadow"* (1988, p. 287). Together, these voices contend that language can open worlds and close them, affirm identity and wound it, give voice and impose silence.

The team's reflections reveal these dynamics clearly. Raed challenged the very notion of "tools": *"The strongest tools weren't technical… they were human: connection, emotion, willingness to share"*. For Sally, participants indeed had access to tools: *"free writing and poetry worked best… however some struggled with translating bodily sensations into words"*. HC highlighted the way expression was scaffolded: *"Writing opened the door to collage, and collage fed back into writing. The flow of activities helped build momentum"*.

Silence was also acknowledged. Sally admitted: *"People always leave things unsaid or censor themselves in some places. But generally, it was a safe space for everyone to express themselves"*. HC could not recall significant withholding. But Raed offered a more nuanced view: *"There were moments where I held myself back… that tension between oversharing and sharing too little… I don't believe it was ever a complete opening. What happened instead was the beginning of something: we were opening new doors."*

These reflections show that expression is never complete but is always partial, situated, and relational. What was voiced, and what was withheld, together created the contours of *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا. Silence was not absence but presence, being another form of communication that shaped what could be said.

V.4 Visual Expression

Visual expression in *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا through collage was not a decorative supplement to writing, but an alternative language. It allowed participants to bypass grammar and linearity, to move directly from sensation to form. Asking how visual tools function is crucial, because in contexts where words tend to fail, images often become the site where bodies speak most fully. Hélène Cixous[72] argued that *écriture féminine* disrupts conventional structures of language, calling for forms of writing that emerge from the body itself (1976, p. 880–881). Collage, in this

[72] Cixous, H. (1976). "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs, 1*(4), 875–893.

[77] Barthes, R. (1977). *Image—Music—Text.* Fontana.

sense, becomes a kind of feminist writing: fragmented, embodied, and resistant to closure. Roland Barthes[77] claims that images carry their own rhetoric, that is not reducible to text: *"The image no longer illustrates the words; it is the words which are parasitic upon the image"* (1977, p. 38). This highlights why visual practices are not secondary but central to knowledge production. For Raed, collage stood apart: *"The one tool that stood outside the system… no grammar, no structure—just freedom."* He recalled a striking piece: *"A woman smoking inside flames with the words 'أجسادنا تحترق' [our bodies are burnin]. It felt like a code for collective stress."*

Sally observed: *"A lot of visuals expressed things that words could not"*. HC agreed: *"Collage let participants say things that would have been too harsh in writing"*.

These reflections confirm that images opened a path where language alone could not. Collage did not simply accompany expression; it expanded it, and this in translating silence, tension, and desire into a visual field where the body could carve itself differently.

V.5 Translation

Translation in *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا was not considered a neutral act of transferring meaning from one language to another. It was a site of tension, loss, and creativity. Asking how the team perceived translation means asking how affect survives or fails to survive when moved across linguistic borders. In a bilingual project, translation is both a necessity and a risk: it makes texts accessible to wider publics, but it also unsettles intimacy, rhythm, and tone.

Gayatri Spivak[73] famously warned that translation can enact *epistemic violence*: *"The task of the translator is to facilitate rather than erase difference, but too often translation domesticates what is foreign"* (1993, p. 179). Emily Apter (2013)[79] offers another angle, suggesting that "untranslatables" are not failures but productive frictions that force us to dwell in difference (pp. 6–10). In the case of *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا, translation became an ongoing negotiation between loss and invention.

[73] Spivak, G. C. (1993). *Outside in the Teaching Machine.* "The Politics of Translation," pp. 179–200. Routledge.
[79] Apter, E. (2013). *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability.* Verso.

The team's reflections echoed these tensions. Raed lamented: *"Poetry lost its beauty in translation—the rhyme, the rhythm, the emotion. It was stripped."*

Sally stressed the affective core of language: *"We feel in languages… the feeling belongs to the original tongue".* HC was blunter: *"I am biased for Arabic—translation always weakens expression".* What these insights reveal is that translation was not a smooth bridge but a space of friction, one that both diminished and generated meaning. Just as silence shaped what could not be spoken in the workshops, translation shaped what could not be carried intact across languages. In both cases, absence was not failure but a trace: silence and translation each made visible the boundaries of language, showing where affect clings to words and where it resists being transported.

V.5a Researcher's Own Experience of Translation

My own experience of translation sits at the heart of this tension. I had to translate my own text from Arabic into English, and in doing so, I realized that translation was not simply an act of transfer but a process of rewriting. The English version was not a copy of the Arabic but almost a new prose, woven differently, carrying resonances that belonged to English and could not have existed in Arabic.

Moving into English felt like stepping onto other grounds. The text became layered, multi-levelled, a tapestry shaped by what English allowed: rhythms of cadence, syntactic turns, and a sense of abstraction that gave me space to weave ideas differently. Yet at the same time,

English failed to carry certain metaphors that Arabic held effortlessly. The sensual density of Arabic expressions, the images rooted in body, land, and intimacy, resisted smooth transfer. In English, they sometimes appeared flatter, stripped of their textures.

This doubleness confirmed what the team had also observed: translation was not a neutral bridge but a site of both loss and creativity. For me, it was a doubling: each version became alive in its own way, each deficient on its own. Translation then is no longer about equivalence, but about inhabiting two languages, each with its possibilities and its gaps.

Here, I find resonance with Gloria Anzaldúa's reflections in *Borderlands/La Frontera*: *"Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language"* (1987, p. 81)[74]. Translating myself meant inhabiting this truth. My Arabic text carried my body, my cultural skin. While the English version revealed another side, it also created a certain separation. To move between Arabic and English was to move between identities - I tend to ponder much on the term- each incomplete, but forming together a more complex weave.

In this sense, my own contribution mirrored the ethos of *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا itself: not to erase difference, but to hold multiple articulations side by side, acknowledging what is lost in translation, and what is gained when bodies and texts cross languages.

