A Hermeneutical and Semiotic Reading of Little Amal:
A Walk through Brex-e-Lit

Heba Mohamed Abdelaziz and May Samir El-Falaky

Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Egypt

Abstract: This study explores the pervasive socio-political implications of the refugee crisis in the language and narrative structure of the interactive fiction of *Little Amal: The Walk*. Hermeneutics and semiotic compositional elements contribute to the on-going meaningful interaction between the interlocutors within the context of the successive narrations in the story. In this paper, we investigate the multimodal semiotic elements in conjunction with the cultural and political implications intended. The study contributes to interactive fiction through the modelled methodological framework. Using the Four-Legged Stool hermeneutical approach (Mburu 2019) and a hybrid of two approaches, namely, Visual Grammar (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006) and Semiotic Elements (Machin and Laden 2018), the study pursues approaching Little Amal to delve into its hidden implications. The study adapts Mburu's approach to become a three-legged stool, where the language and the narrative structures support the cultural, theological, and biblical interpretation of the narrative, hence the political implication in any literary text, especially the interactive ones. The study results confirm that Britain invades both 'first- and third-world' cultures, linking it to Brexit and British superiority over the world. *The Walk*, reveals how Brexit can be viewed as a British nostalgia for the lost empire.

Keywords: Brexit, electronic literature, interactive storybook, mise-en-scène, refugee crisis, semiotics

Introduction

Charity Good Chance and War Horse Handspring Puppet Company collaborated to create a three-metre tall, refugee puppet called Little Amal to support the refugee crisis. Through her journey, Amal, a female name that means 'hopes' آمال , moves across Europe searching for both her mother and a new life after leaving Syria following a military attack. The journey is transformed into a British-made interactive storybook (IS), developed by The Alchemy Immersive Ltd, through which the reader accompanies Amal through her migratory road over seven countries from Syria to the United Kingdom (UK), experiences difficulties and sees whether there are 'hopes', throughout her journey. Through this IS, we aim to trace Amal's journey from a different perspective and reveal how *The Walk* is a political representation of the refugee crisis.

　　Little Amal: The Walk (*LATW*) is an IS of Amal, a nine-year-old refugee Syrian girl who travelled 8,000 km from the Syrian-Turkey border to the UK traversing eight European countries. Amal was welcomed at every stop; people

seemingly support refugees and celebrate cultural diversity. However, there might be a hidden agenda behind the journey. Although *LATW* discusses the Syrian refugee crisis, it can be viewed as Western not Arab electronic literature (E-lit).

Literature and interactivity

Electronic literature is a broad discipline that includes creative productions, one of which is interactive fiction (Bizzocchi 2021: 105), which is the essence of this study. Stefans (2017) defines E-lit from the perspective of interactivity. In interactive fiction (IF), the reader becomes the hero of the story with minimum input and minimal interference. As a major genre of entertainment, IF is based on a set of algorithmic instructions that, when followed, lead to certain outcomes. In this sense, "An algorithm is clearly more than inert matter… but rather has some degree of agency" (Stefans 2017:197).

E-lit or digital narratives (Skains 2010: 97) are developing rapidly and authors are becoming more interested in bridging the gap between printed literary texts and digitally animated works, which increase at the expense of verbal language (Rosario, Meza and Grimaldi 2021: 18). Rosario et al. (2021: 20) culturally analysed the Latin American E-lit discourse concentrating on the discursive practices of its values, belief objects, etc. According to Rosario et al., such E-lit elements are not only authorial stylistic devices, rather cross-cultural representations reflected in E-lit.

This literary genre is of focal interest. E-lit databases are considered for preserving such visual aesthetics and avoiding their obsolescence (van de Ven and Ackermans 2019). Van de Ven and Ackermans examine how visual aesthetics and pictorial and cinematographic culture (Skains 2010) disseminated in E-lit works.

Electronic literature in the Arab culture commenced at the beginning of the third millennium "…specifically after the Jordanian writer Muhammad Sanajilah published the first Arabic novel in the genre of Interactive Fiction titled Zilal al-Wahed (One's Own Shadows) in 2001" (Rosario et al. 2021:22). However, according to Rosario et al., such genre does not progress as quickly in the Arab world as it does in the Western world.

Being oriented towards Chinese culture and the implication of E-lit as a literary genre, Zhang (2018: 1) examined the Chinese production of E-lit and the influence of its electronic tools, such as computers and smartphones. Zhang (2018: 2) focused on China's E-lit, which is "…becoming a symbol of the image of Chinese culture to the outside world, and a way of exporting Chinese foreign culture".

Bizzocchi infers the differences between ambient video arts and E-lit spotting light because the former "…must never require your attention…reward your attention with visual, [and]… must continue to provide visual pleasure after repeated viewing" (Bizzocchi 2021:108). E-lit, however, recalls the narrative experiences "…which could include plot, character exposition, story world creation, empathic emotion, or combinations of these and other narrative elements" (Bizzocchi 2021:106).

Migration, refugees, and Britain

Ryan refers to immigrants from the Middle East, stating that "…the Middle East has seen significantly higher labor migration" (2018: 43). Although the call for 'multiculturalism' grows louder, this political ideology is "designed to let all cultures and faiths live alongside one another" (Ryan 2018: 42). This is claimed to threaten nationalism and the economic welfare of some British citizens. Immigration was challenged owing to the security threat that it posed in the UK. According to Ryan, this was primarily why Brexit was called for. Kolpinskaya and Fox (2021: 3) assured Brexit voting by the older working-class citizens for fear of the effect of the competitive workers of immigrants on their jobs and the influence of their ethnicity and cultural values and practices. In this sense, the UK citizens should control these variables in the age of globalisation and should be obliged to regain control over its borders. This results from the belief that Islamic extremism leads to fear of migrants, especially refugees, and therefore, it is safer not to accept migrants. This raises a public debate that "not all migrants are Muslim, and only a tiny minority of Muslims have ever committed any such acts" (Ryan 2018:159). Synder also believes that immigrants threaten security:

> Migrants have become simultaneously both invisible – in that individuals are often hidden in high-fenced camps and detention centres and/or practice "strategic invisibility" to evade deportation – and hypervisible – presented by the media in hyperbolic language as an undifferentiated mass threatening our way of life, resources and security. (Snyder 2018:99)

Data and methodology

LATW is a digital narrative that was transformed into an application on both Google and App Store, which are digital platforms. The interactive story is downloaded and scenes are snapshot into frames. The story is characterised by its digital interaction between the author, fiction, and the reader who is "…now accustomed to networked, hypertext environments" (Skains 2010:109).

The study adopts Mburu's African Four-Legged Stool (FLS) hermeneutical approach (2019), which aims to better understand the Bible and reread it from four interrelated perspectives: Parallel to the African, Theological, Literary, and Historical Contexts. Mburu compares these perspectives to a stool, a common African object. Mburu (2019: 107) believes that just as the well-balanced stool supports our body, in the literary field, the hermeneutical tools help in interpreting the biblical text. If any leg is missing, the stool will fail to carry our weight. Similarly, any missing hermeneutical tool will hinder the reader from interpreting the text.

Mburu is not the first to set the dimensions through which the Bible is approached. West (1991:131) introduced three main hermeneutical approaches: historical-critical, literary, and contextual approaches, which are similar to Mburu's approaches. The difference is that the West introduces only three tools.

