



# A Review of the Film “Yuli” in Terms of Trauma, Growth and Creativity

“Yuli” Filminin Travma, Büyüme ve Yaratıcılık Kavramları Açısından İncelenmesi\*

Eda Mert<sup>1</sup>, Hülya Arslantaş<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Aydın Adnan Menderes University, Aydın, Turkey

## ABSTRACT

Cinema films are characterized as a powerful tool that provides information transfer within a culture and between cultures, informs people about social roles and directs them in the light of this information. Biography, which is one of the types of cinema, tells the life stories that have been lived in its closest form to the truth and helps to convey the life processes of the people who are told; the events and emotions in these processes. In this context, this article examines the film “Yuli”, in which such a life story is discussed. Yuli film that tells the real life story of the famous dancer Carlos Acosta, offers the audience an emotionally and artistically satisfying piece. In this review, the film “Yuli” is considered in accordance with the information of the literature in terms of the traumas suffered in some life processes, the posttraumatic growth that develops due to these traumas, and creativity that is possible to occur as a result of posttraumatic growth.

**Keywords:** Trauma, posttraumatic growth, creativity

## ÖZ

Sinema filmleri kültür içinde ve kültürler arasında bilgi aktarımını sağlayan, insanları toplumsal roller ile ilgili bilgilendiren ve bu bilgiler ışığında yönlendiren güçlü bir araç olarak nitelendirilmektedir. Sinemanın türlerinden biri olan biyografi, yaşanmış hayat hikayelerini gerçeğe en yakın haliyle anlatmakta ve anlatılan kişilerin yaşam süreçlerinin; bu süreçlerdeki olayların ve duyguların aktarılmasına yardımcı olmaktadır. Bu bağlamda bu yazıda böylesi bir hayat hikayesinin ele alındığı “Yuli” filmi incelenmiştir. Yuli filmi, izleyiciye ünlü dansçı Carlos Acosta'nın gerçek yaşam öyküsünü anlatan; duygusal ve sanatsal yönden doyurucu bir yapıtı sunmaktadır. Bu derlemede “Yuli” filmi, kimi yaşam süreçlerinde maruz kalınan travmalar, bu travmalara bağlı gelişen travma sonrası büyüme ve travma sonrası büyüme sonucunda ortaya çıkması mümkün olan yaratıcılık kavramları açısından literatür bilgileri doğrultusunda ele alınmıştır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Travma, travma sonrası büyüme, yaratıcılık

## Introduction

Although cinema and psychology are different fields, they unite in addressing human behavior and feed off each other. Cinema is a branch of art that tries to convey human behavior to the screen mostly via subjective methods; on the other hand, psychology tries to explain human behavior with scientific methods. Cinema films are described as a powerful tool that provides the intra- and inter-cultural transfer of knowledge, informs people about social roles, and guides them in the light of this knowledge (Morsünbül 2015). Cinema has played an important role in the social, political, and cultural structure of life since its emergence (Bhugra 2003). Biography, one of the film genres, tells lived life stories in the closest way to reality and helps to convey the life processes of the people told and the events and emotions in these processes.

The way a person experiences the growth process is effective in the construction of the person's future life. Experiencing one or more traumas in life affects both the time when it is experienced and the future life of the person. Trauma is defined as the occurrence of extraordinary events in which there is a real death or death threat, a threat to physical or life integrity occurs, and the person cannot cope with the existing coping methods (İnci and Boztepe 2013). Natural disasters, migration, diagnosis of a terminal illness to an individual or a relative, cheating, divorce, and dismissal, as well as devastating events, such as exposure to violence, abuse, rape, and being taken hostage, are considered as traumatic events (Calhoun and Tedeschi 1999, Wortman 2004, Öztürk and Uluşahin 2011). In short, trauma is a state of intense stress (Christopher 2004). If individuals give reactions, such as helplessness, fear, horror, guilt, or shame during or after a trauma event, these experiences are considered psychological traumatic events (Şimşir 2017).

