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Editorial Note

The 15th volume of *Crossings: A Journal of English Studies* is proud to feature Abdulrazak Gurnah, the 2021 recipient of the Nobel Prize in literature. He enthralled the Dhaka crowd with the talks he gave at the Dhaka Lit Fest and ULAB in 2023. Titled as "Writing and Its Hinterland," Gurnah's talk transported the audience to colonial Zanzibar to enlighten us about his writing process situated in the intersections of personal memory and collective history. The occasional piece sets the tone for our journal that aims to converge diverse voices that are not limited to geographical and disciplinary boundaries.

This volume remains committed to producing a world-class international journal that highlights knowledge produced from the Global South. Our recent shift from a print journal to open access journals on the DOAJ platform has ensured greater visibility for our contributors' work through indexing in various bibliometric databases. By design, we attract diasporic scholars, and their research typifies the growing trend of the Global South's contribution to the scholarship claimed by the Global North.

The second occasional paper by Obaidul Hamid, an Australian-Bangladeshi linguist, is a case in point. The essay problematizes the hegemonic presence of English as a global lingua franca and its implications for modern languages in English-speaking societies. Meanwhile, Canada-based Bangladeshi linguist Jahurul Islam collaborates with his colleagues to reflect on the phonological challenges faced by Bangla speakers in producing English vowels.

Crossings, as the name implies, would like to go beyond its originary loci to engage with globally meaningful scholarly dialogue. It is bold enough to encourage emerging voices to publish alongside seasoned academics. The volume includes essays that deal with classic texts such as *Frankenstein* from a feminist disability perspective, period studies involving slavery in America, trauma narratives in contemporary Syria as expounded in Mustafa Khalifa's *The Shell*, the exile saga of a Pakistani girl in the US in Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*, memory in Anglophone Bangladeshi poet Kaiser Haq's poetry, social protests involving Black Lives Matter in hip-hop songs, democracy in post-9/11 America as found in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the female body as a contested site in the poetry of Bangladeshi-American poet Tarfia Faizullah, transgression in the Polish Nobel laureate's murder mystery, *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*, and toxic masculinity in the Bollywood satire *Darlings*.

The language section navigates educational issues, such as the ideas behind translanguaging in higher secondary schools, the effects of writing instruction on school tests that are not always thought about, the possibility of blended research

supervision after the technological changes that happened post-pandemic, and a very in-depth look at lax vowels among Bangla speakers.

Two recent books, one on late Wordsworth's poetics and the other on performative feminism, bring the volume to an end.

The production has been a collective effort of our contributors, reviewers, and editorial team. Their dedication has made this journal a dynamic forum for academic exploration. We hope you will read and refer to the discussions within your own intellectual sphere.

On behalf of the Editorial Board,
Shamsad Mortuza, PhD
Chief Editor

Occasional Papers

Writing and its Hinterland: A Talk

Abdulrazak Gurnah
Nobel Laureate in Literature

When I was asked or invited to speak to you,[1] as always happens when you agree to do a lecture, people say what is going to be your subject. Very often, this is always a crisis moment because you probably have not already got a talk in mind but people want you to give it a title. So I was actually thinking and that is my title ["Writing and its Hinterland"]. So you have got a title and then you say what did I mean by that title? So how do I talk to that title? I think what I had in mind at the time was the way memory functions for a writer but I was not sure if I really wanted to talk about that. So I used that somewhat more open word, "hinterland," to suggest something like what is it that lies behind the writer's economy, if you like, speaking, of course, only of my experience. When I say economy, imagine that the writer is like a small city. The people who live in that city very often do not actually produce very much, at least not very much food anyway, and not very much of the primary things that go on to be manufactured into other things. These people are around us, the country, farmers, whoever the people who dig up clay, potters, that kind of thing. So that's the hinterland I had in mind. What is it that happens behind the product that then becomes a piece of writing that is then given to us as readers? So that's what I meant when I said I was thinking of memory – what function does that play in the way that a writer works. When I say writer, I really mean me because I cannot speak of other people's experience so I am not trying to generalize my sense of how it plays. So read it like that. Read it like how writing works for me rather than perhaps speaking in a general way. I will probably do so as I go along but to begin with, let me think about memory.

So memory is deceptive. Well, you all know that. Sometimes, you are not sure if you are remembering things correctly. You often miss important details: how many times have you been speaking to somebody who perhaps shares the events that you are remembering and you say this is what happened or that is what happened but they say, "But don't you remember also there is something you forgot?" And this other person reminds you of that. I have a brother who is more or less the same age as me, a year between us. We have always stayed in the same place, of course when we were younger, we have always shared a room, we went to the same school, we often took the same class, but we still find ourselves

1 This lecture was presented on January 9, 2023 at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB). The lecture was transcribed by Arifa Ghani Rahman, Executive Editor, *Crossings*. The lecture may be viewed at https://www.facebook.com/ULABian/videos/1896589530694224.

saying, "No, it didn't happen like that, it happened like this," correcting each other's memory of what had happened. So it is a tricky thing what we think we remember. Now, imagine that if you are writing, especially if you are writing about kind of real incidents – it is fiction after all so it does not have to be exactly as it happened. But very often it is informed by something that did happen. And as you try to recall it – this is a beautiful thing about writing – the small details actually come back, things you had not thought of, things in an ordinary way you do not have time or reason to think about or to bring back to your present, as it were. What happens is you remember a little more detail and that detail connects with another detail, and before very long, as you get into the practice of doing it that, in fact, as time passes, you remember more and more rather than less and less. And strangely enough, you remember further back rather than closer to now. It seems to me rather an important resource for the writer. That might seem fine because you are remembering, you are writing, you are moving on. But there is a rather darker side to it – an unfortunate or nagging side to it – because you do not always want to remember, there are things you want to forget. But once you begin this process, they keep coming, these things that you had quietly put away, they come back. And so you have to live through all of these things. But it does not always have to do with remembering correctly. It is not always about remembering exactly as things happen. But what it does is gives you a sense of what it was like at certain times, what was it like to feel or grow up or to live or to have experience. So therefore when it comes to writing about something you are making up, a fictional person, you do have all these other dimensions, felt dimensions that you have remembered, and you can now give to somebody else as a way of authenticating whatever it is that you are presenting.

But also memory is important because there are so many attempts to erase that memory. People often say we live in times that are turbulent or confusing or difficult. Yes, we do but I do not really think we are exceptional. I mean I do not think our time is an exceptional time. Most people in their own epochs probably felt the same way – that we live in turbulent times – for different reasons perhaps. A few years ago, there was a threat of terror everywhere, suicide bombings, planes being hijacked, and that too seemed like a moment of crisis, and the whole world was being invaded, conflagrations here and there and so on, powerful nations going to bring peace apparently, but bombing everybody to death. So the idea of crisis is always with us, I think. And the other thing that happens in crisis is that those who rule, governments and so on, become more authoritarian because these are crisis times, which gives them the license to take unusual measures and also in the process to rewrite what had happened in order to make it more suitable. Governments are always doing this and also

biased powerful forces within nations are always doing this, wanting to reshape and rewrite and change the stories so that it fits whatever agenda it is they have in mind. I think this is where the writer and his little memory plays a part. He says, "No, no, this is not how it was, it was like this." So all those remembered moments, those remembered apprehensions, understandings become a way of also resisting, shall we say, the revision of the story or the narrative of both our times and also of the times before us, of historical moments. Of course, you can also take the big moments in this respect.

You can take the way, for example, how European colonialism was narrated, how it was told. I am talking in particular about European colonialism of various African nations. Colonialism is not the same for everybody. It did not happen in the same way. Like it happened here in this subcontinent in quite a different way from the way it happened in, say, South Africa or North America or in our part of the world. But nonetheless there is a consistent underlying idea in the way that colonialism narrates itself which is, to a large degree, self-aggrandizing or, the very least, self-forgiving – we did this, we did that – and the ugly and cruel things that were done, the hubristic, the idea of superiority, those are not spoken about, they are not emphasized. On our part, on the part of someone like myself, I very much want to emphasize that what drove colonial cruelty was a belief in the superiority of one over the other. So those people are not quite as human as we are, etc. I only give that as an example. I am not really talking about colonialism in depth but saying this is one of the ways in which that idea of memory that is important. You remember not only for yourself, you remember not only the personal histories of things you went through but those also relate to the history of people and of larger societies.

But memory is also shared. So I do not just remember for myself, I also remember what people told me, what my parents told me, what elders told me when I was a child. I also remember what I hear now. So a writer then becomes a confluence of all these narrations, narratives, remembered fragments, and so on. And a writer, of course, has his own mind, his own intelligence and his own eyes and ears so he can see and make up his own mind. And all of this come together and produce a little book. And out of that, we, now I am turning myself around, now I am a reader, so we as readers when we receive a work of writing, of literature, what happens? Well, a variety of things. The first thing we look for, I think, is an imprecise kind of pleasure. We look to be pleased and delighted – not in the way if you saw something funny, not in the way you would if you saw young women and men dancing, but for something quieter than that because we usually read on our own, although sometimes we might be listening to a reader. We look for, I think, in the first place, is if this is engaging me. Is this pleasing me? I do not

mean pleasing in the simple sense, but in a profound sense, in the same way that music does, for example. So we do not listen to it and exclaim, although sometimes we might but when we listen to it, something works, engages, that keeps you listening or reading. Now it could also be as we read, we think yes I know that or this and I agree with this. So we read something and we recognize something we ourselves have already arrived at or it could be that we have not arrived at that and we read something and we think yes, that is really interesting, I had not thought of it like that. And so it illuminates our understanding. It increases our understanding of familiar things. But also when we read, we are struck by what we did not know at all. In other words, there is also news in the literature. All of these things may happen at once, even in the same moment, or within seconds of each other. I am thinking, – I do not know how many people here have read Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.* If you have not, and you have time and a choice between reading this and that, and one of them is *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, then read *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. It will do all of these things I am describing here. It certainly did it for me. So although you think you know something about the Russian Gulag, what happens is that it makes you see in a seriously detailed way what it is like to be in the Russian Gulag. This is what I mean by news. It is not that it tells you something entirely alien and out of this world but it brings you news that you have no way of receiving. So that is what happens as a reader.