However, the idea of using FLS is not confined to literature; it extends to the fields of politics and marketing. McKnight (2013) uses a three-legged stool

approach to illustrate how the three elements of business, government, and civil society aid the democratic process; "Like a milking stool, society becomes dysfunctional if any leg is short or weak. The current argument is that civil society is the short or weak leg and thus our societal disarray" (McKnight 2013:2). McKnight, however, calls for the presence of a fourth leg to build a well-balanced society.

The FLS approach is employed to explore the different contexts of this silent IS. Using Mburu's approach requires analysing *LATW* not in relation to the Bible in the African context but in a wider (non) European context. Thus, this IF focuses on Britishers and Syrian refugees, as well as their association with the Brexit phenomenon.

Using the FLS hermeneutical approach (Mburu 2019) and a hybrid of two approaches, namely Visual Grammar (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006) and Semiotic Elements (Machin and Laden 2018), the study approaches the visual elements of the 'mise-en-scène', or what is placed on the cinematic stage as they are the key elements of the development of the plot and its complication. Furthermore, these elements are studied in relation to the literary and linguistic elements of *LATW* by exploring its FLS: religious, theological, literary, historical, and cultural contexts.

The journey begins

The storybook of *LATW* is based on an interactivity that maintains a means of interaction between the audience and the performance. In this IS, the viewer is a secondary character who interferes, through interactivity, to help Amal in her movements. The literary techniques, visual aesthetics, and cinematic effects are used to ascribe this narrative to the refugee crisis and the Brexit phenomenon. Mburu (2019: 15) claims that it is imperative to delve deep into the world of the biblical text in an interpretive process. In this case, however, we scrutinized our interactive fiction to let the text speak for itself. It is through both the silent narrator and the production of the visual arts and interactivity that the reader is introduced to the cultural, historical, literary, religious, and theological contexts of *LATW*. That is how the reader relates them to Brexit and the refugee crisis.

The socio-political, historical, and cultural contexts of *LATW* emerge at the beginning. The mise-en-scène is considerably utilised to serve the plot. The production designer utilises a set of visual arts in front of the camera in the opening. For instance, Chapter One commences with the camera shooting a vertical long shot of a map. The visual representation depicts the geopolitical stances between the Arab region and Europe. The barricade at the left corner of the chapter opening is larger or equal in size to Syria, which mirrors the country's political status. While the chapter is titled 'Home', it is noticed that Amal stands in one of the European countries in a silhouette.

Chapter One Scene 1 (S1) opens with a view of the shooting location, an open landscape with numerous elements that amplify the dominant mood of serenity. The camera angle captures a horizontal long shot of the heroine swinging, orienting the reader to her peaceful state. The producer employs a specific childish hairstyle to reveal Amal's age, as long hair in the Arab culture is a sign of innocence

and purity. Her loose hair moves back and forth, projecting a 'circumstance' of her inner 'manner' to her peace, freedom, and tranquillity. With the help of the user interactant (actor) and hand-shaped cursor, she is an active actor controlling the swing speed and the frequency of performing this action. As a protagonist individualised with her face directed to the viewers, Amal is a 'senser' expressing her feelings, requesting them to share them. This draws the viewer's unexpectedness of the coming events, especially when the chapter opens with a barricade and utilises light technique to create a silhouette. Not long until the camera angle is positioned higher using a long shot picturing the lonely character on a deserted ground on her swing. Again, the light develops the scene using a shadow of a military aeroplane covering her means (circumstance of instrument) of entertainment and peace; the swing. In S1-2 and S1-3, the land's yellow colour and hues produce the mood of the desertedness of the Syrian land contrasted to the gloominess of the blue-grey graded colour modulation in the preceding S1-1 and the following S2-1.

Visualising the scene of the military aeroplanes, the Syrian land and all related incidents are similar to Mburu's view concerning the Bible. She believes that to decolonise the Bible, it needs to be read from an African perspective. Here, to decolonise *LATW*, it needs to be read from an Arab perspective.
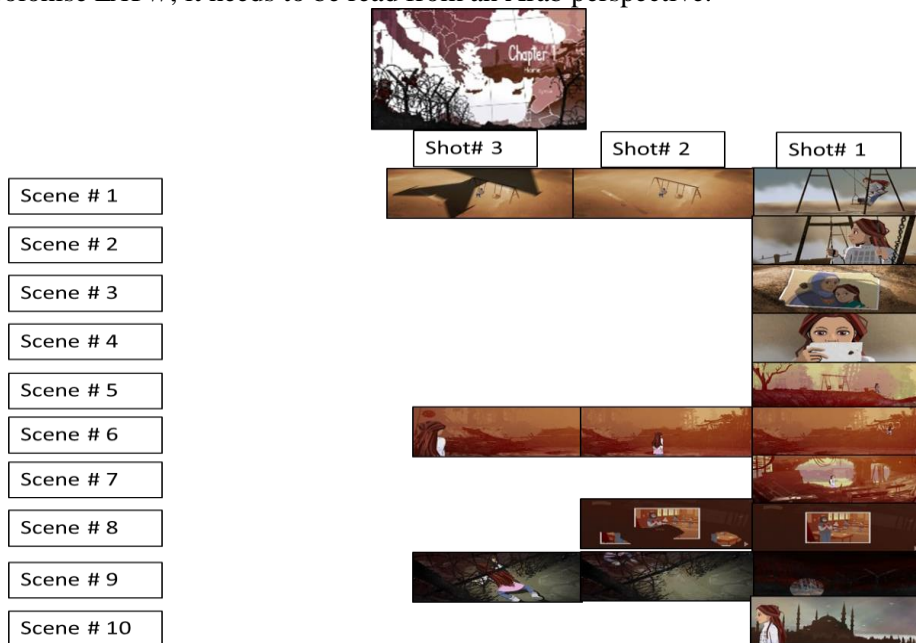

Figure 1. Screenshot 1 – Chapter 1 Frames

According to Mburu (2019:124), "features such as plot, setting and characterization play a major role in communicating meaning". However, there are other literary devices that should be taken into consideration, such as imagery and symbolism. In the coming analysis, all these crucial elements are discussed in detail.

Marking the beginning of the narrative complication, the camera moves to a new scene. With a medium shot, the protagonist moves her head away from the viewers and looks at another long-shot swing, which, in silhouette, can easily be assimilated to a two-wing plane from a long distance towards her. This camera angle reflects scenic depth, and the proximity to the swing is marked by how she grips it, which reflects how the producer views Amal's psychological relationship with the swing as a means of peace and innocence. The character stops swinging, which is marked by her standstill hair. Identified by Amal's religious culture, the hair symbolises freedom and beauty marking Amal's playful actions.

S3-1 depicts a side-torn image of the girl and her mother. Unlike little Amal, her mother is veiled, marking the religious and cultural identity of this iconic character. Both characters are gazing at the viewer, drawing their sympathy and help. The light technique is utilised by showing Amal's shadow covering the image to reflect the sadness for her well-acknowledged loss. This is different from the shades covering the playground in S1-3, which reflect dejection and an unknown fate.