V.6 Shifts in Perspective

To ask whether perspectives shifted is to recognize that research does not leave its actors untouched. In feminist praxis, the work of producing and sharing knowledge transforms not only participants but also facilitators, editors, and researchers themselves. Change here is not necessarily dramatic or common; sometimes it is subtle, uneven, or even resisted. Yet attending to these shifts shows that knowledge-making is a reciprocal process.

Donna Haraway[75] argues that all knowing is situated and partial: *"Feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges"* (1988, p. 581). This means that there is no single perspective that defines the impact of *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا. What actually matters are the multiple, sometimes contradictory, transformations that occurred.

For Raed, there was no theoretical conversion: *"I still read Butler, Ahmed, Crenshaw… but practice pushed me to adapt methods"*. In his account, theory remained stable, but practice unsettled its application, forcing adjustments on the ground. Sally described something broader: *"It changed my perspective on multiple levels"*, suggesting that facilitation, editing, and curation expanded her understanding of both process and politics. HC, finally, emphasized depth: *"It was a transformation, both personal and political"*. For Sally, it was about weaving new perspectives

[74] Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza.* Aunt Lute Books.

[75] Haraway, D. J. (1988). *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. Feminist Studies, 14*(3), 575–599.

altogether: "*each experience translated into writing or digital art has helped me have a unique perspective on a lot of levels".*

My own role also shifted in ways I could not have predicted. Entering *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا as a trainer, my task was to facilitate others' creative expression. Yet in becoming the researcher of this project, I had to re-inhabit those moments differently, as in listening back to texts, collages, and silences with another ear. This double movement changed how I relate to my own practice: I came to see facilitation not as prior to research, but as part of research itself. Like the participants, I was transformed by the process, moving from guiding expression to curating and interpreting it. Together, these reflections echo Haraway's call to embrace multiplicity. Shifts did not converge into a single storyline. Instead, they reveal a field of partial perspectives, each carrying its own truth. The project's impact was not uniform but plural, situated differently in each body, including mine. And this, too, is knowledge.

V.7 Future Directions

Looking ahead is not a neutral exercise. For feminist projects, imagining "what comes next" is not like drawing a blueprint but like keeping possibilities alive, all the while refusing closure. Future directions are, in this sense, political: they reveal what the team values, what they resist, and how they dream.

Donna Haraway[76] claims that knowledge is always partial and situated, and therefore any vision of the future must embrace multiplicity rather than claim universality. *"Feminist objectivity means situated knowledges"* (1988, p. 581), and by extension, feminist futures are also situated, partial, and contested.

The team's visions reflect this plurality. Raed imagined *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا evolving into a civil society organization: *"We could expand elements into standalone projects, and go deeper into intersectional and economic analysis"*. Sally envisioned an immersive format: *"Five or six consecutive days in a village outside Beirut—immersion is key"*. HC proposed adjustments in

[76] Haraway, D. J. (1988). *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. Feminist Studies, 14*(3), 575–599.

rhythm and environment: *"Shorter daily sessions but more days, fewer participants, non-digital art, and nature"*.

My own vision resonates with theirs, but is also shaped by my dual role as facilitator and researcher. For me, *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا's future lies not only in expansion but in deepening, continuing to hold the contradictions of safety and risk, language and silence, translation and loss. I see its future as a space where research and art remain entangled, where creative expression is not an output but an ongoing process of community-making.

These divergent imaginations do not fracture the project but rather enrich it, showcasing that *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا carries within it not a single roadmap but a constellation of possible futures. This refusal of singularity is itself a feminist act: to keep the archive open, to leave space for new voices, and to insist that the story is not yet finished, what Sara Ahmed (2017, pp. 14-16)[77] calls living feminism as a work in progress, carried out in everyday practices and kept open through collective action.

V.8 Challenges of Implementation

The team's reflections also pointed to the material difficulties of implementation, which shaped the project as much as its artistic and theoretical choices. These were not incidental obstacles but structural conditions that reveal the fragility of cultural and activist work in Lebanon.

V.8a Hiring and remuneration

This process proved especially difficult. Paying the SRHR expert based in Egypt required an additional 50% transfer cost, and the open calls often bore either very few or unsuitable candidates. Website development attracted only one applicant, while translation and editing saw over 17 applications, but, in practice, no one was able to meet the demands of sensitive, bilingual, and creative texts. In the end, the team had to recruit outside the formal calls, and even then, faced sudden withdrawals, and missed deadlines.

[77] Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a Feminist Life.* Duke University Press.

V.8b Workshops

Workshops planned months ahead were also affected by the broader political and social climate. One session was delayed by a week due to the public funeral of the former Hezbollah leader, Nasrallah; another was overshadowed by the news of an attack on a participant's hometown. External war-related stress was inescapable, even as the team tried to create a protected safe space. Venue issues compounded this fragility: a hotel frequently shifted the promised conference room for personal reasons, including a private birthday party, forcing the team to constantly redesign the space themselves.

V.8c Selection Processes and Submissions

Choosing which participant should or should not be a good candidate for the workshops was another source of strain. The open call for participants combined quantitative scoring (prioritising marginalised applicants) with qualitative assessment, but attendance problems soon emerged as people dropped out due to travel or scheduling conflicts. For the creative writing section, the sheer volume of texts proved overwhelming: the team eventually read all submissions themselves because delays in hiring an editor-translator made outsourcing impossible. The process was described as "heavy" and emotionally taxing.

V.8d The Launch Event

This stage came with its own set of challenges. While the event was ultimately held in a supportive venue, several external factors, such as homophobic inappropriate remarks from third-party service providers and Lebanese Internal Security, posed obstacles. These moments served as reminders that even spaces meant for celebration can still reflect broader social tensions and vulnerabilities.

