HOW THE DROWNED BECOME WATER

By: Anes Ahmed
INFLUENCES

- Tawfiq Al Hakim’s concept of the “Intellectual Play”
- The character storytelling of August Wilson and Toni Morrison
- The Al-Jazeera documentary “People of the Nile”
- The poetics and experimentation of Ocean Vuong, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Diana Khoi Nguyen
The play explores the grief of Leila’s family due to the sudden and unexpected suicide of her older brother, and the implications of that action that has had on their lives. Musa, the other plot of this story, has become wealthy through smuggling fish from Aswan. And due to this, he begins to explore American art, music, and literature and begins to yearn to travel and acquire the ‘American Dream’ for himself. While very different lives are at the center of the play, the play aims to explore aspects of these lives intersect, conflict, and transform with one another.
At first reading, this project may seem as an experimental version of how a traditional play is written (appearing as this weird collage of poetry, intellectual play, fiction, and screenplay all uniformed into one piece). But the only way I found myself writing this play was through its fragmentation and bastardization. If I was unable to damage the commonalities and glorifications associated with the traditional play, then I would not have been able to write this play. But having the necessary freedoms to experiment, manipulate, and in a way, “damage” my writing, it found its own life.
Is there any art to loss, and if so, should it be confronted, processed, and transformed through the act of storytelling? When I first approached writing *How the Drowned Become Water* and its conception, this was the one question that possessed me continually. I wanted to develop a play that explored the depth of loss and grief in a family, and how in turn, it alters the functionalities of the collective and the individual. It took the course of two independent studies (the duration of a year) of collecting news articles, watching documentaries, reading literature to inform and motivate my writing process, but through it, emerged a completed play. As a writer, to write this story into being was the act of release and the act of submission.

**THE PROCESS**