In the following scene, the close shot accentuates the tears in Amal's eyes and the torn photo of her mother emphasizes a missing or hurt character. In S5-1, the empty swing indexes a turn of events. The producer employs light to throw shades on the ruins in a consecutive set of grounding scenes while the actress moves monotonously through wrecks and tanks in a medium shot and horizontal angle, which discloses the proximity and the direct involvement between the protagonist and the ruins. The scene progresses with users via a hand-shaped cursor, helping Amal escape the wreckage. Only by choosing the right sloping spot can Amal climb the hill to explore her neighbourhood destiny. The first scene directly after the military attack is depicting her school.

With a long shot front angle, Amal is centred looking at the school ruins, marking the loss of her life, education, and her prospective future. The school's portrayal as located high on the cliff and the other land as being geographically lower asserts the total loss of the country. With the user's interactive help in recompiling the torn image, Amal remembers her past life before her homeland's destruction. The restored image comprises a veiled teacher gazing at the viewer that links them both. The image includes students of Amal's age gazing at the viewer, expressing happiness and peace with their life before the school's destruction.

The producer employs costumes to create a cinematic effect in relation to the surrounding cultural and psychological states. In terms of Barthes' (2004: 41) description of fashion as grammar, clothing plays an indicative role in reflecting the character's cultural and religious identity; clothing marks cultural variables. Religion and conservative stances are marked by the veil worn by both the mother and the teacher. The former represents Amal's past childhood life while the latter represents her future. The top and bottom clothing reflect the wearer's age. With a medium shot presented, we can identify the mother wearing a wide top blouse, the teacher wearing a tight blouse and trousers, and Amal wearing a pair of trousers covered by a mini skirt, which all attest both their conservative attitude and modernity. Embracing each other in the photo, Amal and her mother are linked with

the necklace, a means joining them both physically and psychologically as will be seen in Chapter Two.

Although the background is dim, the light inside the school in ruins is completely dark, projecting the impossibility of reconstruction. The scene marks an end to an era. Amal has to leave. Dipped in darkness, S9-1 requests the user's interaction to help Amal to find a spot in the barricades to cross the Syrian border. A high-angle camera movement depicts the power of the tyrant's attacks and supremacy and the protagonist's inferiority and powerlessness. Amal crawls on the ground, projecting complete submissiveness to the unexpected future. The chapter closes with a two-fold iconic scene of a mosque in silhouette. This scene may indicate cross-border migration from Syria to Europe through Turkey that is symbolised by a mosque, which resembles many other mosques there. On the other fold, the horizontal medium shot of Amal, whose size is portrayed as nearly equal to that of the faraway mosque, symbolises her decision of swaying away from any religious boundaries that link her to her religious, geographical, and political roots.

From Chapter One till the end, the protagonist moves from the right to the left side of the screen, marking her heading to the West. This chapter marks a socio-cultural, geo-political, and religious orientation of the narrative and pinpoints the climax. Chapter One presents Amal's tough and conflicting psychological state. Thus, she took her decision to escape leaving behind her child-life, symbolised by the swing (marking the end of the past peace and tranquillity); education, symbolised by the ruined school (marking the end of the prospective future); and religion, symbolised by the mosque (marking the distortion of her spiritual emotive). Through these scenes and the forthcoming ones, we apply Mburu's view of the importance of identifying "our own context and discover the points of contact between it and the biblical context" (Mburu 2019:114). However, our context is the Arab one and our view of the West and Brexit; the other context is that of the IS and how it represents the Arab and the Western view of Brexit and the refugee crisis.

Starting from Chapter Two, Amal's psychological state is viewed as "a terminal loss ... transformed so easily into a potent and, even enriching, motif of modern culture" (Saïd 2012:173). Tracing Amal throughout her journey reveals how her exilic state is changing. In Chapter Two, the reader can sail with Amal through her journey of exile across Europe.
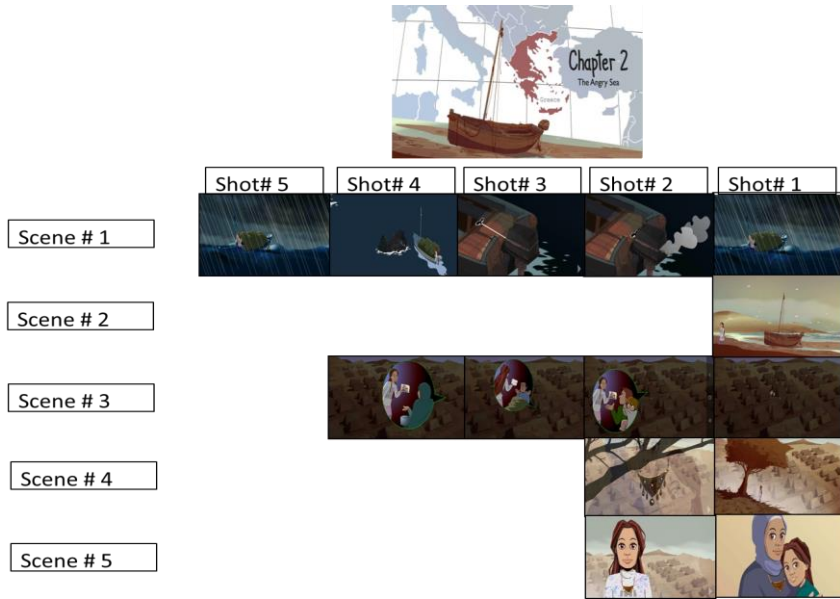
Figure 2. Screenshot 2 – Chapter 2 Frames

The chapter opens with Amal sailing towards Greece. Lighting and colour saturation reflect melancholy and despair. The scale between the blueness of the sea and the greyness of the sky creates an emotive modulation. S1-1 marks the beginning of obstacles to the unknown. Amal is able to overcome these obstacles through the user's interactivity, by using a left/right arrow to avoid the rocks. For Amal to resume her journey, the user has to interfere to fix the engine. Barring the close shots of the engine, Scene 1 is constructed using a long shot with a high camera angle, echoing extreme distance between the viewers and the character. In S2-1, the protagonist reaches the land surviving the furious sea.

The spatio-temporal perspective, as in Habjan (2021: 351), is visually represented by Amal who heads to the West (left of the screen at almost sunset). It is further characterized by the night time at the refugee camp. With a high angle marking the powerlessness of the refugees, the tents are organised in collective rows. Amal and the refugees perform the verbal processes, manifested by the speech bubble through which Amal is visually asking them about the woman in the image. The refugees' helplessness is categorised according to their socio-economic and gender differences. In S3-2, a refugee is portrayed as having a child latched to him on his back. In S3-3, refugee inferiority is depicted by lying on a bed and, in S3-4, only the woman's back was shot, leaving no trace of her identity. This reflects the author's aspiration to capture refugees across the spectrum of gender, ages, and economic statuses.

The camera angle moves higher and the spatial distance increases simultaneously between Amal and the viewers as well as between Amal and the refugees. In S4-1, the protagonist performs a mental action of looking up at the tree.

The necklace, which Amal tries to reach, is spatially positioned at a distance. The necklace is a female accessory signifying a grammatical implication (Barthes 2004: 41). The necklace's symbolic meaning is attributive and its close up in S4-2 signifies both psychological and physical attachment to Amal's mother. As a part of costume utilisation, the connotation of the necklace is gendered; it marks a woman's beauty and freedom that exist only in Amal's memory. Through the user's interactivity, Amal restores her mother's necklace by collecting the scattered gems from the tree. This mission is expressed as the camera moved to a medium shot along with Amal's gaze, forming a vector connecting her with the viewer and signalling a thanking gesture in S5-2. Amal and the necklace represent one construct that is foregrounded against the refugee camps at a distance from her. This signifies her refusal to be part of this submissiveness and demonstrates her persistence to resume her journey.