Seen together, these difficulties resonate with Sara Ahmed's[78] reminder that *"feminist work is often about survival, about keeping going in environments that are not built to sustain*

[78] Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a Feminist Life.* Duke University Press

[85] Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel Optimism.* Duke University Press.

you" (2017, p. 235). They also echo Lauren Berlant's[85] notion of *"crisis ordinariness"* (2011, p. 10), where structural breakdowns, such as war, bureaucracy, and economic collapse, are not exceptional events but the very texture of everyday life. In *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا, logistical challenges were not distractions from the project but part of its feminist archive, shaping how expression and care unfolded.

To acknowledge these struggles is to recognise that the project's achievements were not produced despite difficulty but through it. The resilience of *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا lay precisely in its capacity to create art, expression, and community under conditions of precarity.

V.9 Conclusion

The team's reflections show that *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا was never simply about producing a magazine. It was about navigating thresholds: between saying and withholding, between art and censorship, between translation as loss and as creation, between collective dreaming and logistical exhaustion. Reflection itself became part of the method, a practice of accountability, of staying with tension, rather than resolving it.

The voices gathered here affirm that feminist work does not unfold on neutral ground. It is shaped by war, bureaucracy, hostile infrastructures, and the everyday costs of survival.

To recognize these struggles is not to diminish the project's achievements, but to understand them as achievements forged through difficulty.

What emerges, then, is not a singular narrative but a textured archive of partial perspectives, where each perspective carries its own truth, and where each is situated within its own constraints. This refusal of closure is itself a feminist act: to leave the archive open, to admit contradiction, and to keep space for new voices and futures to come.

VI. Translation and the Limits of Language

Working with a corpus that moves between Arabic and English, sometimes colloquial, sometimes formal, sometimes visual, places translation at the heart of our methodology. Translation is not simply a matter of transferring meaning from one language to another; it is an encounter with history, affect, and silence. Participants' writings often blended registers, broke grammar, or dissolved into images. Such shifts demand that we read translation as a theoretical and methodological tool, a practice that illuminates both what is said and what resists being said.

VI. 1 Theoretical Anchors

VI.1a Gayatri Spivak: The Risk of Erasure

Spivak warns in *Can the Subaltern Speak?*[79] that "the subaltern cannot speak" if her speech is always mediated or domesticated by dominant discourse. Translation, in this sense, can be complicit in silencing: "The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with 'woman' as a pious item. Representation has not withered away." (Spivak, 1988, p. 308)

In our corpus, when a participant trails off: "ما بعرف ليش هيك خلص الشعر / بس يمكن حبيت اخدكم بالقوة على محل بشع", we face a Spivakian dilemma: to "carry over" this violence into English risks flattening its raw abruptness. Spivak invites us to hold that opacity, to resist the illusion that translation can make the subaltern fully "speak."

VI.1b Hélène Cixous: Breaking Grammar, Writing the Body

In *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976), Cixous[80] insists on a writing that is bodily, excessive, unruly: "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing… Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement." (Cixous, 1976, p. 875)

[79] Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Pres

[80] Cixous, H. (1976). The laugh of the Medusa (K. Cohen & P. Cohen, Trans.). *Signs, 1*(4), 875–893

Many of the corpus texts enact precisely this rupture. One participant's line says: "بس إذا ح يمشي حالي / wasn't the question I needed answers for", splits mid-sentence, mixing Arabic and English, breaking expected grammar. This fracture is not an error but a form of écriture féminine: language that carries the body's discontinuities, its anxieties, its refusal to fit into neat patriarchal syntax.

VI.1c Walter Benjamin: Translation as Afterlife

Benjamin's essay *The Task of the Translator* (1923/1996)[81] famously claims: "Translation is a mode. In its intention, translation does not strive for likeness to the original, but rather for the latter's survival." (Benjamin, 1996, p. 255)

For Benjamin, translation is not about fidelity but about opening a space where the text continues to live differently. This resonates strongly when participants turned to collage or symbolic imagery, as in حياةُ دُميّة where the pink dress "covers a piece of crucified flesh". The shift from word to image is itself a translation, an afterlife of meaning where survival takes form in color, symbol, and texture.

VI.1d Judith Butler: The Performativity of Silence

In *Excitable Speech* (1997), Butler[82] argues that silence and speech breakdowns are not mere absence but acts shaped by power: "Not all silence is the same. Some silences are the effects of a refusal to recognize a claim to speech; others signify the exhausted practice of being silenced." (Butler, 1997, p. 133)

When one participant describes herself as "a machine, an empty vessel", the metaphor enacts Butler's idea of performativity: the subject is constituted through language that simultaneously erases her. Her silence is not nothingness but a performative trace of patriarchal violence.

[81] Benjamin, W. (1996). *The task of the translator*. In M. Bullock & M. W. Jennings (Eds.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected writings, Volume 1, 1913–1926* (pp. 253–263). Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1923

[82] Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. Routledge

VI.1e Sara Ahmed: Affective Translation

Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004[83]) reminds us that translation is not only about words but about how feelings "stick" or fail to stick: "Emotions do things… they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments." (Ahmed, 2004, p. 119)

One participant wrote: "ugly, raw laughter". This is an eruption that can never be representable in direct equivalence. The affect carries across awkwardly, but it still binds us to the intensity of her moment. Ahmed helps us see translation not as loss but as a shifting economy of affect, where rage, shame, and desire migrate unevenly.

VI.2 When Language Fails: Visual Emergence

In several instances, participants' experiences resisted verbal articulation altogether, spilling into other registers, visual, symbolic, and fragmentary. Rather than treating these visual expressions as secondary, they should be understood as autonomous articulations, a form of feminist translation that acknowledges the limits of language.

In حياةُ دُميّة (*Life of a Doll*), the narrator is clothed in a pink dress that both conceals and exposes violence: "ألبسني ثوبًا ورديًا، إذ لا لونَ يليقُ بالدمية سواه، ولا لونَ سيظهرُ عليه الدماء كالنور غيره".