**Yazışma Adresi/Address for Correspondence:** Eda Mert, Aydın Adnan Menderes University Faculty of Nursing, Department of Mental Health and Diseases Nursing, Aydın, Turkey **E-posta/E-mail:** edakiraz\_35@hotmail.com **Geliş tarihi/Received:** 20.08.2021 **Kabul tarihi/Accepted:** 12.11.2021

**ORCID ID:** orcid.org/0000-0003-1677-2139

Traumatic events affect individuals in different ways based on some of their characteristics. According to some characteristics that people have, their level of being influenced on traumatic event may differ. For example, in an aircraft hijacking, some of the passengers experience intense panic at that moment, while others remain calm. After the event, some of the passengers may exhibit disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder, while this event may only be a memory for others (Şimşir 2017). In other words, the effect of the event on the individual and the way the person perceives it come to the fore, rather than the traumatic event itself (Öztürk and Uluşahin 2011).

Possible consequences of trauma are evaluated in three ways in the literature: post-traumatic growth, psychological resilience, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Jeon et al. 2015). Accordingly, people react differently to the trauma experience (Erten and Kocakaya 2020). On the other hand, there are also findings that many physiological, emotional, and psychological problems will occur as a result of traumatic events. In studies on trauma, most researchers primarily focus on dealing with the negative effects of traumatic events on people's lives; therefore, studies on its positive effects remain in the background (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996).

In the case of post-traumatic growth, which describes the positive change that occurs after trauma (Duman 2019), the expression "trauma" is used synonymously with a major stressor or crisis. In this context, trauma is defined as any "life-altering" event that creates a shocking or destructive effect in the hypothetical world of the individual and occurs unexpectedly and unpredictably, and where the person's coping skills are not enough to resolve the situation. The expression of "growth" used in the phenomenon of post-traumatic growth is defined as the ability of the individual to go beyond the adaptation functionality and awareness before the trauma experience and a personal transformation experience (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). Also, post-traumatic growth does not mean growth in one single domain, but it can be seen in one or some of the domains of new possibilities, personal power, spiritual growth, and the admirably areas for life (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996).

Post-traumatic growth can also be defined as the process of creating a new self and life construct that requires cognitive, emotional, and social effort, which is beyond the person's full return to their pre-traumatic state (Stewart and Neimeyer 2001, Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). After the traumatic event, the person will build more integrated, flexible, and realistic cognitive, emotional, and social structures, including the teachings of the trauma experience, on the previous experiences to adapt to the new situation (Janoff-Bulman 2004). It is assumed that the restructuring in question will help the person reach a kind of wisdom, create new and more flexible life scenarios, and stand firm against the difficulties that they will experience from now on (Dursun and Söylemez 2020). In short, post-traumatic growth is the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of struggling with extremely difficult life crises, and the change in the person who continues their life after the traumas

they have experienced can manifest itself in many different areas (Duman 2019). As mentioned, trauma experiences can provide an opportunity for a process that increases psychosocial functionality, such as making sense of the pain experienced, developing skills, and drawing new lessons from life, as well as permanent and deep traces that negatively affect mental health (Helgeson et al. 2006, Park 2010).

It would not be wrong to evaluate creativity under the category of "functionality enhancer". The concept of creativity is defined in the literature as "using the mind to come up with new ideas, reshaping the mind, making something new happen by using the mind, creating something new, producing new ideas using imagination, and inventing something new" (Weiss 1964). Creativity is a skill and it is possible to develop this skill with education. It is stated that when people's naturalness is not hindered, in other words, when they are encouraged to be spontaneous, they can uncover their creativity more easily (Koçak and İçmenöğlü 2012). Creativity is also described as an indicator of self-actualization. For this reason, it is thought to be one of the indispensable skills in the personal or professional sense, especially in the information age we live in (Çam and Öztürk Turgut 2015).

Significant progress has been made in psychology by making use of cinema art (Aktu and Dilekmen 2019). In recent years, many studies in the psychology literature have benefited from visual tools such as films, videos, and documentaries to embody some concepts and phenomena (Acar and Voltan-Acar 2013, Morsünbül 2015, Boyacı and İlhan 2016, Aktu 2018). In the field of psychology, films serve as instructive tools in the context of the events, feelings, and reactions of the characters played by actors (Boyacı and İlhan 2016, Aktu 2018). In the literature, there are examples of studies in which the concepts related to psychology have been investigated by considering the films and the events that the characters go through. For example, in the study of Göğërçin Tokar (2020), the concepts of trauma, mourning, and recovery were examined through the film "Three Colors: Blue". Similarly, in the study of Becerikli and Boz (2019), the film "Kelebekler" was discussed, trauma and mourning issues were discussed in line with the events experienced by the characters and the literature. In addition to these studies that address concepts such as trauma, mourning, and recovery through the experiences of adult characters in films, there is also a different study in the literature that examines the phenomenon of trauma through characters whose childhood periods are presented (Sasikumar et al. 2021). In another study, the basic concepts of child abuse were addressed through a film named "Hush! Girls Don't Scream" (Aktu and Dilekmen 2019). When we look at the studies on films in general, it is seen that the basic subjects in the content of the film are given in connection with the information in the literature according to the flow of the events in the film. In the film "Yuli", which is discussed in this study, the experiences of the protagonist starting from his childhood and his successful dancer career formed by these experiences are staged. The fact that the protagonist still carries the traces of the difficult and traumatic experiences he went through in his childhood and