Saïd (2012) views the state of exile as "while it is an actual condition, exile is also for my purpose a metaphorical condition" (Saïd 2012:39). Saïd's view is revealed in Chapter Three, titled 'Hunger', which opens with an arduous material process performed by a little girl. The dark colours and the blue-grey hue scale reflect Amal's psychological exile as well as sadness and wilderness, accompanied by walking along the harsh nature and the frozen mountains.
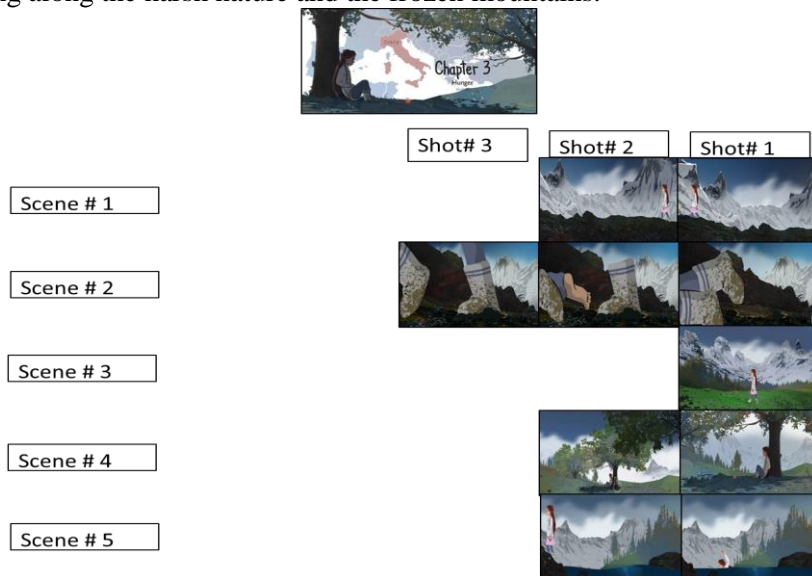

Figure 3. Screenshot 3 – Chapter 3 Frames

In Scene 1, the producer divides each frame: a third is in black colour and the remainder in white. This symbolises that Amal is cold and is shivering. The location has gigantic mountains in the background. The setting's props comprise nature, which creates a central meaning of loss and inferiority. Either on a gloomy day or at night, the scene uses dark lighting to construct the setting. While Amal walks along, she crumbles into the muddy ground. In S2-1, the close-up to the little girl's

shoes intensifies her helplessness. The power of the smash forces her to take off her shoes. To stand up and resume her journey, the user has to interact to help her put her shoes on. The scene changes when the greenery increases and so does the brightness of the image. Amal finds a tree, but the user has to shake it so that the apples can fall and Amal can eat some. The horizontal camera angle zooms out, mapping the tree in a long shot and dividing the scene into two halves. Moving towards the east helps Amal overcome her hunger and get ready for the next phase by swimming to cross the border to Switzerland. This chapter ends with Amal stepping on high land to get into Switzerland.

Chapter Four begins with Amal reaching Switzerland; a transitional scene with the verbalisation of 'Don't look down' takes place as Switzerland is marked on the map. Like other aspects of the mise-en-scène, verbal-linguistic forms create an interactive spectrum of interacting reality. The imperative form 'Don't look down' represents more than the geographical reference of lower land. It instructs the girl to not focus on any degenerating past prompting her to proceed with the journey. Unlike the previous chapters, this one is beautified with green landscapes. However, to experience that beauty, Amal, through the user, has to cross a broken bridge that serves as a vector linking the past to the future. The girl digs into her identity by inserting a block into the wall with her name engraved to leave her trace. Amal is captured in S3 from a lower angle in a long shot that shows her going farther from the viewers' attention.
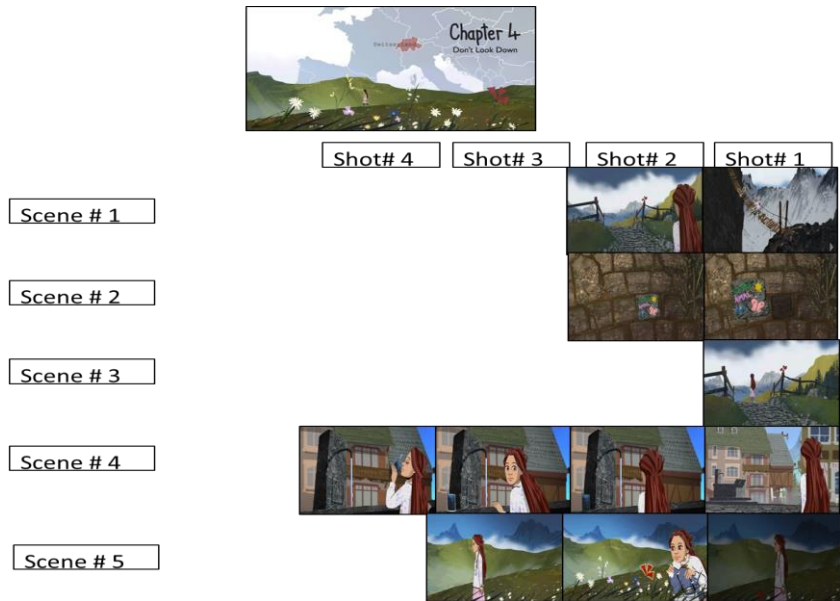

Figure 4. Screenshot 4 – Chapter 4 Frames

In S4-1, Amal looks at a water faucet performing a material process of walking towards it. Through the user's interactivity, she picks the can and drinks to quench her thirst. In a medium shot, Amal comes closer to the viewer and seeks

sympathy. The flower in S5-2 symbolises her feminine attribute and her insistence to dissolve her distress. Moving to the west, Amal crosses the borders again.