Here, pink is not merely descriptive: it is symbolic, carrying the gendered coding of girlhood, innocence, and commodification, only to be violently overwritten by blood. The image of the "doll" suspended in a shop window is itself a visual metaphor, collapsing into a tableau of spectatorship, commodification, and bodily harm. The visual here is not an ornament to language but a survival strategy: it allows what cannot be safely said to surface through symbol.

Similarly, in the collages produced during the workshops, recurring motifs of mannequins and eyes performed what words struggled to contain. The mannequin "a body emptied of subjectivity in plastic, while surveilled", evoked objectification and the hollowing out of subjectivity. The eye,

[83] Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh University Press.

omnipresent, became an emblem of surveillance, echoing Foucault's panopticon, a visual reminder of constant watchfulness that no single word could encapsulate.

This movement from textual to visual registers resonates with feminist and queer archival traditions that recognize alternative languages of expression such as gesture, silence, color, fragment, as legitimate. It echoes Cixous's demand that women "write the body" (1976), but expands writing to include non-linguistic forms. It also recalls José Esteban Muñoz's insistence that queer expression often takes the form of ephemera: not always stable, not always textual, but still vital as traces of lived intensity.

In this light, visual emergence is not a deficit but a politics. It refuses the demand to make trauma entirely speakable in normative language, and instead insists on preserving opacity, affect, and excess.

VI.3 Reflection: Translation as Possibility and Limit

Translation in this project emerged as a double movement, enabling and constraining, liberating and exposing. On the one hand, it allowed participants' voices to circulate across Arabic and English, across written and visual registers. For instance, one participant's bilingual line "ح بس إذا يمشي حالي / wasn't the question I needed answers for", becomes legible to both Arabic- and English-speaking readers, enabling a broader recognition of her affective state. Translation thus serves as a bridge, ensuring these voices are not trapped in isolated linguistic enclaves.

On the other hand, translation continually revealed its own limits. One participant's self-description as "a machine, an empty vessel" evokes a dehumanization so embedded in cultural and bodily context that no translation can fully render the historical weight of marital rape in Lebanon, or the specific layering of violation. Similarly, one other participant's abrupt ending " ما بعرف ليش هيك خلص الشعر", is untranslatable in its very form: the poem's breakdown enacts the violence it names. Any attempt to "tidy it up" in English would betray its power.

Benjamin (1923/1996) reminds us that translation is always an "afterlife," not an equivalence. It reveals both the survival and the fracture of meaning. Spivak (1988) insists that we cannot presume to make the subaltern "speak" in translation without risking erasure. Butler (1997)

shows that the very breakdown of speech is itself performative, while Ahmed (2004) demonstrates how affects refuse to travel smoothly. Together, these theorists help us hold translation not as failure but as a productive tension.

For feminist and queer archives, this has methodological implications. Translation cannot be understood as a neutral act of carrying meaning across, but as a site of ethical encounter: a recognition that some meanings remain untranslatable, and that our role is to preserve these silences and ruptures rather than overwrite them.

Thus, translation is both a possibility and a limit. It allows voices to travel, but also marks where they cannot. It opens new audiences, while protecting what must remain opaque. To honor this, we must read translation as tension: an opening that is always also an exposure, a bridge that is always also a fracture.

VII. Participant Feedback: Key Insights, Quotes, Affective Responses

The participants' reflections form the living core of this research. They were gathered across three complementary sources: a structured survey answered by eleven out of sixteen participants, a series of letters written during the creative writing workshop as messages to future participants, and the feedback session of the digital art and collage workshop. Together, these testimonies trace how individuals engaged with *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا*'s* spaces of expression, and how they experienced their own voices, bodies, and creativity within them.

The survey offered a systematic glimpse into participants' experiences, showing patterns of empowerment, discovery, and self-expression. It revealed how writing and art became tools to articulate relationships with the body, to speak about silenced topics, and to build a sense of safety and community.

The creative writing letters, by contrast, were personal and often poetic. Addressed to imagined "future participants," they captured the emotional intensity of the workshops: the fear of vulnerability, the catharsis of writing, the joy of recognition, and the collective bonds forged through storytelling. These letters provide a direct window into the transformative potential of the workshop, written in the participants' own voices and styles.

The feedback session of the digital art and collage workshop added another layer of reflection. Here, participants described pushing boundaries, discovering new mediums, and finding freedom in visual expression. Their words highlighted the role of facilitation, the importance of supportive spaces, and the logistical and emotional challenges that shaped the experience.

These materials are analyzed through a qualitative thematic coding process, attentive to both individual voices and collective dynamics. While the full methodology is detailed in the dedicated section of this research, here we note that coding allows us to identify recurring themes, such as empowerment, healing, vulnerability, and community, without flattening participants' narratives. Instead, their words remain central, guiding the interpretation and analysis.

Taken together, these sources and their thematic coding do not simply provide evaluation but articulate the meanings of participation itself. They demonstrate how the *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا

workshops became spaces of healing, experimentation, and solidarity, where the body could be reimagined through text and image, where community could be built through vulnerability, and where participants themselves became authors and archivists of their own experiences.

VII.1 Thematic Analysis

From the participants' survey answers, the feedback session of the digital art workshop, and the letters written during the creative writing workshop, several recurring themes emerged. These themes were identified through qualitative coding, attending to both the repetition of certain experiences and the emotional intensity of individual voices. What follows is not an exhaustive categorization but a mapping of the most salient threads that cut across the different sources of data. Each theme is illustrated through the convergence of survey patterns, workshop feedback, and personal letters, so that both breadth and depth of experience are preserved.

VII.1a Theme 1: Empowerment & Voice

A central theme across all materials was the sense of empowerment that participants experienced through writing and art. For many, the workshops offered the first opportunity to articulate silenced experiences, to "find words for what had long remained unspoken."