youth when he reaches adulthood and that he integrates these traces into his life in a positive way and uses them to create creative dance choreographies reveals that it is possible to reach a positive result even after negative experiences. Therefore, in the light of the film “Yuli” and the literature, this review was conducted to discuss the traumas that are experienced in some life processes and leave traces on life, the post-traumatic growth as the outcome of these traumas, and the concept of creativity that can occur along with post-traumatic growth.

### **General Information About the Film “YULI”**

The 2018 film “Yuli”, directed by Iciar Bollain, is adapted from the autobiographical work of famous Cuban dancer Carlos Acosta, “No Way Home”, which was released in 2007. The life story of Carlos Acosta is reflected in the film, in which the famous dancer himself also starred. Enjoying spending time with his friends on the streets of the area he lives in, Carlos’s life changes completely when his father discovers his talent as a child. Carlos, who is not very keen on ballet dancing, is sent to the Cuban National Dance School under his father’s pressure. At first, Carlos goes to this dance school reluctantly and because of his father’s compulsion, but over time he begins to listen to his inner voice and spend efforts on ballet. This dancing talent of his breaks taboos in the era of black racial discrimination, and Carlos manages to become the first black ballet dancer to perform in prestigious institutions such as the London Royal Ballet (Beyazperde 2021, Kültürservisi 2021).

### **YULI and Trauma**

People can experience social and individual psychological trauma due to the living conditions they are in. The concept of trauma is used for all kinds of events that shake, injure, and hurt the mental and physical existence of individuals in many different ways (Öztürk and Uluşahin 2011). These experiences cause people to continue their lives after the trauma event by experiencing serious problems and difficulties (Öztürk and Uluşahin 2011) and adaptation problems (Özgen and Aydın 1999). In particular, abuse is described as one of the traumas that are likely to be experienced in childhood (Aktu and Dilekmen 2019). It is stated that children who are abused may experience problems in their psychological development (Güleç et al. 2012).

From the beginning of the film, especially in the period when Carlos’s (Yuli) childhood is told, we witness the oppressive attitude of his father Pedro towards Carlos. In the scenes at the beginning of the film, his father Pedro holds the boy Carlos, whom we watch as he “break dances” on the street, by the ear and takes him home by force shouting, *“Do you want to shake your bottom? You’ll see how the bottom is shaken if that’s what you want!”* Afterward, Carlos is taken to the National Cuban Dance School, again under the pressure of his father. Although Carlos says that if he goes to ballet school, the other children around him will mock him as “soft” and that’s why he doesn’t want to go to this school, his father forces him. That’s why Carlos is very angry with his father. Pedro emotionally pressures his son to quit street dancing and to go to dancing school, and he uses both emotional and physical violence for this reason. It turns out that Pedro wants his

son to succeed; however, it is also obvious that he ignores how a child is affected by the attitudes shown. The functions of families include supporting the care, education, psychology, and social development of the child, as well as protecting them against abuse. As a matter of fact, child abuse is considered as one of the most severe violence and crimes against an individual (Güneri Yöyen 2017). In the literature, physical abuse is defined as the use of physical violence that is painful and deliberate (Finkelhor and Korbin 1988, Kaytez et al. 2018), the use of violence is evaluated in the context of physical abuse (Güler et al. 2002), and it is reported that trauma is experienced as a result of abuse (Polat 2016). It is stated that emotional abuse can be used instead of the terms psychological/emotional violence (Özgür et al. 2011), verbal abuse, and emotional maltreatment (Chamberland et al. 2012). In this respect, emotional abuse is characterized by humiliation, swearing, and humiliation in front of others (Özgür et al. 2011, Kaytez et al. 2018) and is defined as conveying the feeling of violence verbally (Polat 2016). Violence-related traumas experienced by the individual in childhood significantly affect self-esteem and form the basis for many mental illnesses (Güneri Yöyen 2017). Considering that physical and emotional abuse is handled within the scope of violence (Polat 2016, Ertuğ 2018) and they cause mental traumas (Zoroğlu et al. 2001), it can be said that Carlos’s life will most probably be negatively affected as a result of Pedro’s behaviors. However, Carlos can turn the process in his favor and positively develop himself despite his traumatic experiences. However, these traumas remain as memories that he cannot forget.