So then, to return to our title, if the writer's hinterland is memory, this is not a simple thing. This is not simply a matter of remembering, but it is also a matter of remembering in detail, possibly adding to that memory sometimes to check things – so this is what co-research is, as far as I can see, for a writer I mean. It is not that we invent a subject, but you begin with an idea and then you know what you know about it. You do not begin from nothing. And then perhaps you go read to either confirm certain things or to broaden your understanding. So the writer too learns as he – I told you I am talking about myself – probes and investigates and reflects. In my experience, it takes a long time to write. It is not that the writing process is lengthy but it might be if you have to rewrite several times. This is normal. This is not exceptional at all. Writers do not often talk about it but the process of it is you write one draft, and then another one. Then the editor looks at it and asks for more revisions and you think "Yes, but I'm not sure this is me. I'm not sure." And then you revise a third time and so on it goes on. So you go through the various stages of this process of revising and then the thing is ready. A lot of people are involved, a lot of time is involved, a lot of thinking is involved. The greatest thinking is actually before, I think, I begin to write – the lengthiest period before I begin to write. It might take three or four

years sometimes before I begin to write. I think my novel *Paradise* was published in 1994. I think I wrote the first paragraph in 1984 – which actually, strangely enough, turned out to be the final paragraph of the novel. It was ten years. It does not mean I was doing nothing else in those ten years. But that is how long it takes for things to percolate and then the moment arrives when there is time now. I might also say that final paragraph, which was the original first paragraph, was of the recruiting drive of the German forces, or rather administration – it is about the First World War – which was recruiting mercenaries for their army and that is how *Paradise* ends. So for a long time, I was thinking, while other things were going on, what happens to this young man who becomes a mercenary and it took me until 2018 to actually get around to writing it, and it is the book *Afterlives*. So it takes a long time and during this time the other processes I have described occur – of remembering, of researching, of accumulating, and then beginning to write. Even then it is not over because as you write, then other things come up. So as you do that research as I mentioned before, you discover things you have not thought of and so it goes on. And then when you finish, you think, have I done it right? Or is this subject of the next one? So it goes on. So the writer's hinterland, as I have described, that is also something to do with the process itself and how the process itself produces a kind of dynamic that prepares a writer for their next project as well, the next thing to be done. It is never-ending, I tell you. I think perhaps that will be it. Thank you very much for having me here.

The Rise of English and the Space for Modern Languages

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Abstract

This article examines the space for modern languages in Inner Circle English countries including Australia, UK, and USA against the continued rise of English as a global lingua franca. It is reasonable to surmise that the global popularity of English – demanded by the Outer and Expanding Circle and mainly supplied by the Inner Circle countries will leave limited instrumental value for learning other languages. As reported in this article, the global linguistic market is dominated by English which has also attracted new market players alongside the old, Anglophone market leaders. Indeed, the "English is enough" ideology is dominant in the Inner Circles of English, affecting the quantity and quality of the study of other languages in these societies. Despite all sociolinguistic, attitudinal, and instrumental factors in favor of an English-only monolingual social psyche, the article concludes that the space of other languages has not fully dried out. There are still many reasons from multiple perspectives that point to the value of other languages in a global regime of English.

Keywords: English and modern languages, global linguistic market, rise of English, language and instrumental ideology, language and identity and humanity

Introduction

In an article entitled "Spread the Word: English is Unstoppable" in the Canadian paper *Globe and Mail*, Neil Reynolds (2006) provides an apt characterization of English, the global lingua franca of our time. He said: "English is to language as capitalism is to economics. It is the language of laissez-faire, of enterprise – and, beyond all argument, of hope" (n.p.). Indeed, the history of English in the past few centuries – from an unknown tongue of a small island nation to the language of the globe and globalization (Hamid, 2016; Northrup, 2013) – substantiates the language as a prime example of a capitalist enterprise. If English was marketed in the colonies as an intangible commodity ("hidden curriculum," see Hamid, 2021), unlike such tangibles as cotton or spices, the commodification of English is open and clear now in the era of global capitalism and neoliberalism (Cameron, 2012; Gray, 2010). It is the language of "hope" for both sellers and

buyers of English: if English has remained the only high-demand trade item of an erstwhile capitalist empire, the global demand for English has been sustained largely by a massive social desire for English substantiating popular faith in what the language can offer (Brutt-Griffler, 2002).

Nevertheless, although the language has spread globally, reinforcing the message that it cannot be "stopped" at the current height of its marketization in late capitalism, English should not be taken for granted. This may be despite the prediction that the current dominance of English is likely to continue at least in the near future and that a potential challenger to English is not yet seen in the linguistic horizon (Ammon, 2010; Bruthiaux, 2003). The rise of Chinese with China's rise as a superpower from the Global South can be mentioned (Gil, 2021), but even China cannot spread Chinese without the help of English. English works as a medium for teaching and learning Chinese (Hamid & Alkhalaf, 2024). Despite this, English cannot be taken as a given, not because it will fail to meet our needs or we will lose faith in its power, but because of our sense of fear and uncertainty about what we need and how we can be equipped to face the multifarious demands of uncertain times that lie ahead of us. In this article, I explore the potential of other modern languages *vis-à-vis* the rise of English in this uncertain world. Although my discussion has a wider relevance, I am particularly interested in the English-speaking nations including Australia, UK, and the US. I seek to illustrate how, despite the rise of English, its perceived adequacy as a global language and the significant economic stakes of English for these countries, there is still value in modern languages of European and Asian provenance.

The Rise of English

A key point of departure is to take an overview of the global dominance of English in terms of critical indicators. Ammon (2010) considers four such broad criteria including a) the number of non-native and native speakers; b) economic strength; c) official status; and d) the use of language in the terrains of economy and science to ascertain the rank order of world languages. Of all the competing world languages, English rightly deserves the top rank in view of the above criteria. As Ammon (2010) observes:

> There is virtually no descriptive parameter or indicator for the international or global rank of a language which, if applied to today's languages worldwide, does not place English at the top. (pp. 116-117)

Details on these indicators can be cited from Reynolds (2006), who referred to the authority of the British Council:

> The British Council, an independent charitable organization, says the

> English language now has special status of one kind or another in 75 countries. That one-third of the world's books are published in English. That two-thirds of all scientists read English. That three-quarters of the world's mail is written in English. That four-fifths of all electronic communications are in English. That people who spend time in Britain simply to learn English spend $2-billion a year doing it. (n.p.)

Although the extract provides a clear indication of the dominance of English in certain key domains, there is no mention here of the number of speakers of English, either native or non-native. The size of the population speaking a particular language is important for its ranking. However, this is not necessarily the number of native speakers (see Bruthiaux, 2003). Chinese has a much higher number of native speakers than English, but what distinguishes English from Chinese as a world language is the global spread of English, the number of its non-native speakers and the key terrains where the language has established its dominance. Of these, the number of non-native speakers is critical because this indexes the global spread and functions of English. Although defining English proficiency or categorizing people as users of English and counting the number of these speakers is fraught with conceptual and methodological issues (Bolton & Bacon-Shone, 2020), various estimates have suggested the number of non-native speakers of English to be around 1 billion (see Ammon, 2010; Graddol, 2006). This size of the English learning/using population may not be huge since it constitutes less than 20% of the total population of the world. Similarly, it can be argued that the spread, function, and utility of English may have been overblown on material and ideological grounds (Hamid, 2016). However, even a more realistic and conservative assessment cannot undermine the global reach of English. Despite the declining share of the use of English on the Internet and the potential of Chinese as a competitor for global status, the dominance of English appears to be secure, at least in the near future. As Ammon (2010) argues:

> it seems […] unlikely that any other language can "dethrone" English as the clearly predominant world language, and as especially the world lingua franca, in the foreseeable future. (p. 119)

Some years before Ammon (2010), Bruthiaux (2003) reached the same conclusion – "that it would take a geopolitical realignment on a catastrophic scale for English to be supplanted as the dominant language of global communication in the reminder of the twenty-first century" (p. 22). The starting point for his analysis was de Swaan's (2001) theory of world languages system conceptualized as a linguistic galaxy. English as a "hypercentral" language constitutes the hub of the global language system that connects "super-central," "central," and

"peripheral" languages located in different spaces. Bruthiaux examined each of the "hypothetical competitors" of English including Arabic, Chinese, German, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish on the basis of a set of criteria that included the robustness of the language to adapt to regional and local variations and its potential as a tool for modernization. These elements constituted what he called the "critical mass" of English. Although he does not deny some potential of Chinese, he argues that these challengers were in no way near to providing alternatives to what English has already provided to humanity. As he argued, "the effect of critical mass rules out any thought that a serious competitor to English as a global language may even exist" (p. 12). These predictions have clear implications for teaching, learning, and using languages other than English for both native speakers of English and of other languages. As he elaborates:

> As a result, potential participants in global communication have less and less incentive to make the effort to learn a language other than English. This is equally true of both speakers of English as a first language, who increasingly come to rely on others to do their language learning for them, and of speakers of English as a second language, who often take an instrumental, non-emotional view of a language they regard as serving their interests quite adequately and see no purpose in promoting another language of global communication…. (p. 12)

I will discuss the impact of the "English is enough" view on the learning of other languages in Australia, the UK, and the US later in the article. Although I do not think that the centrality of English in a globalized world has drained out the potential of other languages, the veracity of Bruthiaux's observations can be evidenced by the global market of English to which I now turn.