From the survey, every single respondent affirmed that the workshops gave them tools to express their bodies and experiences (chart 1). One participant wrote: *"The workshop provided me with the tools and approaches to better articulate my relation with my body… it gave me the language and structure to begin expressing."* Others described writing as a way to "*transfer the body from silence into words".* This suggests a powerful shift from embodied silence to articulated voice, facilitated by the safe and creative format of the workshops.

The feedback from the digital art and collage workshop echoed this. One participant described how, despite initial uncertainty, the facilitation allowed them to transform hesitation into creative agency: *"I didn't easily know what I should do, I was happy to have Nur to assist… it should be more than just 4 days"*. Another remarked that the workshop gave them freedom to "translate internal emotions" and "play with colors" in ways that were both expressive and liberating. In

both cases, empowerment was not abstract—it was tied to process, guidance, and the discovery of one's own medium.

The letters from the creative writing workshop captured this theme in its most personal and emotional form. One participant wrote to future attendees: *"You're going to get triggered, you're going to cry, you're going to laugh, and you're going to heal. But most importantly, you're going to belong… you will embrace your body and all of its perfect imperfections. And you're going to do all of that through the power of words."* Another insisted: *"It takes courage to write down your thoughts… writing is the most powerful tool that you have"*.

Taken together, these testimonies highlight empowerment not as a simple feeling of confidence, but as a transformative act of reclaiming one's body, story, and creativity. The survey shows this was widespread, the art feedback situates it in practice, and the letters reveal its intimate, emotional force.

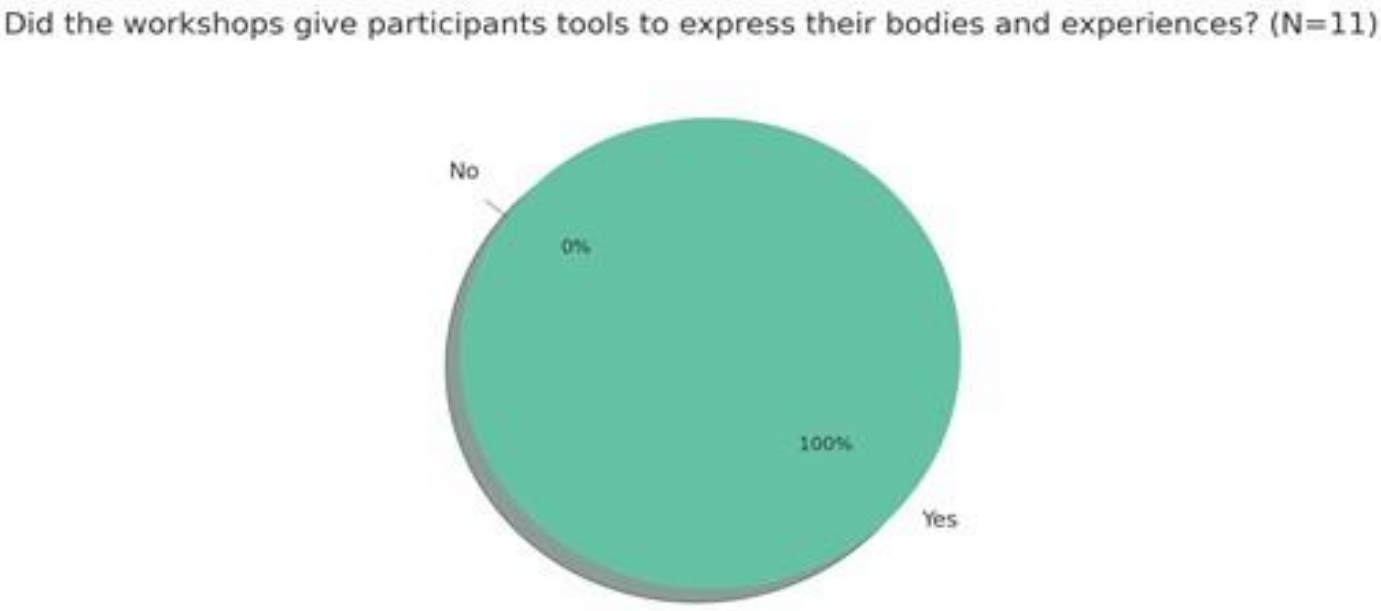


Chart 1

VII.1b Theme 2: Body & Self-Perception

Another central theme that emerged across the participants' reflections was the transformation in how they perceived and related to their own bodies. For some, the workshops opened new ways of seeing and narrating embodied experiences, while for others it marked a process of reconciliation, compassion, and even liberation.

From the survey, participants repeatedly highlighted that writing and art allowed them to access parts of themselves they had previously silenced. One participant explained: *"Writing gave me ways to approach my body indirectly, with imagery and metaphors"*. Another described how the exercises acted as *"mirrors… moving my body from silence into words"*. Several noted a tangible change in self-perception: *"Yes, I'm more at peace in my skin, my body is my temple"*; *"I no longer feel ashamed of being loud in who I am"*. Collectively, these answers point to a deepened awareness and more compassionate relationship with the body.

The digital art feedback session confirmed this theme in a different register. For many, experimenting with collage or digital drawing became a way to translate inner emotions into form. Hiba reflected: *"In this experience I was able to experience internal emotions, and freedom to play with colors, I can use it later on in my work to help people express their feelings"*. Hussein spoke of the joy of transforming ideas into visual expression, while others emphasized how the safe, non-authoritarian atmosphere allowed their bodies and emotions to surface in their work. Here, empowerment was not only about the act of creating, but also about re-seeing the body as a source of inspiration and creativity.

The creative writing letters brought this transformation to life in a particularly visceral way. One participant wrote: *"You will embrace your body and all of its perfect imperfections"*. Another spoke of courageously confronting "speechless terror," noting: *"The words I found were within me. I reached for them, and they freed me"*. In another letter, a participant described entering the space with fear, unsure if they would be accepted, only to later write: *"My body felt free, it flew and expressed with love"*.