During his childhood, when Carlos attends the National Cuban Dance School, his father Pedro is imprisoned due to an accident. Carlos and his sisters go to visit Pedro and say that everything is fine. When his father asks Carlos about the school, he says everything is fine and hides the fact that he is not attending classes. When his father finishes his short-term imprisonment and returns home, he learns the truth and beats Carlos with a belt. When we look at the literature, it is seen that physical abuse is characterized by slapping, hitting, battering, injuring, beating, burning, beating with a tool, leaving hungry, poisoning, or giving deliberate physical harm to the child (Aral 1997, Güneri Yöyen 2017). Physical abuse is also defined as giving physical harm to a child or young person under the age of 18 in a way that affects their healthy development and the resulting injury or risk of injury to the child or young person (Pelendecioğlu and Bulut 2009, Güneri Yöyen 2017). This situation usually occurs when the parent/caregiver loses control or wants to punish the child (Geçkil 2017). Therefore, Pedro’s behavior can be considered as physical abuse. There are studies in the literature reporting that post-traumatic stress disorder is observed in individuals who have been physically abused (Pelcovitz et al. 1994, Widom 1999). There is no information in the film about whether Carlos has such a mental disorder. However, this event, in which he was subjected to severe physical violence, creates a trauma story that will not be forgotten throughout his life.

Although the father Pedro cannot predict the negative consequences of his attitude, he behaves in this way for the



'goodness' of his son. He thinks that if he does not use violence, Carlos will not attend the dance school and "will not get on the right track". In fact, this ambitious attitude originates from Pedro's own trauma. Three hundred and fifty years of black slavery left traumatic traces on Pedro. In the film, Pedro describes this with the following words: "*They made us slaves; they made us reproduce like animals for profit. Three hundred and fifty years of slavery runs through our veins. But we have survived, we have danced, we have sung, and we have resisted. We are still warriors as before. No one can stop you, son.*" One of the purposes of the concept of trauma, which has gained importance since the 1990s, is to deal with historical and cultural traumas, such as colonialism, slavery, racism, that have been experienced in an individual and social context and which are tried to be silenced and forgotten. It is expected that the losses experienced throughout the historical process and the negative experiences that have been ingrained in the memories of society and individuals are transformed into a narrative form and brought to the surface and put into a healing process (Güneş 2020). Pedro still harbors the trauma of slavery from his past and desires to prove that his own race is now strong. For this reason, by occasionally putting pressure on his son and by sometimes showing that he loves him, he reveals that he wants him to be successful.

After learning that his son does not attend the National Cuban Dance School, father Pedro, who goes and begs the school authorities to re-admit Carlos, learns that he will be admitted to school only if he attends boarding school. Carlos begs his father not to send him to boarding school, but father Pedro does not listen to Carlos and sends him to boarding school without his consent. This situation leads to emotional trauma in Carlos, who thinks that his father refuses all his requests, and as a result, the child Carlos gets very unhappy. In another scene of the film, Carlos, who is caught while eating another student's food in the boarding school, is taken to the podium in an area where all the students are gathered, and the reason for his behavior is asked by using the phrase, "*we will listen to the perpetrator*". While Carlos has not yet answered, voices from the group of students in front of him begin to rise: "*You are a thief, you smell horrible.*" Carlos is quite offended by his teacher due to his words "perpetrator", especially in front of other students, and by his friends due to their words "thief, stinky". According to the definitions in the literature, emotional abuse includes behaviors, such as shouting at the child, swearing, name-calling, making fun of the child, humiliating, rejecting, threatening, and keeping the child locked in one place for a long time. It is characterized by not showing the attention and love that the child needs, and not providing its care, and is defined as a repetitive interaction cycle that harms the child (Kairys and Johnson 2002, Şenkal 2013). Based on this definition, it would be correct to consider the situations that Carlos was exposed to, such as being rejected by his father, humiliated and mocked by his teacher and friends, as emotional abuse. It is also stated that emotional abuse causes more harm to the individual than physical and sexual abuse. Emotional abuse affects especially children's psychological growth and development and formation of personality and identity (Gabalda