The Global Market of English

The unique status of English as a global lingua franca, its dominance in the key domains of knowledge, science, economy, and technology, and the absence of a potential competitor for English have attracted investment in the teaching and learning of English on a global scale. The global market of English is one of the largest global industries. The 2014 Ambient Insight report on the 2013-2018 digital English language learning market ascertained the value of the global market of English and other languages (Adkins, 2014). As of 2013, this market was worth $56.3 billion in which the share of English was $35.5 billion or 63% of the total language learning market. The focus of the report is mainly the digital market of languages in general and English in particular which was worth $1.8 billion in 2013, and which was predicted to surge to $3.1 billion by 2018. The report predicted the growth rates of the market in seven regions of the world covering 98 countries. Africa was predicted to mark the highest growth

in the 2013-2018 period, while China, the US, South Korea, Brazil, and Japan were predicted to be the top five digital English language buying countries. The report identified five major catalysts behind the growth of the digital market of English including large-scale digitization initiatives in academia, government educational policies designed to increase English proficiency, consumer demand for digital language learning products, the proliferation of mobile learning value added services, and a strong demand for specialized forms of English such as business or aviation English.

Although the market of English, from a capitalist point of view, can be attributed to the growth of the language and its global demand, a unidirectional (i.e., demand leading to supply) explanation of the global dominance of English may be too simplistic. While the theory of linguistic imperialism and neo-imperialism (Phillipson, 1992, 2011) in the global spread of English may not be fully supported by evidence (Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Fishman, Conrad & Rubal-Lopez, 1996), it cannot be denied that the policy and marketization efforts of supplier nations and institutions as well as the discourses of English that are constructed and disseminated by various authorities have had a significant contribution to the global demand for English (Pennycook, 2000, 2007).

The British Council is a key organization that has explored the global market of English in order to develop strategies to maximize the British share of the English language market (see Phillipson, 1992). It commissions market studies on a regular basis (e.g., Coleman, 2010, 2013; Graddol, 1997, 2006) to have up-to-date information on the nature of the market which is growing, changing, volatile, and challenging (British Council, 2006). The *JWT Education* review of the global market of English language courses, which was produced for the British Council with funding from the (British) Prime Minister's Initiative for Education, provides a summary of the key features of the global market with particular reference to the size and the value of the UK and competitor countries' market shares. The competitors include Australia, New Zeeland, the US, Ireland, Canada, and Malta. The ultimate objective of these market studies is "to identify market opportunities to enable the UK EL [English language] industry to capitalise on them" (British Council 2006, p. 5). As the report noted:

> These potential risks notwithstanding, the future for international English Language education appears to be bright although likely to be characterised by a high level of competition for demand, which may mean further change in the future global English Language landscape. (p. 4)

In looking for potential niche markets for English, these studies identify not only the sources of the demand of English; emphasis is also placed on factors that may restrict opportunities for suppliers such as the British Council or other members of the British English language industry. For example, it is noted that national education systems that are relatively successful in developing English language proficiency among their student population, as in some of the countries in Europe including Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland, do not provide market opportunities for external or private suppliers. A more strategic approach is called for in these saturated markets with specialist language products such as business English or English in the workplace.

Unlike the UK English language industry, which has dominated the market of English both locally (e.g., visitors coming to UK for English language services) and globally (e.g., selling English language products and services overseas through the British Council), the Australian English language industry which is overseen by English Australia (EA) has more of a local focus. With financial support from the Australian Government, EA also commissions surveys and reports to develop an understanding of visitors coming to Australia for English language studies and the performance and earning of the sector in the country. The 2013 survey (English Australia, 2014) shows that after four years of decline in the number of enrolments, 2013 marked a strong return to growth, with 147,828 students, a 19% increase from 2012. The sector generated $1.845 billion in 2013 which was 26% higher than the $1.462 billion generated in 2012.

The value of the global market of English and the market shares of English-speaking countries need to be emphasized because for these countries English is often the most critical commodity that earns a very large amount of national revenue. Therefore, these countries may be reluctant to adopt language or education policies that may potentially harm this lucrative market.

Investment in English by Non-dominant English-Using Countries

The global market of English and market opportunities for supplier nations are contingent on the demand for English, regardless of how this demand is created. Despite the growing privatization of education and the growth in the private sectors, the largest market of English in the English-seeking world lies in the public sectors (see Hamid & Baldauf, 2014). Therefore, the major source of the demand for English can be located in national education policies.

It is hard to identify a single country in the world where English is not taught as part of the national curriculum. The growing demand of English can be understood from the various forms of increased English language access policy. Many countries have introduced English as a compulsory subject for all students.

This "English for all" policy (Hamid, 2010; Wedell, 2008) is informed by the liberal ideals of equality of opportunity: if English is a significant factor in the life of individuals, every citizen should be given access to it through compulsory education (Hamid, 2011). Moreover, over the years the total instruction time for English has increased in many countries (see Baldauf & Nguyen, 2012). This has been implemented by introducing English much earlier in the curriculum, typically at Grade 1 or Grade 3 (see Kirkpatrick, 2011). Furthermore, in some school systems, English has been introduced as a medium of instruction, either for the entire curriculum (e.g., Singapore and Philippines) or selected subjects such as science and mathematics. The Malaysian government experimented with English for primary school science and mathematics for nearly a decade (Ali, Hamid, & Moni, 2011) before revoking the policy in 2012 in the face of social, academic, and political pressures. Education systems in Singapore, Hong Kong, and the Philippines have introduced EMI for school education either fully or partially. While English-medium education has a strong footing in the private sector in the South Asian nations of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, the Government of Bangladesh has recently allowed mainstream education (the public sector) to offer an English version of the national language-based national curriculum provided there is demand from the community and that schools have adequate resources and competent teaching staff (Roshid & Phan, 2024). This is comparable to the "fine-tuning" policy in Hong Kong (Poon, 2013), which introduced restrictions on the large-scale provision of English-medium instruction. While the reduced access to English education reflects the political reality in Hong Kong since its handover to China, the policy does not reflect the popular demand for English and education in the polity (see Tollefson, 2015).

At the tertiary level, the provision of English has also taken several forms. Introducing general English for students pursuing non-English majors is common in the countries of Bangladesh, China, and Vietnam (e.g., Hamid, 2006). Some countries provide specialist English language courses linking the content to students' academic (English for academic purposes) or future professional needs (English for business communication) (see Kusnawati, 2015). More importantly, switching to English-medium instruction has been a common trend across countries in Asia (Hamid, Nguyen, & Baldauf, 2014), Europe (Doiz, Lasgabaster. & Sierra, 2013) and Africa (Hamid, Kamwangamlu, & Nguyen, 2014).

Globalization and the emergence of English as a global lingua franca are behind this increased investment in English in different parts of the world. English is believed to be a key catalyst in nations' participation in a globalized economy. English is taken as a means to internationalization of higher education, which may

enable nations to claim share of the growing market of international students. Countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan have already presented themselves as alternative markets for international higher education (Bolton et al., 2024). Other countries including India and the Philippines have been major destinations of outsourcing that are reaping the benefits of globalization by setting up call centers. Strategic investment in English and developing higher levels of English proficiency have enabled these countries to establish dominance in this outsourcing market, which is mediated by English (Sonntag, 2009). English has also contributed to the staggering amount of remittance for the Philippines which has exported female homeworkers to different countries in Asia. Wider use of English in the society and a high percentage of the population with English proficiency have enabled Philippines to be ahead of other competitors including Indonesia (Lorente, 2012). Finally, English proficiency has also facilitated people with skills and professional qualifications to seek employment opportunities and migration to western societies including the UK, USA, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (Rassool, 2012).

Both English-speaking and English-seeking nations are significantly engaged in English and the English language industry in the wake of the rise of the language and its new status in late capitalism. While the former as suppliers of English look for market opportunities to sell the valued product, the latter are investing in English, taking the language as a resource for human capital development for participation in a globalized economy. In investing in English and developing citizens' English proficiency, some of the latter countries are also emerging as suppliers of English, which are attracting international students to their higher education. In addition, countries such as Singapore and the Philippines have emerged as affordable destinations for English language learners from Asia (see Kobayashi, 2011). Thus, newly emerging English-speaking societies are also coming forward to claim the share of the global English language market, blurring the divide between English-selling and English-buying nations.

Modern Languages *vis-à-vis* the Rise of English

Against the background of the extraordinary rise of English and the strategic investment in English by traditional and newly emerging English-speaking societies, I would like to explore the potential value of other languages. I direct my analysis to the tentative conclusion that the space of modern languages in the English-speaking countries constitutes an uncertain and shifting territory, constructed by ambiguous and changing policy discourses and mixed attitudes towards these languages, their speakers, and their economic and socio-cultural values. I argue that this lack of certainty of the status of these languages does not make them unsuitable for educational provision as part of the curriculum,

but it implies that the provision of languages other than English will be the outcome of strategic investment by forward-looking institutions, which aim to construct distinct institutional identities for themselves and a niche market for their academic products.

Despite the presence of a multitude of languages spoken by indigenous and migrant communities, countries such as the UK, US, and Australia have represented themselves as English-speaking monolingual societies, taking an ideological perspective (Reagan, 2003). These nations (and many others in Europe and Asia) are still guided by one-nation, one-language ideologies. The English language – specifically a particular variety of English informed by the foundationalist view of languages (see Petrovic, 2015) – is seen as a critical bastion of nationalism and national integration and unity. English has been given unquestionable status in all three countries, although variations in their positions are to be noted. While UK, the home of the English tongue, has not needed official protection of English through explicit status planning given that it is the *de facto* national and official language, Australia has provided English the status of a national language. The US has pursued de facto English only policies since its independence from the British in the 18th century (Kaplan, 2015; Macías, 2014), denying all other languages. Although institutionalizing English as an official language may not make the language any different from what it currently is, the ethnolinguistic vitality of Spanish spoken by over 20 million people and the bilingual education movement have led many states to give official status to English in order to restrict minority communities' linguistic choices and force them to assimilate into the mainstream.