Chapter Five shows how, according to Saïd, the person's exilic state creates a state of double consciousness (Saïd 2012: 44). As an exilic person, little Amal cannot push the thought of her country out of her memory; her present in Europe and her past in Syria are inseparable. This is represented by delving into the narrative's complication. This chapter, titled 'Dreams', witnesses Amal in Germany, and traces her mother's sleep and dream. The chapter's title reflects the author's intention to portray Germany as the land of dreams. This appears as the chapter transitions, where Amal is in silhouette looking from top to bottom at Italy and the rest of the map. The top to bottom view reflects the countries' hierarchy, whether geographical or socio-economic hierarchy. The night-time temporal reference exhibits her weariness and tiredness, but she is persistent to achieve her dream of success.
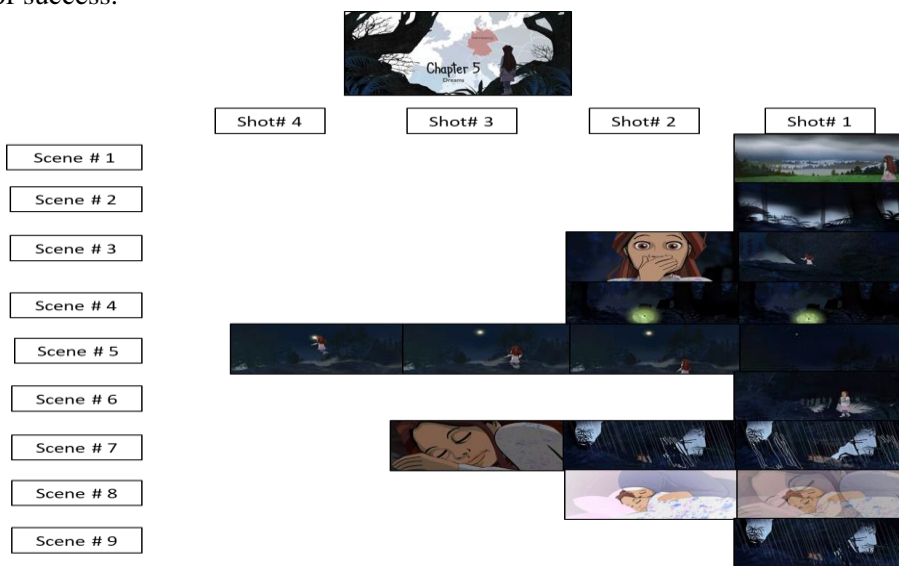

Figure 5. Screenshot 5 – Chapter 5 Frames

The wolves wandering the wild are running quickly, symbolising hardships. S3-1 is a long shot that swiftly shifts to a close-up to the girl's face where her eye gaze asks for help. The user has to intervene and use this light insect to soothe her fear by spotting the light on the furry animals, the rabbit, and the squirrel before the scene changes. In S4-1, the core visual element is a high star, a symbol of dream. Amal is depicted flying, trying to catch the star that symbolises a dream to live for and to resume her journey. With a wide angle in S6 and with the user's help, she can sleep in a wooden shelter. The camera zooms in to reach a close-up to change the scene in a transitional fade-in blend of her dream of her mother kissing her while

she was in her homeland. The last scene in this chapter is shot in a medium shot to prepare the viewer for the following phase in her journey.

Chapter Six opens with a transition. France is spotted on the map and the Eiffel Tower is centralised in a long shot where everything else is in silhouette. In S1-1, although the tower is in a long shot, unlike in the previous chapters, Amal is smaller in size. The difference in size reflects power relations and the socio-political power of France. As Amal performs the same action of walking to the left of the screen, the camera moves to a new scene. A zoom-in occurs and a close-up to the feet (instrument of walking) is focused on. On the ground, Amal sees her reflection in the water. She treads her feet into the water, which signify the refusal and unacceptance of the self.
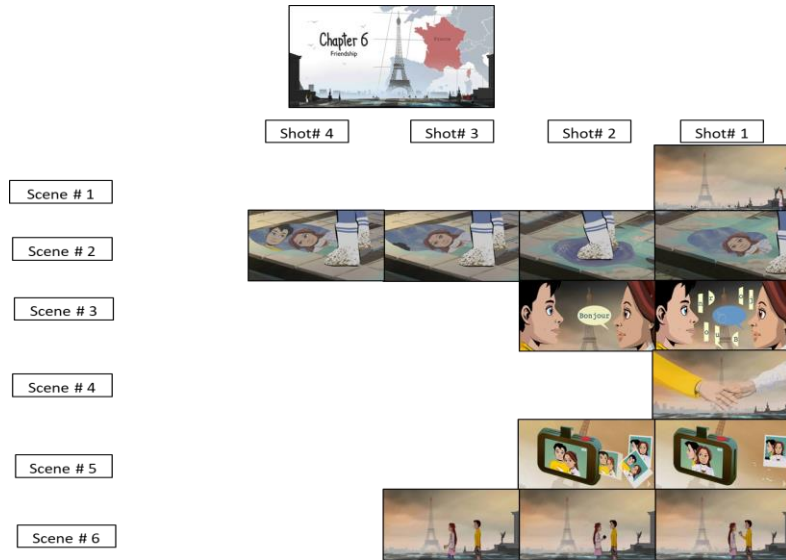

Figure 6. Screenshot 6 – Chapter 6 Frames

Developing into S2-3, a new reflection appears of a French boy of Amal's age. The complete faces of two characters appear from a high camera angle to the bottom on the ground. The scene moves to S3-1, where the front angle highlights the face with a speech bubble. Again, with the help of the user, the French greeting phrase 'Bon jour' is used to get those from two different cultures to communicate. Amal initiates the greeting and, in S4-1, the two shake hands as a reaction. An index of communication and getting along appears through camera photos in S5-1 and S-2, which marks their friendship. In the closing scene, the French boy performs the act of giving the girl the photos, which she accepts, marking the mutual intercultural acceptance of the Other. Amal moves to the left side of the screen to complete her journey. This takes us to Mburu's view of language. She believes that it is important to pay attention to grammar and syntax. In *LATW*, it is more of body language rather than words, and these gestures successfully conveyed the message.

The last chapter (Chapter Seven) commences with a transition; the UK is marked on the map where the international water borders with France are marked, and Amal is walking into the country. In S1-1, Amal is aboard a boat to cross the border to the UK, but she has to swim to the shore.

The scene reflects Amal's persistence and the strength needed for this act. Unlike the transition of the chapter, S2-5 is brighter, and this defines new life. After crossing the sea, Amal has to cut through the green landscape and overcome the cold she is feeling. Through the user's interactivity, a vest is taken off a scarecrow and given to her . Then comes the beginning of the resolution when Amal enters Britain in a scene highlighting the British different viewpoints concerning migration, which prompts the re-construal of the refugee issue worldwide.

The last scene, along with the diversity in opinions regarding immigrants and refugees, can be explained through Ryan's view. According to Ryan (2018), the issue of immigration challenged the 'nation state', thus causing nationalism to become a critical ethnopolitical threat of all times. This is ascribed to language, racial, cultural, and religious homogeneity. Muslim immigrants represent part of this dilemma; it is expected that by 2066, Muslims will outnumber the rest of the population, leading to a 'white flight' as British people will desert areas inhabited by immigrants (Ryan 2018: 39).
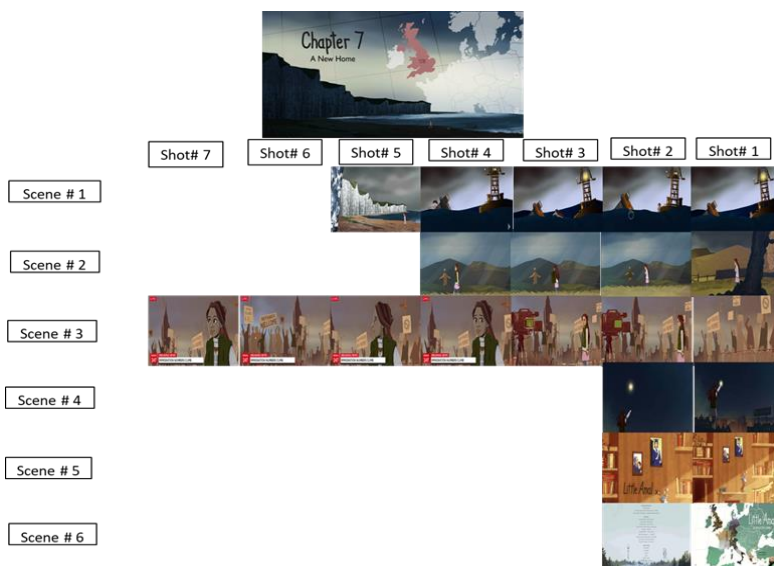

Figure 7. Screenshot 7 – Chapter 7 Frames

The refugee debate is mirrored in S3, wherein Amal meets people from two different ideological stances. The social groups attacking the presence of refugees are categorised by verbal labels held up with non-acceptance signs. The scene represents protesters' political stance against refugees; Amal looks at the viewer in S3-4, requesting help and sympathy. She then turns her head to the other group that

welcomes her in the UK. The medium shot in the whole scene with the front angle enables us to capture the scene, allowing the viewer to choose which camp to accept. The verbalisation of the news bar in 'migration number climbs' is nominalised. The nominalisation of 'migration' impersonalises the viewers' decision to offer the freedom of the selection of their ideological stance regarding the refugee issue.