These accounts show that the workshops created conditions for participants to confront embodied pain and stigma, but also to discover compassion and freedom in their relationships with their bodies. The process was not always easy and was often described as painful, heavy, or triggering, and yet it opened space for rearticulation. In this sense, body & self-perception emerged as both a challenge and a site of possibility: a journey of seeing, naming, and reimagining the self.

VII.1c Theme 3: Community & Belonging

One of the strongest threads across participants' reflections was the experience of community. Many described the workshops not only as spaces for writing or art but as intimate collectives where they could feel understood, safe, and connected.

From the survey, participants consistently used words such as *"safe," "intimate," "playful,"* and *"freeing"* to describe the workshop environment. Several noted the importance of not feeling alone, with one stating: *"I no longer feel ashamed of being loud in who I am,"* while another emphasized: *"Feeling not alone, supportive community"* as what stayed with them most after the sessions. Such responses highlight that the workshops were more than technical skill-building, but rather relational spaces.

The digital art feedback echoed this emphasis. L. explained: *"It was very comfortable, no people tension, I was able to talk to everyone"*. H. praised the diversity of the group, noting how facilitators and participants worked together with mutual respect, and specifically appreciated the presence of an anti-harassment policy. The trainers themselves also reflected on this dynamic, describing how what began with shyness evolved into "a sense of community" and "collaborative art".

In the creative writing letters, this theme took on an even more personal dimension. One participant described the journey as *"like leaving a part of me in the heart of each lovely individual who handled this beautiful 4-day journey with me"*. Another reassured future participant: *"You are not alone… here you will meet people who understand, voices that resemble yours, and reveal*

new perspectives". These words illustrate how the workshops became sites of recognition, where private stories could be shared without fear of judgment.

The above taken together (chart 2) highlight community as a transformative dimension of *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا. In these workshops, belonging was not an abstract concept but a felt experience: of shared laughter and tears, of collective vulnerability, and of solidarity in expression. The power of this sense of community lies in how it reconfigures isolation, in what was once private or unspeakable becomes collective, resonant, and held in common.

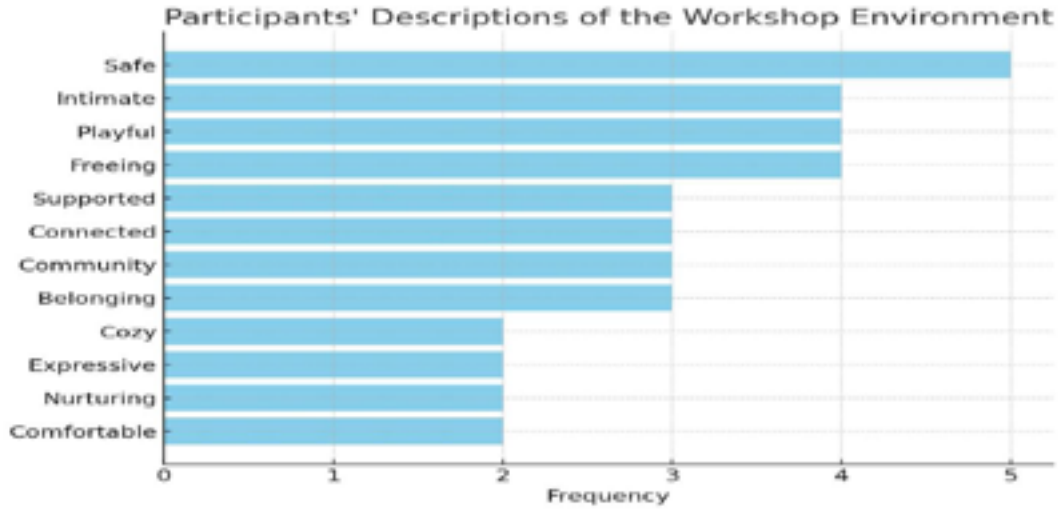


chart 2

VII.1d Theme 4: Challenges & Vulnerabilities

While participants emphasized empowerment, healing, and belonging, their reflections also reveal the vulnerabilities and challenges that shaped their experiences. These challenges were not only logistical but also deeply emotional, showcasing the weight of confronting silenced stories and the structural obstacles surrounding the workshops.

In the survey, several participants described the difficulty of expressing painful or intimate experiences. One respondent noted that the hardest part was *"realizing what I wanted to express in the first place, having silenced myself for too long"*. Another explained: *"Mostly the flaws in my body and experiences with how I and others view it were really difficult to express"*. Even when breakthroughs occurred, they came with heaviness: *"The hardest things to express came out most easily… I wrote about one of the most painful experiences in my life, knowing that I usually avoid*

even thinking about it". These responses show that vulnerability was both a barrier and an opening, where participants confronted repressed memories and traumas.

The digital art feedback added another layer of challenge, often related to logistics and environment. H. recalled discomfort when the hotel changed rooms unexpectedly, disrupting the flow. H. noted the hardship of traveling long distances to attend, suggesting online options would have made participation easier. Others mentioned fatigue, wishing for naps or nature-based spaces that could have balanced the intensity. These reflections underline how material conditions shaped the experience of creativity, reminding us that empowerment is always situated within broader structural constraints.

The letters from the creative writing workshop spoke directly to the emotional vulnerability of participation. One writer warned future participants: *"You are stepping into a dangerous place… this is a study about yourself"*. Another recounted entering the workshop with deep anxiety, unsure if they would be accepted, only to slowly find comfort: *"In the first moments, anxiety was my companion… but with every word and kindness offered, tranquillity settled in despite my troubled state"*. For some, the weight of trauma remained close: letters referenced "speechless terror," fear of exposure, and the lingering effects of shame. Yet, even in these moments of struggle, participants described the space itself as enabling safety and expression.

These reflections show that *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا's workshops were not easy spaces. They required participants to take risks, confront fears, and navigate external obstacles. Vulnerability was central to the process: it was both the source of challenge and the very condition that allowed healing and community to emerge. In this sense, the workshops became laboratories of resilience, where fragility and strength were not opposites but intertwined.