These political and ideological reasons plus the economic interest of these nations in the global market of English have constrained the space for other languages. This has happened to such an extent that those who are concerned see a "national crisis" in foreign language education in these societies (see Bartram, 2010). Regardless of the value of modern languages, certain discourses present these languages as not belonging to these countries. These *other* languages of *other* people are often the object of suspicion because their public presence is believed to undermine the American language (English) and American way of life given the dominant ideology that "[o]ne becomes American by merging with the norm, and one of the widely acknowledged defining characteristics of Americanness is speaking English" (Tonkin, 2003, p. 149). Therefore, association with other languages can mean lack of patriotism and disloyalty. As Reagan (2003) explained:

> Bilingualism and multilingualism, especially for native speakers of English, have increasingly come to be seen as not only un-American,

> but also as evidence of social schizophrenia – and, in the post 9/11 climate, public use of languages other than English has come to be seen as downright unpatriotic. (p. 136)

There have been recurrent debates on the use of immigrants' languages in public spaces in migrant-receiving societies (`Schmidt, 2014). While it has been reported that the locals "feel 'alienated' in their own country by large numbers of immigrants speaking another language" (Schmidt, 2014), the public use of the *othered* languages is also linked to intentions of secrecy. As Tonkin (2003) explains:

> If you've done nothing wrong, you have nothing to hide. Since people who speak foreign languages are clearly hiding something from us, they must have done something wrong. So, in our society language use is related to loyalty to our sense of selves, and opposition to foreign language is related to opposition to the encroachment of foreigners on our society …. (p. 149)

Interpretations such as these of foreign language use in public spaces apply to local citizens as well, but in their case, it becomes a question of disloyalty rather than secrecy. The use of languages other than English has consequences, particularly for public figures such as political leaders (Tonkin, 2003). For example, Lo Bianco (2014) analyzed the media coverage of the refusal of John Kerry, the then US Secretary of State, to speak French at a press briefing and of the use of Mandarin by former Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, to welcome a Chinese delegate to Australia in 2007. He argued that the English-only linguistic and psychic landscapes of Australia and the US may not support the use of foreign languages in public domains. John Kerry might have refused to speak French from his experience of the 2004 election campaign in which it was clear that his fluency in French and Spanish "proved to be a distinct liability rather than an asset from the perspective of a majority of the electorate" (Harris, 2006, p. 152).

The intolerance of other languages in public spaces was demonstrated in a New York school (BBC, 2015). An Arabic speaking student at Pine Bush High School read the US Pledge of Allegiance in Arabic. The school's foreign language department organized the reading of the pledge in a different language each day for a week as part of the celebration of the Foreign Language Week. However, there were complaints about the use of Arabic from the community. The school then sought apologies from anyone who might have felt it was disrespectful to use Arabic in this way and assured the community that no other language would be used for reading the pledge in the future.

If the use of foreign languages is not permitted in public, how can we explain the long presence of foreign languages such as French, German, or Spanish in the US, UK, and Australian education systems? In the US, foreign languages have not only been taught in universities, proficiency in foreign languages has also been a requirement for graduate studies in arts and social sciences. Up until the 1960s, many Australian universities required a foreign language for matriculation and the study of a language for at least one year as necessary to the award of Arts degrees. However, as Reagan (2003) explains, although foreign languages have been part of education, a clear distinction has been maintained between *studying foreign languages* and *being able to use these languages*. This means that the ability to use foreign languages is neither required nor is to be displayed publicly, as evidenced by the cases of John Kerry and Kevin Rudd. As well, most language teaching, in Australia for example, up until the 1960s, gave greater emphasis to reading and writing than speaking a foreign language.

Across the English-speaking countries such as the UK, US, and Australia, there are widespread negative attitudes towards modern foreign languages which are often reciprocated by policymakers and the media (Bartram, 2010). Underlying such attitudes are, although somewhat controversial, a "national indisposition" to language learning and a collective inability to learn languages. As Bartram (2010) explained:

> There still appears to be very widespread perception that English speakers are poor linguists, in terms of their attitudes, their motivation to learn and their levels of achieved competence. (p. 1)

In the US, advocacy groups for English Only are dominant (see Kaplan, 2015). Similarly, mainstream views in Australia are not necessarily in favor of teaching and learning of other languages. For instance, Australia's attitudes towards Asia and Asian languages over the decades have been ambivalent (Hill, 2016). For instance, Bahasa Indonesia, the language of Australia's neighbor in the north, has been seen through the prism of politics and prejudice (Firdaus, 2013; Hill, 2016; Kohler, 2014). It is not rare to find endorsement for mutual ignorance, downgrading the value of languages and cultures in maintaining relations between the two neighbors.

Negative attitudes towards other languages have been largely influenced by what is called the "English is enough" mentality (Bartram, 2010; Coleman, 2009; Oakes, 2013). As the British Council report *Languages for the Future* acknowledged:

> It is a widely held – if not undisputed – view that the UK is lacking in the necessary language skills for the future partly because of the status

> of English as the language of international communications. (British Council, 2013, p. 3)

This mentality is probably understandable in a globalizing world where the use of English dominates as a global lingua franca. Native speakers of English may learn other languages to be able to communicate with their speakers when they travel to non-mother tongue English-speaking countries. However, they may find it dispiriting when their interlocutors in those countries are keener on speaking English and thus giving them little opportunity to practise the hard-learned foreign language skills. While this pattern of language use cannot be generalized, this may contribute to a feeling of redundancy of other languages.

Modern languages may also have limited appeal to English-speaking people because of the prevailing status of those languages and their speakers. As Acheson (2004, cited in Bartram, 2010) explained: "Just as their society has taught them to view culturally different people in a negative light, it has taught them to depreciate the foreign languages they are studying" (p. 30). The past few decades of foreign language teaching and learning suggest that motivation for learning languages is significantly influenced by speakers of these languages and their status in the global context. This has led to proposing the notion of "ideal L2 self" in recent motivational theories (Dörnyei, 2009; Oakes, 2013) that explains the kind of persona one imagines for oneself as a future speaker of a particular language. While some people may be motivated by the instrumental prospects of some of the Asian languages including Chinese and Japanese and construct L2 selves as speakers of these languages, for others, accommodating an Asian language into their existing identity package may be seen as condescending.

Given the relevance of motivational self-theory, some languages may be subject to popular prejudices mainly due to their speakers. For instance, despite the potential of Spanish in the US (Callahan & Gandara, 2014) and its demographic strength, some constituencies of Anglo-Americans may consider this language as belonging to the Latino communities with their poor social status. They may wonder how this language could enrich their sense of self and their status. Similarly, there is a strong sense of rejection of Bahasa Indonesia and their speakers in Australia informed by ambivalent relationships between these neighbors (Hill, 2016). While Australia needs to engage with Indonesia for economic, political, and strategic reasons, which also requires the teaching and learning of the Indonesian language, its sense of superiority as an outpost of Western civilization occasionally overrides positive and constructive engagement with Indonesia and its national language. The sense of superiority from the economic, cultural, and civilizational point of view and the perceived sufficiency of English may have sedimented into English-speakers' deep-seated attitudes towards languages of the South.

Space of Modern Languages in English-speaking Societies

The hostile social and psychological landscape sustained by the "English is enough" mentality can be seen as severely restricting the space of modern languages in English-speaking societies. At the same time, given the role of English in national politics and the return of investment in English, it may be difficult to gauge the actual positions of English-speaking countries on other languages. It can be observed that their positions on modern languages are complex, equivocal, or even contradictory at times. Nevertheless, it may be possible to make a case for languages other than English and visualize fertile spaces for their cultivation in these societies.

English-speaking countries such as the US, UK, and Australia have committed to extremely utilitarian and national interest-serving agenda through modern languages. The US is a classic case of this, where "the major motivation for language education promulgation at the federal level has been national security" (Brecht & Rivers, 2012, p. 263). These authors provide an overview of the past, present, and future of this security-motivated language initiative in constructing a language policy framework for "defence and attack." The link between national security and foreign languages can be traced back to the First World War, at the end of which foreign language teaching was prohibited. The link has been strengthened with significant investment in the teaching of "critical languages" including Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Persian since 9/11 in view of the growing security threats and the increased military presence of the US in different parts of the troubled world. During the period between the First World War and 9/11, there were several key security events that led to the growing awareness of the need of languages for military and security purposes such as the Second World War, the Cold War, and the launching of Sputnik by the former Soviet Union (see Brecht & Rivers, 2012). This military connection gave a significant boost to the field of foreign language teaching and testing in the world.

The Australian government has invested in the teaching and learning of four Asian languages including Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, and Korean for economic and strategic reasons including national security. Hindi is also under consideration given the rise of India as an Asian giant. This foreign language policy has been a result of the redefinition of Australia's place in the world and its relationship with Asian countries, as outlined in a white paper (Commonwealth of Australia, 2012). Developing proficiency in the Asian languages is part of what is called "Asia Literacy," which is seen as an important aspect of human capital for Australians in an Asian century. Although the coalition government replacing the Labour Government which had initiated the policy binned the White Paper, there is bipartisan support for increasing the number of Australian

students studying in Asia and studying Asian languages but with little impact (Hill, 2016).