et al. 2009) and can cause them to move away from the family, develop feelings of worthlessness, and engage in maladaptive and aggressive behaviors (Tıraşçı and Gören 2007). However, the negative consequences of childhood abuse are not only limited to childhood or adolescence but are also reflected in adulthood. For this reason, the topic of child abuse is evaluated within the framework of childhood mental traumas (Yılmaz and Cenkseven Önder 2019). This event, which Carlos experienced in his childhood, affects him very negatively emotionally and becomes one of his unforgettable traumas. The important point here is that Carlos does not reflect the emotional trauma he experienced in his adult life in defensive, offensive, or other negative ways. On the contrary, he has succeeded in integrating these experiences into his dancing career positively.

As understood from the film, Yuli is the name of the son of Ogun, an African God. Father Pedro attributes power to Carlos by naming him Yuli. He also wants to see his son as a symbol of power, in reference to the black people's demonstration of their power and their liberation from slavery. For this reason, he wants him to progress a lot in dance, which he is talented at, and to show himself to the whole world as a black person. He even tells his son that he must forget his family for this purpose. A trauma phenomenon occurs as a result of an event in which the person loses the protective factors that make them feel safe. The traumatic situation caused by having to leave the home in which they have been living is quite complex. When individuals leave their home, the region they live in, and the people they love, they are in danger of losing their identity (Güneş 2020). Based on this explanation, it is possible to evaluate the statements of father Pedro to Carlos that he should forget about his family if he wants to become a talented dancer as a trauma that Carlos has experienced.

It is observed that young Carlos, who is told by his father that he has to forget his family for the sake of his career, is very upset by this situation. The unhappiness caused by having to leave the home where they live is interpreted as a traumatic experience (Güneş 2020). The effect of this event can last for days or even months in people who have been exposed to a traumatic event (Gölge 2005). At the end of the film, adult Carlos addresses his deceased father by saying, "*You were wrong, dad; my home is not London.*" Here, Carlos, who has suffered the effects of the trauma for years, expresses his longing for his home and a sense of belonging to Cuba.

When we look at the family life in which Carlos grew up, we see that his parents are divorced but still live together. Apart from the fact that they are divorced, there is a nuclear family portrait in which the mother, father, and three siblings live together. However, it is seen that his mother's family living in Cuba is white, and they want to include his mother and white half-sister, Bertha, in their plan to go to America. For this reason, tensions arise in Carlos's family. Carlos hears talks about the possibility that his mother might go to America, he thinks his mother will leave them. In another scene of the film, Carlos personally witnesses the white-black segregation during his childhood. Carlos's aunt,

who is not black, comes by car and says she can only take her white half-sister, Bertha, to the beach because there is no room in the car. She doesn't want to let Carlos and his black sister get in her car for some reason. As we can see, this situation has been repeated many times. Attitudes such as ethnic discrimination, gender discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization cause social traumas in individuals and communities (Güneş 2020). When considered from this aspect, it is possible to evaluate these scenes, in which racial discrimination is revealed, as a social trauma experienced by the boy Carlos. Enraged by the racial discrimination he was exposed to during his childhood, Carlos created an individual profile that was strengthened by traumas in his adult life and proved himself among the white race.

In the film, in which it is emphasized that Cuba is under the influence of powerful states, Carlos's life story reflects a large part of the effect of this situation on the citizens of the country. The country suffers from poverty. The traumatic effect of an event on the person depends on several factors such as the event itself and environmental and personal characteristics. The economic conditions of the country and poverty are among the events that are likely to cause trauma depending on personal and environmental characteristics (Sert 2020). The economic conditions in Cuba and the consequences of these conditions have taken place in Carlos's memory as traumatic experiences. It is stated in the literature that people cannot forget their past or break away from it. This is because the time of memories is now, and they arise in the now. This means that the past that a person carries in their memory continues at present (Gögerçin Toker 2020). As depicted in the film, his poverty-stricken country and the ill-treatment of the people living in the country remained as a painful memory in Carlos's memory and emerged in his adult life. Carlos implicitly reveals the current situation by integrating these traumatic memories into his dance choreography, an area where he can use his creativity quite well.