VII.1e Theme 5: Imagination & Future

The final theme that emerged across the participants' reflections was a sense of projection toward the future. Rather than ending with individual testimonies alone, many participants used the workshops as a springboard to imagine what might come next for themselves, for others, and for the community.

In the survey, participants were asked to reflect on what stayed with them after the workshops. Their answers were marked by memories, images, and phrases that they carried forward: *"جسدي مملكة هو، حدودها أنا"* ("My body is a kingdom, its borders are me") or simply *"Feeling of freedom and security"*. Others described the significance of holding on to tangible traces: sticky notes, drafts, or small gifts exchanged during the sessions. These responses suggest that the workshops left participants not only with skills but also with symbols and memories that could accompany them into the future.

The digital art feedback also pointed toward continuation and sustainability. Several participants emphasized the need for more sessions, more days, and different spaces, with one participant noting the challenge of weekly travel but still expressing commitment to carry the work forward. Leen even spoke of integrating her artistic "signature" into her future practice, while the trainers themselves encouraged participants to keep producing art beyond the workshop. These reflections show that participants were not only recipients of knowledge but also saw themselves as carriers of the practice into their future lives and communities.

The creative writing letters made this theme most explicit. Addressed to "future participants," these texts were filled with encouragement, advice, and visions of what the workshops could mean. One participant wrote: *"You're going to belong. You will embrace your body and all of its perfect imperfections… and you're going to do all of that through the power of words"*. Another assured: *"It might feel scary at first to share your story with strangers… but I promise you, on the first day you will not regret any of it"*. Others framed the workshops as journeys, even dangerous but necessary ones: *"This is a study about yourself"*. The letters reveal not only what participants themselves experienced but also their desire to pass this experience forward, transforming private journeys into collective legacies.

These reflections point to imagination as a key outcome of *AJSADOUNA-أجسادنا's* workshops. Participants did not stop at self-expression; they envisioned how such practices could be sustained, transmitted, and deepened. In this sense, the workshops generated not only healing and community in the present but also futures of continuity, where participants themselves become the messengers and mentors for those who will follow.

V11.2 Reflection *in Lieu* of Conclusion

The reflections analyzed here are more than testimonies of individual experience: they embody what Patricia Hill Collins[84] describes as *situated knowledges*, those truths produced from specific social locations, marked by emotional weight and partiality, yet no less valid as epistemologies. In *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا, participants' voices were not extracted as "data" to be processed; they were honored as co-authored knowledge, echoing Collins's insistence that marginalised communities theorize from within their lived realities.

In this sense, our thematic coding is not a neutral analytical tool but an enactment of Donna Haraway's[85] call for *feminist objectivity as situated knowledges*. We did not aim to construct an abstract, universal model of expression. Instead, we stayed close to participants' voices: contradictory, fragmented, affective. These voices refused the "god trick" of detached observation.

The participants' insistence on safety, belonging, and healing also recalls bell hooks's[86] vision of care as method: facilitation was not control but accompaniment, and discomfort was not a failure but a productive moment of ethical encounter. Letters describing fear, tears, and eventual healing testify to this dual movement of care and vulnerability.

Similarly, the participatory structure of the workshops aligns with what Andrea Cornwall[87] claimed on feminist participation, that is not about "giving voice" but about redistributing authorship. Participants became authors of their own archives, advising future cohorts, imagining continuity, and thus transforming the research into a collective act of knowledge production. This resonates

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[84] Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

[85] Haraway, D. J. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies, 14*(3), 575–599.

[86] hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.

[87] Cornwall, A. (2002). *Making spaces, changing places: Situating participation in development*. Institute of Development Studies.

with Michelle Fine's[88] call to "work the hyphen," acknowledging the blurred boundaries between researcher, facilitator, and participant.

The creative, affective dimensions of these reflections (collage, free writing, intimate letters) also echo Ellis and Bochner's[89] autoethnographic ethos, where research should move us, make us care, and sometimes even make us cry. Participants' words did exactly that: they wrote with the wound, with the body, and with radical vulnerability. In this, we find kinship with Lora Mathis's idea of "*radical softness as a weapon*"[90], where fragility becomes a stance of resistance, not weakness.

Through empowerment and voice, through reimagined relationships with the body, through belonging and community, through vulnerability and challenge, and through visions for the future, the reflections show that *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا workshops are not simply pedagogical exercises. They are feminist interventions, sites where knowledge is produced through care, contradiction, and creativity. They demonstrate that feminist methodology is not just a frame we impose; it is a lived practice, unfolding in the very words and silences of participants. And they reveal the deeper purpose of such workshops: to create spaces where silenced experiences can surface, be held collectively, and become archives of resistance and possibility.

[88] Fine, M. (2018). *Just research in contentious times: Widening the methodological imagination*. Teachers College Press.

[89] Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 733–768). Sage.

[90] Mathis, L. (n.d.). *Radical softness as a weapon* [zine/online]. (Originally published as a zine and online visual/poetic series.)

VIII. Conclusion & Recommendations: Learnings for Future Creative Feminist Work on SRHR and the Body

This research began with a set of guiding questions: whether normative tools of expression are sufficient to speak about our bodies; whether the digital world offers more liberating possibilities than physical spaces; what themes recur most powerfully when participants are invited to write and create around their embodied experiences; and how audiences engage with these expressions. What emerged through the workshops, the editing process, the collages, and the participants' feedback is a complex but coherent response to these questions, one that highlights both the fragility and the strength of feminist creative practices in the field of SRHR.

It became clear that normative tools of expression are insufficient. The clinical, policy-driven, or even conventional literary frameworks often proved unable to contain the depth of what participants wished to articulate. Their words overflowed boundaries, fractured grammar, slipped into bilingual hybrids, or dissolved into silence. Others migrated into collage, image, or symbol, carrying meanings that could not be voiced directly. What mattered was not clarity or coherence but the act of making fragments visible, of honoring contradictions, and of sustaining the possibility of expression even when words failed.