Similarly, in the UK, there has been significant thinking towards the linking of modern languages for national security and economic interests. The British Academy (2013) conducted an inquiry into the government's language capacity in diplomacy, international relations and national security. The report identified and analyzed challenges to building essential language capacity in these critical domains and suggested recommendations. In 2013, the British Council also commissioned a survey on *Languages for the Future* (British Council, 2013), which identified ten languages including Spanish, Arabic, French, Mandarin Chinese, German, Portuguese, Italian, Russian, Turkish, and Japanese in order of importance (see also Codrea-Rado, 2013). The languages were ranked in this order based on their scores against ten indicators: current export trade, language needs of business, government trade priorities, emerging high growth markets, diplomatic and security priorities, the public's language interests, outward visitor destinations, government's international education strategy priorities, levels of English proficiency in other countries, and the prevalence of different languages on the Internet. Although cultural and educational issues are not excluded from these indicators, these clearly show how languages are subjected to national economic and security priorities.

Another development is the launching of a manifesto in the UK by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Modern Languages on 14 July 2014. Supported by over fifty UK businesses, organizations, and institutions, the manifesto sought the following policies:

- A commitment to transform the reputation of UK citizens as poor linguists
- High quality language learning for all children throughout the UK from age 7
- A goal for every child to have a high quality language qualification by the end of secondary education
- Active encouragement for business and employers to get involved in tackling the crisis through a tax break for companies investing in language training
- A commitment to maintaining and developing UK expertise in modern languages and cultures in university language departments. (APPG, 2014, n. p.)

Although the discourses of the sufficiency of English often point to English usurping instrumental value of languages (Oaks, 2013), it is actually on the

instrumental grounds that arguments for teaching and learning of modern languages are now being made and circulated in English-speaking societies. As jobs and businesses increasingly take on global dimensions in the globalized economy, work and business environments are changing rapidly which require communication across borders, cultures, and languages. While English as a global lingua franca may bring advantage for English-speaking countries, it may still be inadequate because 75% of the world's population does not speak English and many of those who do may have their own Englishes which are not indistinguishable from those native varieties of English (Coleman, 2009). As Lanvers (2011) cited from the UK Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT, 2005):

> The fact is, more and more businesses are looking for employees with language skills, and these career opportunities have to be highlighted for young people. As the complicated process we now call "globalisation" accelerates, the ability to communicate internationally becomes a pre-requisite for success on so many different levels. That hoary old adage, "Everyone speaks English," thereby absolving us of the need to learn other languages, will consign the UK to the slow lane of global culture, politics and business. (p. 73)

Lanvers also points to economic losses for the UK in trade, business, and export which is attributed to its lower investment in language skills and language complacency. As the Chair of the APPG, Baroness Coussins, observed:

> The next government will need to take clear, urgent and coherent action to upgrade the UK's foreign language skills. The UK economy is already losing around £50 billion a year in lost contracts because of lack of language skills in the workforce. And we aren't just talking about high flyers: in 2011 over 27 per cent of admin and clerical jobs went unfilled because of the languages deficit. (APPG, 2014, n. p.)

As English language skills become saturated and job seekers from traditional and newly emerging English-speaking countries compete for globalized jobs, it is bilingual ability that is expected to bring an advantage to job searchers. Despite the mixed nature of many of the findings, the contributors to the volume on bilingual advantage in the US labor market (Callahan & Gándara, 2014) point to the desirability of bilingual trait in this domain. Reporting on the closure of modern language courses and programs in British higher education sector, Bawden (2007) also emphasized material benefits of foreign languages:

> And speaking a foreign language should be appealing. It enables people to travel abroad more easily and appreciate other cultures, as well as improving job prospects. Research shows that people with language skills can earn £3,000 a year more than those without. (n.p.)

Although the significant push towards developing foreign language capacity of English-speaking countries is driven by coalitions of businesses, government, and independent agencies, how these initiatives will result in policies and how policies will be translated into coordinated action to produce proficient users of languages is a matter of time and investigation. Without undermining the greater awareness of and policy thinking on the value of languages, albeit for instrumental reasons, one could also be sceptical about desired outcomes. While policymakers often support foreign language initiatives, public policies in this area are often rather rhetorical, which reveals the gap between what is said and what is done, or between what should be done and what is actually done (Tickle, 2013). As Tickle (2013) argues, when only 9% of students studying foreign languages in England reached the level of independent user of language compared with 82% in Sweden as reported in a European Commission report, what UK needs to do becomes obvious. However, the point that Tickle drives home with reference to different aspects of teaching and learning of languages is the much needed action which is rarely undertaken. Similar cases of foreign language teaching outcomes have been reported for Australia and the USA, substantiating the dominance of rhetoric in this field of policymaking (see Reagan, 2003; Tonkin, 2003 for the US; Lo Bianco, 2014 for Australia).

Modern Languages in the Curriculum

Beyond this domain of strategic thinking on developing national capacity to address security needs and secure economic and geopolitical interests, the practical field of foreign language teaching and learning is yet to experience significant overhauling of language education programs. As Brecht and Reivers (2012) noted with reference to the US:

> While federal support for languages in the US military continues to grow, the Department of Education for its part has not significantly increased investments in school, college and university language programs, continuing the tradition of having foreign language education in the US essentially a national security concern. (p. 264)

Although foreign languages are taught as part of the curriculum in secondary, and in some cases, primary, schools in the UK and Australia, language learning outcomes have been a matter of concern (Coleman, 2009; Kohler, 2014; Scrimgeur, 2014). Foreign languages are available at the tertiary level in all three countries. However, many of these languages and programs are struggling to survive (see Bawden, 2007; Hill, 2016).

While the society-wide picture of foreign language education looks bleak in these countries, there are small-scale initiatives which look promising. For

instance, although bilingual education has been severely axed in the US, the Seal of Biliteracy was initiated in California in 2012 and has been approved in seven other states, namely, Texas, New Mexico, Louisiana, Illinois, New York, Minnesota, and Washington. The Seal recognizes high school graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in one or more languages in addition to English at the time of school graduation. In 2014, 24,513 students were awarded this Seal in California showing significant increase from the figures from 2013 (19,000) and 2012 (10,000). Similarly, foreign language immersion programs initiated at the local level have received positive responses from communities (Dorner, 2015; Wesely & Baig, 2012). From only three such programs, as documented by the Center for Applied Linguistics, in 1971, the number rose to 119 in 1991 and 448 in 2011 (Dorner, 2015). Rumbelow (2013) noted that the number of immersion programs could be over 1000 across the US.

The immersion model appears to mark the new trend of foreign language education in the future, as it is increasingly being experimented in other parts of the world. It is becoming popular in continental Europe, where it has been given the label Content and Language Integrated Learning or CLIL, to deliberately distinguish it from its Canadian origin (see Turner, 2012). Foreign language immersion or CLIL programs are likely to have substantial growth in the UK (Rumbelow, 2013) and Australia (Smala, 2014).

Modern Languages and Complementary Schooling

An important way of cultivating or maintaining languages other than English in English-speaking societies has been through complementary schooling, labelled differently in Australia, the UK, and the US (e.g., community languages or heritage languages). Although these schools may receive some support from government authorities, they are mainly managed by communities at the local level. Migrant communities have brought their first languages to English-speaking societies, which has added to the linguistic geography in the metropolises. Despite the official status of English, hundreds of languages other than English are used by permanent and temporary residents in many of the cities, turning them into the global centers of languages. These linguistic resources generally remain under-utilized under a laissez-faire policy frame. Community efforts have led to the teaching and learning of these languages to children of migrant communities in the form of complementary schooling. These weekend schools mark the agency of local communities seeking to maintain ethnolinguistic vitality and a rich tapestry of languages in the community. *Heritage Language Journal* (http://www.heritagelanguages.org/) published since 2002 online by the National Heritage Language Resource Center at UCLA serves as a forum for disseminating knowledge and research on heritage and community languages (see Lynch, 2014 for an overview of the research).

Although the presence of languages in the community can be a good basis for choosing languages for teaching in the formal setting (Clyne & Kipp, 2006), usually there are divergences between languages taught at schools and those that are taught at weekend schools. For instance, major community languages in the London region include Bengali, Urdu, and Somali, but language subjects in schools have been dominated by French (Lanvers, 2011). Similarly, the ten key languages identified by the British Council for the UK do not include these community languages. This points to the underlying motivation for selecting school languages, which refers to the perceived value of languages and its appeal to student and parent populations.

Humanizing Language Education in a Multilingual World

As I have highlighted in the foregoing discussion, modern languages in the English-speaking countries of the UK, US, and Australia have found themselves in a complex politics and political economy of English and a hostile social and psychic environment for other languages. While the nationalist politics and economic stakes in English have prevented a whole-hearted policy support for foreign languages, national security and potential economic benefits have led to committing to the teaching and learning of these languages. This half-hearted commitment has hidden behind the strategy of policy rhetoric. At the same time, I have pointed out two discernible trends: a) emphasizing instrumental value of languages; and/or b) leaving the teaching and learning of languages with local institutions and communities following a laissez-faire approach. Both approaches fall in line with the neoliberal agenda underpinning contemporary globalization.

Instrumentalist ideologies currently dominating foreign language policies have taken reductionist views of languages and their potential. For instance, teaching languages only for their instrumental value based on economic rationale undermines the full potential of what languages can do for humans. Similarly, emphasizing languages only for identity maintenance underestimates their pragmatic possibilities. Instead of reductionist views, what is needed is a holistic, comprehensive view that will take into account languages and their purposes in their entirety. At the same time, there is a need to (re)construct the linguistic ecology of the national space, where these languages are to be introduced, being informed by the sociolinguistic reality of the local and the global context. I address both these issues in this final section of the article.