### **YULI and Post-Traumatic Growth**

In the scene where father Pedro drives a pickup truck with Carlos on his lap, a short journey scene is shown. In this scene, where Pedro shows that he cares about his son by saying "Be careful son", they have a pleasant time and Carlos's happiness is reflected. At the end of this scene, Pedro takes Carlos to the so-called "Acosta Plantation", where blacks were formerly enslaved. In this place, Pedro tells Carlos that his grandmother was also a slave on this plantation and what black people did to endure this oppression. Carlos listens to his father with interest and curiosity and gets involved in the conversation with his own experiences. Afterward, Pedro tells Carlos, "*We are still warriors like before. Sons of Ogun, Yuli; this is us. We are warriors. You are so beautiful, son: inside and outside. No one and nothing can stop you.*" and he hugs Carlos. The love and interest shown by the parents to the child are considered as the most important elements in terms of the child's mental structure and personality development (Güleç 2018). All kinds of personal, social and psychological help processes, such as interest, love, trust, and knowledge (Karasu et al. 2017) that the individual sees first from their family and then from their friends

and people they respect in their circles (Yıldırım,1997) constitute social support (Karasu et al. 2017). It is stated that social support has a multifaceted function, including emotional support as well as providing information and advice (Cutrona and Russell 1987) and also creates a positive effect on an individual's life (Mahon et al. 1998). Linley and Joseph (2004) reported that emotional social support is positively associated with post-traumatic growth. Although it is shown throughout the film that Carlos was forced by his father and exposed to various traumas, these scenes reveal that Pedro actually loves and cares for his son. Based on this, it would not be wrong to say that Carlos has social support from his father. While it is observed that Carlos was angry at his father's attitudes in the previous scenes, the love he feels for his father is understood in this scene. In the film, the traces of the social support that Carlos receives from his father are seen in his post-traumatic growth process.

When we look at the life that Carlos lives in general, it can be seen that positive effects, such as love and attention from his father and negative effects that create trauma, such as emotional and physical abuse are at the forefront and that black-white racial discrimination seems to accompany these effects. It is seen that Carlos sometimes hates his father, and sometimes cares about what he says and loves him. In this respect, it is possible to say that the role of the father shows a figure who thinks it is right to treat his child badly sometimes because he wants the best of his child. When Carlos grows up, he does not forget his father's positive and negative attitudes towards him, and he misses him. From this point of view, it is possible to say that the love that Carlos feels towards his father comes to the fore. The white-black racial discrimination comes before Carlos in every period of his life. Both the privileges given to his white half-sister Bertha by his mother's family and the negative discrimination made by other students at the boarding dance school motivate Carlos to be strong among whites. Although this motivation does not contain hostile feelings, it has been very effective in Carlos's successful life story.

As it can be understood from these explanations, Carlos, who is exposed to traumas both emotionally and physically and due to racial discrimination throughout his childhood, carries the traumas he experiences individually and the trauma of slavery transferred for centuries by the black race. In his adult life, we come across a success story that feeds off the traumas he has experienced. The expression of post-traumatic growth is used to mean that the person shows more positive growth and development after experiencing a trauma, instead of developing negative reactions. This growth and development after trauma may be characterized by a change in the person's self-perception (Tedeschi and Calhoun 1996). When interpreted from this point of view, it is possible to say that the growth process after the traumas that Carlos experiences overlap with the definition of post-traumatic growth in the literature.

The last scene of the film shows Carlos sitting in the middle of the dance stage and addressing his father, whom he lost due to death. Father, mother, daughter, son, spouse, brothers, and

sisters of individuals are defined as first-degree relatives (Şirzai et al. 2015). In a study conducted on post-traumatic growth with people who lost their relatives, it was found that people who lost their first-degree relatives showed more growth than those who lost their second-degree relatives or friends. In other words, it is stated that the greater the perceived loss is, the greater the growth is (Armstrong and Shakespeare-Finch 2011). In this scene, Carlos says, *“Thank you, Dad. But you were mistaken; my home is not London. It is here. I founded my ballet group here, and one day I will open my old school. I can only give what I am. I am your son: the son of Pedro Acosta; truck driver Pedro Acosta; the son of Ogun. I am who I am.”* With this speech, he shows that although he lost his father, he has not lost contact with him. Pedro was Carlos’s father and therefore a first-degree relative. Although he is dead, Carlos thanks his father and emphasizes that he is his son, which shows the extent of Carlos’s loss. Reflecting on this point of view, it is possible to say that Carlos experiences post-traumatic growth to a large extent.