S3 reveals the division within European society and highlights the Brexit/not-to-Brexit battle. It is a battle between the British economy and immigration (Girma 2018; Glencross 2016). Glencross (2016: 67) linked Brexit to immigration, stating that the Conservative Party took the Leave camp to control this phenomenon. According to Glencross, the UK was divided into the Remain/Leave camps, where the Remain camp opted for economic privileges while the Leave camp opted for greater immigration control. Glencross regarded the latter as a political jeopardy to their identity, security, national sovereignty, democracy, and economy (Smith & Woodhead 2018), which the UK lost control of (Glencross 2016:67).

This division in English society points to the opposing opinions on refugees, and their classification as either good or bad: '' 'Good' refugees are those that stay in camps and wait to be processed…. By contrast 'bad' refugees are those that do not wait in the conditions of the camps but attempt to help themselves…." (Ryan 2018:48-9).

Smith and Woodhead (2018: 13) associate Brexit with religion and voters' identity, which influenced the voters' choices in the UK's 2016 referendum. Accordingly, religion here refers to "the communities (such as Anglicans or Jews) and institutions (such as churches or mosques) that people identify with' (Kolpinskaya & Fox 2021:18). According to Kolpinskaya and Fox (2021: 18), religion plays a complex role in influencing political attitudes. Similarly, Smith and Woodhead (2018: 13) highlight the importance of the role of Christianity in the vote for Brexit. They point out that Anglicans decisively took the Leave camp and that "[their] effect remains even when all other factors are controlled for. Anglicans in England had a serious impact on the Referendum result" (Smith and Woodhead 2018:5). The reason for the Anglican Brexit is ascribed to cultural and ethnic pride even when they denied its relation to their Christianity. This, according to Smith and Woodhead (2018: 12), affected negatively the attitudes towards immigration. The political camps sought to "…try to "weaponise" Christianity" (Kolpinskaya and Fox 2021:55), raising the fear of the Turkish Islamic accession. However, this was resisted by urging religious institutions, the Catholic Church, the Muslim Council of Britain, and the Movement for Reform of Judaism, to convince voters to remain (Kolpinskaya & Fox 2021: 55).

The final scene in *LATW* is significant in terms of tackling the Brexit phenomenon, its theological context, and its relation to religion. According to Mburu (2019: 115), in the African context, the spiritual dimension of Africans' lives cannot be denied because Africans are religious and their spirituality is part of their interaction with life. This implies that in Africa, biblical hermeneutics and theological reflection cannot be separated, and that the Bible can be viewed as both

a literary text and a spiritual document. However, our interpretation should not move in a direction opposite to the theology conveyed through it (Mburu 2019:117). Mburu's view can be applied to any religion or ethnicity. Synder (2018: 94) believes that "…increasing flows of people across borders and political debate around immigration have left an imprint on theology more broadly….".

Reddie (2019) cites Rushie's (1982) opinion about anti-immigration discourse and the British reactions against Black and Asian migrants. His opinion is assimilated to the Brexit phenomenon and its relation to theological ideas. Reddie (2019: 14) asserts that religious and theological ideas shaped the national identity. Reddie (2019: 14) further argues that we cannot understand Brexit unless we conceptualise "… the creation of empire and the process of colonialism beyond the shores of Britain". The assessment of the development of Brexit requires the "assessment of the colonial context in which Christianity in Britain is deeply located in the construction of Black bodies in faraway places from British shores" (Reddie 2019:14).

Linking *LATW* to religion and theology, Amal's immigration mirrors immigration in Islam; "Migration and movement are part of Islamic tradition.... The hijra or flight of the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina in 622" (Snyder 2018:98). Through immigration, Amal is searching for personal and psychological meaning. As a refugee, she does not only need money, food, and clothes but also support and dignity, which are religious orders. Being a human involves movement and migration in some way; therefore, it is no surprise that theologians have sought to emphasise the full humanity of contemporary migrants (Snyder 2018:99). Theologians engage with calls 'for love of neighbour and love of stranger' (Snyder 2018:104). They claim that seeking God's love is achieved through engagement with those who are different (Snyder 2018:107). As Mburu (2019: 116) states, "The Bible can be viewed as literature. However, … it is primarily a spiritual document". This is similar to our view of the Qur'an, which can be seen through Amal, who is spiritually attached to Prophet Mohammed, his suffering, and his harsh journey from one place to another for a certain cause. Thus, theological understanding guides our interpretation of the Qur'an.

As a climax resolution, Amal in S4-1 gets the star marking her dream and throws it up to the sky as an indication of choosing the UK as her final destination. Although Amal is a Muslim, categorised by many as a 'bad' refugee, she is accepted in Britain. This scene connotes that while history encompasses conflicts, they can be resolved through culture. The past can be used "with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope" (Fanon 1952:232). Amal finds a liminal zone between two cultures by choosing to stay in the UK. This concurs with Bhabha's view that transnational culture is always in a process of hybridity. Through her liminality, Amal represents the whole world. The UK is her dream come true and this is symbolised in S5-1, which is a photographic viewpoint of whether the framed photos on the wall are an indication of her success and achievement of her dreams of education. However, having the photo next to her mother but in a lower position than her graduation photo reveals that while she is attached to her culture, roots, and family, the two photos are not at the same level;

one has priority over the other. This is the implied meaning and the hidden agenda of Brexit, which is the British nostalgia for the lost empire and its superiority over non-western cultures.

Moreover, this photo of her mother, whom she did not find through her journey, reflects Amal's view of death, which Mburu tackled in her work. Mburu (2019:114) states that in traditional Africa, "death is not an end…. there is some similarity with the biblical world view…. in Africa, death is a continuation of life, and the dead are still in contact with the living".This is similar to what is seen in the Arab world and its view of death as presented in Islam. In *LATW*, Amal's mother is her source of encouragement and the reason she undertook this long journey of self-discovery. For Amal, death is a sense of continuation of life.

The chapter closes in S5 with Amal's name engraved on the wall. Amal has few hopes in life, one of which is getting a life that can be achieved only in the UK. Although all the previous chapters are shot in open locations, this scene is depicted in an indoor setting. The objects hung on the wall are illuminated by natural sunlight. The lighting here creates a mood of optimism and cheerfulness. The wall has a gradient of colour based on the distribution of light. The whole IS ends in a complete display of the map marking the route and a verbal imperative of donation is requested, highlighting European financial control and supremacy.