It has to be acknowledged by policymakers that the linguistic world is essentially multilingual. Multilingualism is the norm and that it is monolingualism, whether empirical or ideological, which is the exception. It also needs to be appreciated that it is multilingualism that is compatible with a globalized world that we

currently experience, which is expected to be more globalized in the future. It is impractical for policy directions to stick to monolingual ideals at this moment in history. Despite the de facto dominance of English as a global lingua franca, it is hard to imagine an English-only world. No other language may reach the height of English to dethrone it. But it is a misguided view to assert that only global languages of the present or future should be taught and learned.

Although nation-states continue to promote discourses of monolingualism and linguistic homogeneity, these discourses are facing increasing challenges as a consequence of globalization and multidirectional global flows. While there are grave predictions about the loss of a significant number of languages in the course of the current century, significant attempts are also underway to prevent language loss, revitalize languages, and assert language-identity links for minority language communities. Although a large number of children in the world are deprived of the right/opportunity to receive education through their mother tongue, there is also greater awareness of the importance of education through mother tongues, thanks to the advocacy of some key scholars in the field and the consequent recognition by international agencies such as UNESCO (Walter & Benson, 2012). Instead of focusing on languages in isolation for language planning, scholars have suggested taking into account the whole linguistic ecology in a polity (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). This means that language planning is to be guided by multilingual, rather than monolingual perspectives. Aronin and Singleton (2012) have proposed a more considerate version of linguistic ecology, which is labeled Dominant Language Constellation (DLC). DLC refers to a set of important languages for individuals or communities in a multilingual environment, which is required to meet their needs in relation to communication, interaction, and identity marking. Instead of a single language, which is the case from a monolingual focus, DLC considers a group of languages (usually three) as a unit. They explain the rationale for their approach in the following way:

> recent global transformations have resulted in a situation where not a single language, but rather a set of languages, may frequently be the prerequisite for the functioning of an individual or a society. (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 59)

Multilingualism has been the basis for language policies in the European Union where European citizens are advised to learn two European languages in addition to their L1. Multilingualism and multilingual education are increasingly being recognized in many parts of the world including Canada, South Africa, Ireland, and New Zealand. In English-speaking countries as well, while bilingual education has been axed, it is returning to school in the guise of

CLIL, as previously pointed out. The policy and planning of modern languages in English-speaking societies should have as its starting point the recognition beyond the ideological domain that society is inherently plurilingual which is part of a multilingual world.

Within this multilingual space, teaching and learning of foreign languages needs to be promoted taking a holistic view, not just looking for economic and geopolitical rationales. These languages in the curriculum in the first instance should be seen as part of education in the areas of humanities and social studies, going beyond mere instrumentalism. Reagan (2003) presents this case poignantly:

> Perhaps the most powerful argument for the need for students to study languages other than their own is that the point of "education" is to introduce and initiate the individual into our common human social and cultural heritage, and that this cannot be done adequately without some exposure to the different ways in which human beings in various times and places, have constructed an amazingly wide variation of languages to meet their needs. If becoming educated is, as many scholars have suggested, the process by which one learns to join in the "human conversation," then language skills will inevitably be required if one wishes to join the conversation at anything more than the most trivial level. (p. 142)

This knowing of others and other linguistic and semiotic ways of doing things have been emphasized by the notion of intercultural competence, which is also presented as the key aim of foreign language studies. In a globalized world, where global mobility has reached an unprecedented height, the necessity of knowing other languages and cultures can be rightly argued to be a requirement of what is called "intercultural citizenship" (Byram, 2021). Tertiary-level English students learning French or Spanish, as reported by Oakes (2013), and English-speaking Australian students studying German, as reported by (Schmidt, 2014), were guided by, among other factors, these intercultural goals.

At the same time, it needs to be emphasized that learning foreign languages means knowing oneself better, taking a different perspective, the perspective of others. As Tonkin (2003) argues, foreign language skills enable us to see the world in a different way, to be a different being, which ultimately leads to knowing oneself:

> We need to learn languages in schools because they offer us alternative ways of being ourselves – and such is the very essence of freedom. Indeed, foreign languages are a crucially important part of our cognitive development. (Tonkin, 2003, pp. 154-155)

This learning of self and other, by adopting the self and other perspectives, is possible because every language is a unique epistemic code that shapes the way of knowing for its speakers (Petrovic, 2015). Similarly, as Wierzbicka (2013) argues, learning another language is needed to set oneself free from monolingual imprisonment and cognitive tunnel-vision. Implicitly, she urges monolingual English speakers not to be imprisoned in English and seek freedom by learning additional languages.

Languages are the best form of humanistic education because language study tells us what we share with other human beings, in the ways of being in the world, and in what ways we differ from others – in other words, what makes us human (Reagan, 2003). This educational focus is needed particularly in our time when human values are being replaced by market values and ideals of self-aggrandizement and consumerism and when there are growing tensions and misunderstandings between societies and cultures. It is important to note that the study of a foreign language has the potential to develop informed, more positive and less prejudiced views about the speakers of the language and the society. By analyzing data of an Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) news poll survey, Hill (2016) argues that the experience of the study of Indonesia has positive effects on the perceptions of this neighboring country.

This may happen because the study of foreign languages helps us to know more about the society and its people and to get rid of our ignorance and prejudices promoted by interested groups. Indeed, it is a pity that when the crowded curriculum is forced to accommodate issues of physical health and safety issues, advocacy for language education for knowing us and others as humans falls onto deaf ears.

This emphasis on the educational, intercultural, and humanistic goals of foreign languages does not undermine instrumental potential of languages. However, an emphasis on the latter, as we can see currently happening, may not recognize the higher values of foreign language education. The dissecting of the goals of foreign language teaching – instrumental and integrative – is observed only at the policy level; for language learners, all sorts of goals, both instrumental, integrative, and humanistic, come together, as has been reported by language students in Oaks' (2013) and Schmidt's (2014) studies. Many of the students in the latter study were motivated by who they were and who they would like to be, where both instrumental and integrative goals were harmonized. Oaks' (2013) study is particularly interesting because it emphasized that being monolingual English-speakers and having been born in the UK provided the primary motivation for learning another language. Despite the dominance of the "English is enough"

discourse, there is awareness among these people that English is clearly not enough and therefore their communicative repertoire needs to be enriched by adding resources of another language. Thus, they were seeking freedom from the monolingual imprisonment in English.

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Literature and Cultural Studies

Subjugation, Dehumanization, and Resistance: Slaves in Select Antebellum American Slave Autobiographies

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Abstract

In Antebellum America, both male and female slaves were oppressed and subjugated. However, the forms of these oppressions varied based on the gender of the slave, as did the ways in which different genders resisted their oppressors. Using the autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs as primary sources, this paper studies the differences and similarities between male and female slaves in terms of subjugation and resistance in Antebellum America. Douglass in his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, describes how slave-owners used violence to "break" male slaves' spirits and maintain their subservience, leading him to employ physical resistance against his masters and eventually flee to the North. On the other hand, Jacobs in her autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* illustrates how female slaves faced additional obstacles, such as fighting for their children's safety and living under the constant threat of sexual violence. These gendered differences reveal the complex ways in which power and oppression function in society, especially when analyzing them from an intersectional perspective. Through this analysis, the paper gains a deeper understanding of the nature of power dynamics connected to slavery.

Keywords: resistance, exploitation, dehumanization, slavery, race, racism

Introduction

The 19th century in America was a time of great turmoil and upheaval, especially for African Americans who were still enslaved and treated as property. The institution of slavery is rooted in the Atlantic slave trade which brought over "10 million" slaves from Africa to the Americas between the 15th to the 18th centuries (Lovejoy 95). With the discovery of the Americas by European settlers and the cultivation of new crops such as sugarcane, tobacco, and cotton, intensive labor was required, which American natives were unable to perform. This prompted

the European settlers to turn their attention to Africa where they captured and enslaved millions of people to work in their fields.

Douglass and Jacobs were two such former slaves who wrote autobiographies that detailed their experiences of being enslaved in America. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, published in 1845, is a powerful condemnation of the institution of slavery in the United States and played a significant role in the abolitionist movement. Through his narrative Douglass sheds light on the brutal conditions of slavery he faced as a child and young adult. His experiences included various forms of abuse such as physical violence, starvation, and being forced to work in abhorrent conditions. On the other hand, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), an autobiography written by Jacobs offers a unique perspective on the experiences of enslaved women in the American Antebellum South. Jacobs recounts her struggles as a slave woman and the challenges she faced in keeping her children safe during a time when "[s]exual exploitation and abuse simply characterized the daily reality of many females in bondage" (Miller 35). Both Douglass and Jacobs further portray the differing ways in which male and female slaves experienced and resisted slavery and pursued freedom. Therefore, in this paper, we examine select slave narratives with the aim of seeking answers to how male and female slaves were exploited and subjugated in Antebellum America, and how they resisted their oppressors.

In connection to these questions, we also explore the distinctions between race and racism, as well as how the concept of race, as it is understood today, is mostly a "European" invention mainly constructed to justify the discriminatory treatment inflicted on Africans (Fortney 35). The paper is an exegesis of the aforementioned autobiographical texts. However, the only limitation would be that very often the genre has been claimed to be unreliable (on which the authors of this paper elaborate in the theoretical framework). Overall, the authors of this paper unearth the gendered dynamics of slavery in the select texts in an attempt to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding the lives of enslaved individuals in Antebellum America.