As mentioned, Carlos states that he wants to open a dance school in Cuba. It is stated that some people express themselves better and understand others better after traumatic experiences, which is one of the indicators of post-traumatic growth. People who become aware of their vulnerability after trauma may want to help others (Weiss 2004). Carlos’s desire to open a dance school in Cuba can be interpreted as an effort to help other people in his own country, as well as reflecting his desire to return to Cuba. In addition, Carlos, as a dancer and choreographer, gives lessons to young dancers throughout the film, which shows his desire to help others. This inference supports the idea that Carlos is experiencing post-traumatic growth. However, from the beginning to the end of the film, the successful dance choreographies that were created by adult Carlos, inspired by the traumatic traces in his life, shows that the growth experienced as a result of traumas spread over a certain period, while his desire to open a dance school in Cuba reflects that he wants to continue this process. In the literature, it is stated that post-traumatic growth should be evaluated as a process that takes months or even years (Linley and Joseph 2004). In this context, the fact that Carlos’s growth in the post-traumatic process continued for a certain period and that he wanted to continue it supports the findings in the literature on post-traumatic growth.

### **YULI and Creativity**

Throughout the film, short sections of the dance choreographies that Carlos created after some of the childhood scenes are staged as rehearsals. As is seen, choreographer Carlos, who is in his adult life, reflects the traces of life on him to his dance choreographies.

It is known that the concept of creativity is handled in different ways by different disciplines (Onur and Zorlu 2017). In this film, Carlos demonstrates his creativity by transferring the most influential parts of his life on the dance stage through choreographies. In the literature, it is stated that the concept of creativity is handled with organizational or social approaches by some researchers (Onur and Zorlu 2017) and more individually by some others (Weiser 1970). In this

context, we can say that the individual creativity characteristic is highlighted in the film “Yuli”.

After the scene where his father takes Carlos to the Acosta Plantation, which is their last name, and tells about the oppression of slavery that his black ancestors lived there, the scene returns to the present time and shows the emotional speech of a father-son, which is translated into dance. In the dance, it is felt that Carlos and his father Pedro are talking at the Acosta Plantation. Another dance scene comes after the scene where father Pedro beats Carlos with a belt. Here, by using a belt in the content of the dance, the “beating” scene is presented to the audience in its most realistic form. Similarly, another choreography displays the feeling of being trapped while Carlos is looking out of a jalousie window in a room in the school when he is sent to the boarding school. In this scene, the panels of the jalousie window that Carlos looks out that day are projected onto the dance floor in the form of transverse shadows. In the conversation between the dancer performing the dance and Carlos, it is seen that Carlos tells the dancer that he should dance by feeling it more. In addition to their creativity, individuals differ from other living things in the universe by recognizing and making sense of their feelings and thoughts and expressing them verbally. The ability to be aware of one’s emotions and to understand and express them correctly have an effect on protecting mental health, increasing interpersonal relations and harmony, and facilitating communication (Dereboy 1990). Carlos creates the choreography by feeling every detail, and now he wants the person dancing to feel similarly and expresses this desire with these words: *“You are hurt, you are tough, and you are sensitive. I call it the ‘Wednesday Feeling’ because Wednesday was the only day families could visit their children.”*

In one scene of the film starting with dance, a dance performance is presented in which the words of the American General Smedley Butler are used, accompanied by music. The words include “American Oil and Cuba”. At the end of the dance rehearsal, a friend turns to Carlos and says, *“I’m trying to figure out what this has to do with your life.”* In the scenes shown afterward, it is understood that while tourists from the US or other developed countries are given more importance than Cubans, the local people are treated as low-class people. This situation is clearly demonstrated by the scene where Carlos and his friends are not accepted to the bar of a hotel in Cuba. Combining his creativity with his critical thinking skill, Carlos arouses curiosity in the audience with this dance choreography and rehearsal. The following definitions of critical thinking and creative thinking can be seen in the literature: critical thinking is the revealing of thinking based on evidence, concept, method, and context on which a judgment is based. Besides being a purposeful and organized judgment, it is based on interpretation, evaluation, analysis, and inference. Creative thinking, on the other hand, includes the skills to come up with new ideas, explore existing and different options, find the appropriate one among these options, evaluate new ideas in line with a new approach, and encourage new hypotheses. There are also some differences between critical thinking and creative thinking. Some of these differences are as