This breakdown of normative expression directly echoes Bourdieu's understanding of symbolic power and linguistic legitimacy. If certain modes of articulation are socially sanctioned, those medical, academic, or policy-oriented modes, then what escapes them exposes the limits of the *linguistic habitus* itself. When participants' words fractured, mixed languages, or dissolved into silence and image, they were not merely failing to express; they were revealing the social boundaries of what counts as a text said, written, or drawn. In Bourdieu's terms, their aesthetic and affective gestures unsettled the *doxa*. And what emerged instead was a new, non-normative field of expression where voice, texture, and silence coexisted as equally meaningful. The overflow beyond normative language thus becomes not a breakdown, but a political act: a form of resistance to the symbolic violence that polices what is considered legitimate discourse within SRHR and feminist spaces.

Across the corpus, recurring constellations of meaning emerged: shame, silence, desire, violence, and resilience. These were never isolated but always entangled, with shame colliding with desire, violence producing silence, and resilience emerging from within injury. The body in SRHR contexts was revealed as contradictory and layered, simultaneously a site of regulation and reclamation, silence and voice, fragmentation and wholeness. Audience engagement mirrored this complexity. Participants themselves became each other's witnesses, readers, and mirrors, and their testimonies show that expression was experienced not only as output but as transformation. Writing, collage, and storytelling were described as tools that allowed them to embrace their bodies, confront fear, and reconfigure their sense of belonging.

What this process ultimately revealed is that expression in feminist SRHR work is multimodal and never complete. Translation, in particular, stood as a double-edged practice: it allowed voices to travel across Arabic, English, and visual registers, yet it also exposed the untranslatable, the silences, ruptures, and embodied intensities that cannot be carried intact across borders of language.

To honor this means resisting the temptation to smooth over fractures, instead preserving opacity, affect, and partiality as ethical choices. Community, too, emerged as central. Safe and intimate collectives created the conditions for what had been silenced in isolation to surface, and belonging was as transformative as the act of expression itself. Editing and safety were inseparable from this process: curation was never a neutral task but a feminist practice of care, balancing fidelity to participants' voices with protection from risk. Vulnerability was not a flaw of the process but its very method, shaping the work as a field of partial openings, unfinished disclosures, and fragile strength.

Participants themselves were clear in their feedback that these workshops should not remain isolated events but become sustained spaces of expression. In surveys, feedback sessions, and letters to future participants, they repeatedly emphasized the need for more time, more continuity, and more opportunities to write, draw, and simply be. Many spoke of the workshops as a rare chance to articulate silenced parts of themselves, and urged that similar spaces be

expanded and multiplied. The call was not only for technical training in writing or art, but for safe feminist spaces where vulnerability is possible, where community can form, and where bodies can express themselves beyond censorship and judgment. What participants asked for, ultimately, was continuity: spaces where creative expression could accompany them not just for four days, but as part of their longer journey of living with and through their bodies.

The question of whether the digital world offers more liberating possibilities than physical spaces proved harder to answer within the scope of this project. To fully address it, we would have needed a systematic audience analysis to understand how digital readers engaged with the published works in comparison to the embodied experiences of workshops. What our findings do reveal, however, is that both spaces are necessary and mutually sustaining. Digital platforms enabled anonymity, distance, and safety, while physical workshops nurtured intimacy, recognition, and the affective ties that made expression possible. Rather than privileging one over the other, what emerged is the importance of their interplay: liberation lies not in digital or physical alone, but in the circulation between them, where texts and images can travel, be witnessed, and gain new resonances.

From these insights, a set of learnings for future practice emerges. Multilinguality and non-translation must be sustained, treating what is untranslatable as productive friction rather than failure. Visual practices such as collage should be integrated as central modes of feminist expression, not as supplements. Hybrid formats that balance digital safety with embodied intimacy should be expanded. Editorial frameworks must be explicitly feminist, treating editing as protection rather than correction. Reflexivity and care should be embedded in all stages, making reflection part of research rather than an afterthought. Most importantly, creative feminist work on SRHR should be rooted in continuity and community, ensuring that workshops are not isolated events but part of broader networks of solidarity that extend the archive.

AJSADOUNA-أجسادنا has shown that speaking the body in contexts of stigma, silence, and regulation is never straightforward. It requires disrupting normative frameworks, holding silence alongside speech, and creating spaces where fragments, ruptures, and affects can exist without being forced into coherence. The contribution of this project lies not in producing finished

narratives but in cultivating conditions where opacity and multiplicity can thrive. Future feminist work in SRHR should therefore not aim to resolve the problem of expression but to keep open the spaces where bodies can continue to speak, refuse, rupture, and reimagine themselves.

Did we succeed, I wonder! Perhaps this was never the right question. Success implies an endpoint, a resolution, a measure that this work was never meant to provide. What *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا offered instead was an opening: a set of encounters where silenced bodies could begin to write, draw, imagine, and sometimes refuse. To speak or to remain silent, to fragment or to collage, to stay in metaphor or break into laughter, these are not failures but forms of doing. And yet, we must admit that we continue to work with tools and frameworks shaped by patriarchal academia and institutional systems, even as we bend them toward feminist and queer purposes. Writing, theorizing, archiving all remain entangled with legacies of exclusion. What matters is that we are always in discovery, always in the unfinished.

In this sense, the project lives not in its outputs but in its gestures toward what José Esteban Muñoz calls *queer futurity*: the horizon of what is not yet here, but is already glimpsed in fragments, intimacies, and collective longings. *AJSADOUNA*-أجسادنا was never about arriving, but about moving toward futures where the body can continue to imagine itself otherwise.

Annexes are available upon request. If you are a researcher, organization, or donor interested in exploring this study in greater depth or accessing its data sources, please contact us at hello@intersection-leb.org. Kindly include the purpose and intended use of your request. Our team will be glad to provide additional information and respond to any questions you may have.