Race, Racism, and Intersectionality

The concept of race is a complex and socially constructed notion that is difficult to scientifically define. It serves as a way of categorizing and distinguishing the diverse human population based on perceived physical traits, such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture. American sociologist and race theorist Wintat posits that "race can be defined as a concept that signifies and symbolizes sociopolitical conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies" (172). Generally speaking, though race is a way of categorizing people based on their physical characteristics, such as their outward appearance or their

physical traits, it is important to understand that race is not something that is determined by biology or science. Instead, it is created and defined by society and history. Certain physical features may be used to determine someone's race, but there is no clear-cut "biological" basis for these categories. Close examination of the ways in which people are categorized into different races shows that these categories are not accurate or consistent (Wintat 172). So, the question is if there is no biological validation of race, why was it constructed? The answer is quite simple. Throughout history, race is created as a tool for "othering," as a means of "distinguishing and highlighting differences" among the various communities of humans which led to the creation of "social hierarchies" and gave rise to different "power dynamics."

According to Wintat, the concept of race started to develop alongside the emergence of a "world political economy," as the world became more interconnected through trade and exploration. With the colonization of the Americas and the establishment of the Atlantic slave trade particularly, the concept of race began to take shape (172). It was not just a theoretical concept, but rather a practical one that evolved over time. Although different societies across the world had their own ways of categorizing people based on physical characteristics, the specific idea of race as it is understood today was primarily an invention of "Europeans" (Fortney 35). It was connected with the processes that led to the creation of European "nation-states" and colonial empires (Wintat 172). Wintat claims that the creation of the dark, oppressive, and exploitative sugar plantations in regions like the Brazilian Reconcavo and the Caribbean were all part of the same "world-historical process" that shaped the concept of race (172). Similar sentiments would be echoed by Zanden in his article "The Ideology of White Supremacy," in which he would go on to point out how "notions of innate Negro inferiority" would rise "rather early in the Colonies" (391). Therefore, the "biological basis," as the prevailing belief, was constructed and practiced for a "colonial purpose" which propagated some races (e.g., white-skinned Europeans) to be superior to others (e.g., black-skinned Africans).

As one can imagine, this perspective of a biological reality influenced not only scientific discourses but also social and political systems. This understanding of race played a significant role in debates, both in "defense of slavery and its critique" (Wintat 174). Proponents of slavery used the concept of race to justify the enslavement of certain groups, arguing that their "innate" characteristics made them suitable for servitude (Wilson 411). While discussing segregation and the unlawful treatment of black people, people in the South often used terms like "instinctive," "a natural order," or "a universal law of nature" to describe it (Zanden 386). By relying on these pseudoscientific notions, historical justifications for

racial hierarchies were constructed, enabling further discrimination of black people. Zanden also attributes slavery to pre-Enlightenment thinking, including influences from Greek philosophers like Aristotle, who claimed that slavery was a natural part of the social order and part of God's plan for the world (387).

However, the idea that certain races are inherently inferior or superior to others only became a widely accepted practice through the early 16th-century colonial endeavors. Three hundred years later, in 19th century America, Jacobs confronted these notions of racial inferiority, and justifiably attributing the blame to the institution of slavery, she declared, "I admit that the black man is inferior. But what is it that makes him so? It is the ignorance in which white men compel him to live; it is the torturing whip that lashes manhood out of him; it is the fierce bloodhounds of the South" (49). It is a historical fact that different forms of slavery have existed throughout the ages, even before the establishment of the Atlantic slave trade. However, these systems of slavery were typically justified not because of the alleged biological inferiority of a person, but rather due to religious and cultural differences (Zanden 390). When a significant number of enslaved Africans began to adopt Christianity as their religion, there arose a need for a change in rhetoric. As Zanden would point out, "As time progressed and the Negro was converted to Christianity, the heathen or infidel buttress no longer constituted a satisfactory defense of slavery. Gradually, then, the biological argument came into prominence" (391). This "biological argument" reinforces the belief among the 19th century white Europeans that the "mental capacity" of black people had a "biological limit or ceiling." Conversely, abolitionists such as Jacobs expressed their disdain for such laws and beliefs: "I regarded such laws as the regulations of robbers, who had no rights that I was bound to respect" (208). Similarly, Douglass also challenged these notions of "natural inferiority" of black people and hoped that, given enough "time and opportunity," they may reach "the highest point of human excellence" which ensures that the notion of freedom would soon thrash the chains of slavery (38).

Intersectionality

With the emancipation of slaves and the abolition of slavery, American society gradually aimed to distance itself from its racist past. However, despite the passage of time, racist ideologies and discrimination continue to persist even in the 21st century. Thus, the vision of a post-racial society remains largely elusive. In order to address the ongoing racism and prejudice against certain racial groups, various racial theoretical frameworks have emerged. Among these frameworks is the intersectionality theory, which asserts that a person's various identities, such as gender, race, and social status, intersect "to shape" different forms of discrimination or, in some cases, preferential treatment (Crenshaw,

qtd. in Gopaldas 90). Intersectionality can help explain the various forms of abuse that Douglass and Jacobs encountered, and elaborate on why some of their struggles were similar while others were unique to them.

To understand intersectionality, one must look at the period after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, when it became increasingly clear that progress with regards to racial equality had stagnated, and even some of the victories of the past "were being rolled back" (Delgado and Stefancic 461). In response to these challenges, a group of scholars and activists identified the need for a fresh perspective that could provide deeper insights into the interconnectedness of race and other social identities, and how they intersected with systems of oppression. The term "intersectionality" was coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, but "the concept of intersectionality was developed over the course of the twentieth century by various advocates of black feminism" (Gopaldas 90). The term emphasizes how different intersecting identities of a person shape unique experiences of marginalization and resistance. Slave autobiographies and narratives written in the Antebellum period nullify the connection of intersectionality with slavery for which a little elaboration on the aspects of slave narratives is necessary.

Exploring the Historical and Critical Aspects of Slave Narratives

Slave narratives hold importance as they provide firsthand accounts and personal testimonies of individuals who experienced slavery. But there are an abundance of these narratives. James Onley mentions that "one estimate puts the number of extant narratives at over six thousand" (46). Onley notes even after reading through two or three dozen narratives, one would only scratch the surface. Nevertheless, while slave narratives have been a valuable source of information and insight into the lives of enslaved individuals, a gap in the research lies in the comparative analysis of these narratives through an intersectional lens. In fact, very few attempts have been made to examine the experiences of male and female slaves in Antebellum America. By delving into the narratives of both male and female slaves, a more nuanced understanding of how gender played a crucial role in defining the experiences of slaves can be attained.

Furthermore, the authorship of slave narratives has been historically subjected to much scrutiny. One of the primary reasons for doubting the authorship of slave narratives is the limited access to education that enslaved individuals had, especially during the Antebellum period. Many enslaved individuals were denied the opportunity for formal education, and there was a prevailing belief among some that they lacked the necessary skills to write their narratives. This assumption has led to skepticism about whether the ex-slaves themselves were the actual authors or if their narratives were authored by others. Zanden points

out the lack of appreciation for the intellectual abilities of black people, stating that it "was essentially a paternal point of view, one which held that the Negro race could be elevated only under the guidance and supervision of an advanced civilized race" (395).

For this reason, accounts such as the one provided by Jacobs were questioned for their authenticity. Many believed that her editor, Lydia Maria Child, was the true author of the book, and Jacobs was just the convenient token black woman used to appeal to people's emotions and sentimentality to promote abolitionist ideologies. Yellin, however, disputes these claims, stating that the "discovery of a cache of" Jacobs' "letters" has "transformed" the "questionable slave narrative into a well-documented pseudonymous autobiography" (479). Here, Yellin is speaking out against the deeply ingrained belief that black individuals are incapable of intellectual or creative achievements on their own and need the guidance or assistance of white people to accomplish anything significant. This is probably why Foreman claims that "slave narratives are the most neglected body of early American writing" (313). However, when these narratives are examined alongside current events in America, it becomes evident that racial divisions and oppression still persist. People of color continue to face inequality and social opportunities are far from equal. Hence, the study of slave narratives, whether they are autobiographical or biographical, is crucial in this effort. The discussion becomes more nuanced when race and gender are considered together, enabling one to recognize the interconnected systems of oppression that male and female slaves (e.g. Douglass and Jacobs) confronted and how they navigated their unique paths of resistance.

Resistance through Violence in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, published in 1845, details Douglass' life as a slave in Antebellum America. It is a powerful condemnation of the institution of slavery in the United States, as it played a significant role in the abolitionist movement. One of the most crucial elements of Douglass' narrative is his description of the psychological impact of slavery on enslaved people, with one of his earliest childhood memories being the witnessing of his aunt being lashed. He writes, "I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it. I never shall forget it whilst I remember anything. It was the first of a long series of such outrages" (49). This traumatic experience had a profound psychological impact on Douglass. He later reflected, "It was a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it" (Douglass 49). It was a trauma that was all too common among enslaved people, yet often went unrecognized and untreated, as it "was a generally held belief that Africans

lacked humanity and were therefore incapable of experiencing mental illnesses" (Hickling and Sorel, qtd. in Longman-Mills et al. 79).

Douglass often spoke of the "dehumanization" that slavery caused, noting that it robbed people of their humanity and made them feel like nothing more than objects. Furthermore, he recognized that the institution of slavery dehumanized both the enslaved individuals and the slave owners themselves, creating a cycle of violence and oppression:

> We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, old and young, … There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being, and were all subjected to the same narrow examination … At this moment, I saw more clearly than ever the brutalizing effects of slavery upon both slave and slaveholder. (Douglass 76)

The belief that Africans were an "inferior race" was not unique among the Southern American slaveholders. Longman-Mills et al. exposed similar sentiments among Caribbean slave owners who thought that the imprisoned "Africans were considered to be sub-human, treated as property, enslaved, raped, beaten and killed" (79). This shows that the dehumanization and brutal treatment of enslaved Africans was not limited to one particular region or group of slaveholders, and was quite common across different regions and cultures. The prevalence of this type of thinking during the era of slavery can be attributed to several factors. One of the main reasons was the economic incentive to use enslaved people as cheap labor, enabling the maximization of profits. Robert S. Starobini claims that most slaves in the South "lived in rural, small-town or plantation settings, where most southern industry was located" (132).