follows: in critical thinking, something that exists is evaluated, while an original product is produced in creative thinking. While critical thinking questions and evaluates the functionality of a process from different perspectives, creative thinking tests the functionality of this process with the product created (Altın and Saracaloğlu 2018). Based on these explanations, it is seen that in the dance choreography in which Smedley is shown, the event is evaluated critically rather than present the original event, and the functionality of the process is questioned from different perspectives (such as the power of the developed states) and reflected in the dance. Here, Carlos presents a show by working his creativity on the underlying cause of the event rather than choreographing an event directly. This may be the reason why his friend watching the rehearsal could not relate this dance to Carlos's life. In this choreography, Carlos reflects the theme of the event Implicitly And Also Criticizes The System.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, the film "Yuli" is discussed in terms of trauma, post-traumatic growth, and creativity in line with the literature. The film offers the audience an emotional and artistically satisfying work that tells the real-life story of famous dancer Carlos Acosta. At the same time, a success story that has individual, familial, and social aspects and is influenced by all of these aspects is told. The film mostly focuses on Carlos's childhood and youth life. In addition to the experiences relating to family and school life, the social and economic conditions in Cuba are also reflected in the film, and the processes that are effective in the formation of Carlos's current life are discussed. In the film, the role of the father is portrayed in a way that reflects reality, as a character who shows his love but does not hesitate to use violence and therefore abuse (Polat 2016, Ertuğ 2018) when he thinks it is necessary. In addition, in terms of the messages it gives, the film also emphasizes the difficulties faced by Cuban people and the negative discrimination that black individuals were subjected to in the past and during the time the film is told. It is stated in the literature that violence (Aktu and Dilekmen 2019), abuse (Polat 2016), and ethnic discrimination (Güneş 2020) are among the traumatic events. Reactions to a traumatic event may differ from person to person. While some people experience serious problems such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of trauma, others may make positive progress such as finding the meaning of life and personal empowerment (Shakespeare-Finch et al. 2003). It may even be possible for the trauma experience to make the person stronger than before the trauma (İnci and Boztepe 2013). In the film, it is seen that the childhood and youth process of the main character is mostly influenced by the role of the father. His father, whom Carlos remembers with his positive memories -although he does not forget his negative aspects- seems to be the leading actor of his traumas, post-traumatic growth process, and creativity. In other respects, it is understood that the social and ethnic problems that he experiences have an important effect on his trauma experiences, post-traumatic growth process, and creativity. In this context, it can be said that Carlos shows a positive development by showing post-traumatic

growth despite his traumatic experiences (Duman 2019) and comes to a strong position by using his creativity.

The use of films in the field of psychology, especially in psychotherapies, has become one of the most frequently applied methods (Yılmaz 2017). It is possible to benefit from the art of cinema both in interviews with individuals with mental illness and in the education of those who receive education in the field of mental health (Yılmaz 2019). In general, the film "Yuli" includes the traumatic events experienced in childhood and adolescence, the positive and negative emotions felt, and the transfer of a real-life story, in which a post-traumatic growth shaped by these events and emotions has been transferred to a positive feature such as creativity. It is thought that it can be used in the treatment of individuals who have a history of trauma similar to Carlos's experience and have mental problems. Carlos, who has experienced traumas throughout his life, uses his creativity based on these experiences and achieves significant success, which sets an example for the empowerment of people with a history of trauma. In addition, the film is thought to be a work that can be used to support education in the field of mental health, as it reveals the experiences of trauma concretely and conveys the emotions experienced in a way closest to reality.

Despite the traumas he experienced during his childhood, Carlos positively shapes his ongoing life. He manages to become a respected dancer by integrating his post-traumatic growth process with his creativity. In future studies, it is thought that the investigation of the films, "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind" (2019), which is thought to cover the concepts of trauma, post-traumatic growth, and creativity, and "Mia and the White Lion" (2018), which is thought to be similarly related to trauma and post-traumatic growth, will contribute to the literature.

It is also possible to handle the film "Yuli" from many different perspectives. Each scene and each phenomenon helps to see different areas of the life story told. Racial discrimination, artistic aspects, political perspective, and cultural adaptation can be given as examples of some of these areas. In this study, a critical approach was preferred in terms of trauma, post-traumatic growth, and creativity; therefore, assessments were made on the relevant scenes. It is suggested that this biography film, which is thought to provide an important gain to the cinema, should be discussed in terms of different disciplines and different topics.

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