Discussion

The analysis shows how the four-legged stool is actually a three-legged one. Figure 8 depicts the relationship among the three hermeneutic elements. Furthermore, it shows how they are conjoined with the structural elements of language, narratives, and interactivity.
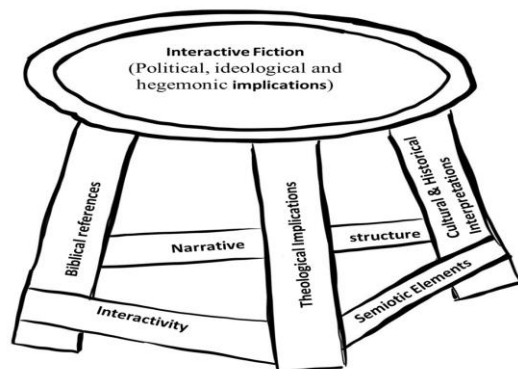

Figure 8. Three-legged Stool (Adapted from Mburu 2019)

To begin with, *LATW* is defined from the perspective of interactivity because the viewer can move Amal according to the pre-set decisions. *LATW* encompasses all narrative and cinematic elements, mise-en-scène. However, it is mostly a silent

narrative, barring some speech bubbles. This silence might be viewed as a "signifier of disempowerment … of the denial of a subject position and its appropriation" (Parry 1996:43). Discussing the silence issue as a disempowerment tool and relating it to culture necessitates exploring the author's mind. *LATW* is a British-made IS. Its silence can be viewed as a means of European oppression. However, this silence might be interpreted differently. It might not entail disempowerment or marginalisation, but resistance, as "a different kind of word to be listened to, perhaps a strategy of resistance" (Miller 1990:250). Although Amal, through her silence, is capable of coping with British life, this British-made character reflects European superiority in taking advantage of people's needs. This was why *LATW* was relaed to the Brexit phenomenon, which we view as asserting European superiority characteristic of British novels.

Through its cinematic elements woven into the narrative structure, *LATW* employs its silence by integrating music and sound effects. As Barthes (1977: 149) argues, music contributes to the aesthetics of any work. Barber (2021: 120) refers to the importance of sound in E-lit, where audiences are connected with the acoustic representations to guarantee engagement with the visual elements and the narrative to construct reality from the contextual literary imagination. Therefore, the relationship between sounds and E-lit is construed by the integration of both to expand the audiences' appreciation and sharing narratives, which, according to Barber (2021:120), is a "…cultural artifact and creative expression". In other words, "sound(s) might be considered, like reading and writing, a central element of contexts, forms, and practices of electronic literature" (Barber 2021:121). The sounds in *LATW* enable the viewer to feel every moment in her walk, e.g., the alerts of war, the sound of the sea, her sighs and cries, her footsteps, even her welcome by the Europeans. Cheerful music can be heard in the background.

The different contexts and the visual elements of *LATW* are explored using the two approaches of Visual Grammar and Semiotic Elements in Elizabeth Mburu's hermeneutical approach. Mburu's approach to analyse *LATW* and tracing its hidden meanings was chosen because of the close connection between Brexit and cultural beliefs. Brexit emerged from real or imaginary cultural beliefs on Europe and the UK. The referendum arguments were about culture and the cultural life of these islands. *LATW* addresses the cultural identity of both the Orient and the Occident—here, the European and the non-European—and how Amal struggles to assert her identity and remain attached to her roots. Although Amal is represented as seeking to find a middle ground between the two opposing worlds, what is created is a biased world, reflecting the dilemma of cultural identity. Her liminal position reflects her struggle to preserve her Syrian identity in the European world. However, we see the British side as superior that asserts complete control on her future. It is in Britain that Amal finds her true self, real support, and education, which reflect European supremacy. Relating *LATW* to Brexit emerges from the fact that Britain is presented as a separate entity from all European countries. It provides Amal with physical support, such as education and shelter; the rest can only provide psychological support. This separation between Britain and the other European Union (EU) countries corresponds to the British Exit from the EU. However, Brexit

does not only separate Britain from other European countries but also mirrors division within the society. By the end of *LATW*, citizens are presented with opposing opinions regarding the acceptance of refugees on their land. In analysing the IS of *LATW*, Mburu's cultural, historical, religious, and theological contexts are employed interchangeably not separately through Mburu's literary tool along with the two approaches of Visual Grammar and Semiotic Elements.

Mburu's first tool 'Parallels to the African context', aims at "identifying the theological and cultural contexts that are the primary contributors to our worldview as well as any relevant features of our social, political, and geographical contexts" (Mburu 2019: 111). This hermeneutical tool emphasises the context of both the text and the reader, as there is no accurate understanding of the text if there is no common ground between the two, which Ukachukwu (2003:25) refers to as 'mutual interests'. Similarly, Ukpong (2000:24) asserts, "the meaning of a text is a function of the interaction between the text in its context and the reader in his/her context". Thus, for a text to be read, there should be a connection between the text and the reader; otherwise, the text cannot be interpreted.

For a successful hermeneutical study, the first tool is essential in our assumption recognition process. It helps understand whether our assumptions are right or wrong and whether, when interpreting any text, our worldview works positively or negatively. In the biblical context, Mburu believes that it is crucial to "identify our context and discover the points of contact between it and the biblical context. In this way we can identify cues that will allow for a more accurate interpretation of the text through a process of comparing the two contexts and analyze the findings" (Mburu 2019:114) and explore the parallels revealed through the text.

Concerning historical and cultural context, the Bible or any type of literature is shaped by the surrounding conditions, whether political, economic, or socio-cultural conditions. Thus, in interpretation, these factors should not be ignored. This tool is closely connected to the idea of mutual interest introduced by Ukachukwu (2003: 25), which tackles the connection between the teller or the narrator and the recipient. Mburu (2019:133) states, "A crucial aim of our study of the Bible is to understand what the text meant in its original context. To do this, we must enter into the world of the author and allow the world to guide our understanding". To grasp the meaning behind the text, it is important to delve into the world of the narrator and to "grasp the perspective and mindset of the author" (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 2004:229). Additionally, to facilitate better understanding of a text, Mburu (2019: 132) mentions the areas that need to be examined. These include history and its wars, religious customs, cultural practices, politics, geography, and economics as well as examining studies from the perspective of purpose rather than content.

To view *LATW* as Brex-e-lit and analyse it through the selected approaches, it is important to bear in mind that it is not a written text. It is equally imperative to explore the mindset of the author, a British developer, The Alchemy. This study probes into the Brexit phenomenon. The study primarily focuses on its cultural aspect despite its political, cultural, economic, and administrative aspects. Brexit

is employed to unravel the historical and cultural context of *LATW* and its racial hidden agenda and to prove whether this IS succeeds in asserting the non-Western against the Western cultural identity.

Exploring *LATW* through Mburu's first tool will emphasise the context of both the text and the reader. Since the world is divided into Self and Other, the reader could be either of them. The two parties of this e-narrative are the Syrian refugees and the British people, or 'We' versus 'Other', or the 'Orient' versus the 'Occident' (Saïd 1977). According to Saïd (1977:110), "The West is the actor, the Orient is a passive reactor". In *LATW*, Amal is the Other, while Europe is the Self. The interaction between both parties is to interrogate Brexit's colonial entanglement. It emphasises Brexit and its racial hidden agenda to prove that superior identity matters to the British more than the economy.

Mburu (2019:119) describes the genre as "a vital interpretive key in the hermeneutical process" as each genre has a specific role in communication. For example, songs, folktales, and proverbs each play a certain role in communicating certain issues. However, "not only is genre recognizable in the expectations of the reader, but it also directs authors as they compose the text. It shapes or coerces writers so that their compositions can be grasped and communicated to the reader" (Mburu 2019:177). Mburu (2019: 123) gives an example of oral literature and the importance of the means of interaction between the audience and the performance. Each genre, whether oral or written, has a specific role and "in uncovering the meaning of any text, it is crucial that the genre, literary techniques, language and flow of the text guide the process [of identifying and analysing the literary context] and begin to confirm the meaning of the text" (Mburu 2019:128). Literary techniques vary according to the material presented, whether it is oral or written. In *LATW*, all the literary features are employed to analyse the historical, cultural, religious, and theological contexts.

Conclusion

This study contributes to interactive fiction and electronic literature. Using a constructed framework, the study provides a better understanding of the philosophical interpretation of the cultural and political perspective of refugees and immigrants within the political frame of Brexit. The study provides insights for future investigations. Applying Mburu's (2019) four-legged stool approach, the study analysed the semiotic resources utilised in the interactive fiction. The study suggests a modification to the approach into a three-legged stool, where language is used as a means of support to the steadiness of the base of the literary structure and its unity. Both verbal and semiotic elements represent the language that the creator of this electronic literary genre used.

Heba Mohamed Abdelaziz (PhD, Assistant Professor)
Department of Humanities
Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Cairo, Egypt
ORCID Number: 0000-0003-1403-2399
Email: hebaabdelaziz@aast.edu

May Samir El-Falaky (PhD, Associate Professor)
Department of Language and Translation
Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Cairo, Egypt
ORCID Number: 0000-0001-8974-5524
Email: maismf@aast.edu

References

Alchemy Immersive Ltd. (20 Oct, 2021) *Little Amal: The Interactive Journey* (version 1.2) [Mobile Application]**.** App Store.

Barber, John. (2021). 'Electronic literature and sound'. In James O'Sullivan (ed.), *Electronic Literature as Digital Humanities: Contexts, Forms, and Practices*, 115–123. New York: Bloomsbury.

Barthes, Ronald. (2004). *The Language of Fashion.* Trans. A.Stafford. UK**:** Bloomsbury.

Barthes, Ronald. (1977). *Image, Music, Text: Essays*. S. Heath Trans. UK: Fontana Press.

Bhabha, Homi. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. UK: Routledge.

Bizzocchi, Jim. (2021). 'Ambient art and electronic literature'. In James O'Sullivan (ed.), *Literature as Digital Humanities: Contexts, Forms, and Practices*, 105–115. New York: Bloomsbury Academic. Retrieved November 28, 2021, from http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781501363474.ch-008

Fanon, Frantz. (1952). *Black Skin, White Masks*. UK: Grove Press.

Di Rosario, Giovanna, **Nohelia Meza and Kerri Grimaldi.** (2021). 'The origins of electronic literature: An overview'. In James O'Sullivan (ed.), *Electronic Literature as Digital Humanities: Contexts, Forms, and Practices*, 9–26. New York: Bloomsbury Academic. Retrieved November 28, 2021, from http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781501363474.ch-001

Girma, Mohammed. (2018). 'Cultural identity in post-brexit Britain: A thought on narrative healing'. In Ben Ryan (ed.), *Fortress Britain? Ethical Approaches to Immigration Policy for a Post-Brexit Britain*, 114–133. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Glencross, Andrew. (2016). *Why the UK Voted for Brexit: David Cameron's Great Miscalculation*. UK: Palgrave.

Habjan, Jernej. (2021). 'Introduction', *Interventions*, 23(3): 349-355, DOI: 10.1080/1369801X.2021.1885472

Justin, Ukpong. (2000). 'Developments in biblical interpretation in Africa: historical and hermeneutical directions'. In Gerald West. Musa Dube (eds.), *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends,* 11-28. Boston: Brill Publications.

Klein, William, Craig Blomberg and Robbert Hubbard. (2004). *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. USA: Zondervan Academic.

Kolpinskaya, Ekaterina and Stuart Fox. (2021). *Religion and Euroscepticism in Brexit Britain*.UK: Routledge.

Kress, Gunther and Theo van Leeuwen. (1996). *Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design* (2006 2ⁿᵈ Ed.). London: Routledge.

Ledin, Per and David Machin. (2018). 'Doing critical discourse studies with multimodality: from metafunctions to materiality'. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 16: 1-17. 10.1080/17405904.2018.1468789

Manus, Ukachukwu Chris. (2003). *Intercultural Hermeneutics in Africa: Methods and Approaches*. UK: Acton Publishers.

Mburu, Elizabeth. (2019). *African Hermeneutics.* UK: Langham Global Library.

McKnight, John. (2013). *The Four-Legged Stool.* Washington: The Kettering Foundation.

Meza, Nohelia. (2021).'Visualizing networks of cultural discourses in Latin American electronic literature'. *Revista de Humanidades Digitales*, 6 (1): 101-121. http://revistas.uned.es/index.php/RHD/index

Miller, Christopher. (1990). *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa*. USA:Chicago UP.

Parry, Benita. (1996). 'Speech and silence in the Fictions of J.M.Coetzee'. In Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson (eds.), *Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee*, 37-65, UK: Macmillan Press.

Reddie, Anthoney. (2019). *Theologizing Brexit: A Liberationist and Postcolonial Critique*. London: Routledge.

Ryan, Ben. (2018). 'Conclusions'. In Ben Ryan (ed.) *Fortress Britain? Ethical Approaches to Immigration Policy for a Post-Brexit Britain*, 154–161, London: Jessica Kingsley.

Saïd, Edward. (1977). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin.

Saïd, Edward. (2012). *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays.* UK: Granta Books.

Skains, Lyle. (2010). 'The shifting author-reader dynamic: Online novel communities as a bridge from print to digital literature'. *Convergence*, 16 (1): 95–111. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856509347713

Smith, Greg and Linda Woodhead. (2018). 'Religion and brexit: Populism and the Church of England'. *Religion, State and Society'*, 46 (3): 206-223, DOI: 10.1080/09637494.2018.1483861

Snyder, Susanna. (2018). 'Biblical and theological perspectives on migration. In Ben Ryan (ed.), *Fortress Britain? Ethical Approaches to Immigration Policy for a Post-Brexit Britain*, 94–131, London: Jessica Kingsley.

Stefans, Brian. (2017). 'Electronic literature'. In Rachel Smith (ed.), *American Literature in 2000-2010 Transition,* 193-210. UK: CUP.

Van de Ven, Inge and Hannah Ackermans. (2019). 'Electronic literature in the database and the database in electronic literature'. *Communications.Media. Design*, 4 (4): 1-15.

West, Gerald. (1995). *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Zhang, Li-Jing. (2018). 'The duality of electronic literature'. *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Social Science and Management (ICSSM 2018)*. China: DEStech Publications, 1-4.