Additionally, the institution of slavery, as mentioned above, was supported by laws and religious teachings. Douglass reiterates this in his autobiography: "Here we have religion and robbery the allies of each other – devils dressed in angels' robes" (123). Furthermore, cultural beliefs such as the idea of white supremacy and the notion that slavery was justified because it was a "civilizing force" also contributed to the prevalence of this type of thinking. One of the Founding Fathers of America, Thomas Jefferson, had the opinion that black people were a "distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind." For enslaved people like Douglass, these predominant cultural and religious prejudices meant that he faced significant challenges and obstacles as an enslaved person and later as a free man fighting for the abolition of slavery.

Due to these prejudices held by white people, slaves such as Douglass were

denied the opportunity to receive basic human rights. Douglass' enslavement ensured that all his basic "rights of humanity are annihilated" and that protection was only to be granted to the "spoiler" rather than the "victim" (Douglass 40). One of the less talked about abusive aspects of the institution of slavery was the restriction on slaves to receive an education. As Douglass asserts, "it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read" (68). Douglass describes how the slaveholders believed that education would "spoil the best" slaves in their holdings, making them harder to control and subdue (68). In other words, after receiving an education, slaves would no longer be compliant.

Despite the danger and punishment that came with being caught reading or writing as an enslaved person, Douglass continued to educate himself and eventually "succeeded in learning to read and write" (Douglass 71). It had to be done in secret and by using various "stratagems" since he was allowed "no regular teacher" (Douglass 71). Douglass' owners tried to keep him illiterate so that he would be easier to control and more content with his station in life. However, through Douglass's own initiative and natural curiosity, he taught himself his letters. He accomplished this by sometimes seeking instructions from the white boys during rare breaks from work and at other times by studying discarded newspapers and books that he managed to salvage. When thinking back about his time, Douglass would write, "my copy-book was the board fence, brick wall, and pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk. With these, I learned mainly how to write" (75).

Although not being allowed to read and write was a significant obstacle for Douglass, it was just one part of the many challenges he faced as a slave. His experience was characterized by the constant threat of violence and physical abuse from his masters and overseers. He vividly recalls his time spent working for a slaveholder named Mr. Covey, who was a particularly cruel slave-owner. As Douglass recounts, "Scarcely a week passed without his whipping me. I was seldom free from a sore back" (87). So, it can be said that Mr. Covey took particular enjoyment from punishing his slaves, and enjoyed his reputation as a breaker of "young slaves" (84). Unsurprisingly Douglass' short time with Mr. Covey was marked by brutal beatings, whippings, and other forms of punishment, which often left him physically scarred. As Douglass recalls, Mr. Covey "tore off my clothes, and lashed me till he had worn out his switches, cutting me so savagely as to leave the marks visible for a long time after" (87). This treatment was all too common for enslaved people who were subjected to brutal violence and mistreatment at the hands of their owners with little to no recourse or protection under the law. Stripping slaves was a common practice among slave owners who often used various forms of physical and psychological

abuse to subdue and control their slaves. Keri Leigh Merritt points out that to further "emasculate enslaved boys and men," their masters would deprive "them right to wear pants." Other methods of emasculation techniques, as she goes on to write, involved forcing male slaves to wear "skirts" or dress-like garments, with the purpose of feminizing and undermining them to ensure that the masters were "the most masculine men on the plantation" (Merritt). Thus the masters reassert their dominance over the slaves and subdue them through humiliation and emasculation.

It was also economically more practical to outfit slaves with a single garment rather than providing them with separate shirts, pants, and undergarments. However, the winter months posed a significant challenge for slaves as the harsh cold was severe enough to kill them and the clothing provided to them offered little protection against the cold. Not every enslaved male was "lucky enough to receive pants when the weather turned cooler" (Merritt). Douglass echoed similar sentiments, describing how slaves would receive a limited amount of clothing at the start of each year but by the time winter arrived, these clothes would have become worn and tattered. Douglass states, "[T]heir clothing consisted of two coarse linen shirts per year. When these failed them, they went naked until the next allowance-day. Children from seven to ten years old, of both sexes, almost naked" (52).

Despite the inhumane treatment and severe limitations imposed upon them, slaves found ways to resist and assert their agency. Douglass was no exception. At the age of 16, he realized that the only way to prevent Mr. Covey's beatings was to physically resist him, using force to counter force. This realization came to Douglass one day after he failed to carry wheat due to a sudden bout of illness. Mr. Covey, upon finding Douglass in this state, instead of helping him, kicked him to the side and told him to get up. When Douglass failed to do so, Mr. Covey picked up the "hickory slat" which Hughes had been using and gave Douglass a heavy blow upon the head, causing a large wound and making blood flow freely (Douglass 91). This event would lead Douglass to go see Master Thomas, a former master. He hoped to receive some form of protection against Mr. Covey. Instead, he was "ridiculed" and told that Mr. Covey's actions were justified and he was instructed to return to him (Douglass 92).

After learning that he went seeking Master Thomas' aid, Mr. Covey would target Douglass out for further punishment. Douglass describes the harrowing incident, saying, "Mr. Covey entered the stable with a long rope, and just as I was half out of the loft, he caught hold of my legs and was about tying me" (93-94). This became the first time that Douglass physically resisted his oppressor. He declared, "I resolved to fight," and he followed through with his resolution by grabbing

"Covey hard by the throat" and rising to his feet (Douglass 94). When asked by Covey whether he meant to "persist" with his resistance, Douglass would state that he did, further adding that "come what might … I was determined to be used so no longer," marking the beginning of how Douglass would deal with oppression from then on (94).

From that fateful day, Douglass resolved to resist the beatings through physical means. Douglass explains that the only reason he was not punished more severely for his disobedience was that it would not reflect well on Covey to have it known that a teenage slave had the audacity to oppose him:

> Mr. Covey enjoyed the most unbounded reputation for being a first-rate overseer and negro-breaker. It was of considerable importance to him. That reputation was at stake; and had he sent me – a boy about sixteen years old – to the public whipping-post, his reputation would have been lost; so, to save his reputation, he suffered me to go unpunished. (95)

After suffering at the hands of his masters for so long, this act of resistance would embolden Douglass and give him a newfound sense of strength and courage that he did not have previously growing up in bondage. He no longer accepted the inhumane treatment from his masters without a fight as he wrote that his "long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place" (Douglass 95). Despite the risks, these acts of resistance paid off. Douglass became so confident that he continued getting into "fights, but was never whipped" (Douglass 95).

However, these "fights" that Douglass mentions would be something he would have to contend with into his adulthood. As a slave, Douglass' life was marred by violence and brutality. Even after getting work as an apprentice at a shipyard, Douglass would face discrimination among the other white shipyard workers, almost losing his "left eye" in one altercation (Douglass 108). Ultimately, Douglass came to learn that the only way he could find salvation was by escaping his life of servitude. Coming to this realization, he would eventually escape to the North, but in his autobiography, he would refrain from divulging any details regarding his escape so as not to close off the possibility for other slaves to escape in a similar manner. Thus, showing resilience and strength of the human spirit, his autobiography stands as a testament to the horrors of slavery and the power of hope and resistance in the face of adversity.

The Trials of a Slave Mother in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl is an 1861 autobiography by Harriet Jacobs, a former slave in the United States, written under the pseudonym of Linda Brent. The book tells the story of Jacobs' life as a slave including the sexual harassment

she faced at the hands of her master, her escape to freedom, and her fight to keep her children safe. Throughout the book, Jacobs writes in great detail about the physical and psychological abuse she and other enslaved women suffered as well as the ways in which they resisted slavery and sought freedom. Jacobs wrote about her own experiences of being repeatedly harassed by her master, Dr. Flint: "I was subjected to such insults as no pen can describe. I would not describe them if I could; they were too low, too revolting" (86). However, despite these indignations, she tried to preserve her "self-respect" while struggling against "the powerful grasp of … Slavery" (Jacobs 60). The book also deals with issues such as motherhood, family separation, and the role of enslaved women in Antebellum America.

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl holds a unique place among slave narratives as it offers a rare perspective from the lens of a woman, which was highly unusual for that period. This unique aspect makes the autobiography more significant in the history of the abolitionist movement since it is widely recognized that "slave narratives were the most telling weapons in the abolitionist arsenal" (Doherty 82). Slave narratives also offer a unique opportunity for slaves to write themselves "into an existence recognized by dominant American society" (Drake 91). Therefore, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* takes on particular significance as it illuminates the firsthand experiences of a slave girl and highlights the various ways in which they were exploited and oppressed as slaves.

Furthermore, according to Thomas Doherty, Jacobs' book was "both demographically and rhetorically astute" (81). This is because women were some of the most ardent advocates of the abolition of slavery. As Doherty put it, "[n]orthern women, largely from leisured middle-class households, were among the abolitionist movement's most dedicated participants" (81). The active involvement of women in the anti-slavery movement marked a significant departure from societal norms at the time. Their contributions, however, faced strong opposition, even within the abolitionist movement. Though they may not have been subjected to physical violence as frequently as their male counterparts, female abolitionists encountered substantial public "ridicule, and censure" (Doherty 81). Regardless of these obstacles, women abolitionists were able to defy social conventions and the expectations placed on women to remain passive in social and political issues, and make their voices heard against the institution of slavery.

Jacobs, through her writing style and sentimentality, brought to the northern women's attention the torment endured by the female slaves who were subjected to sexual exploitation and harassment at the hands of white male slave masters. For instance, by the time Jacobs turned fifteen, she was already the victim of

sexual harassment. As she writes, "On my fifteenth year … (m)y master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import. I tried to treat them with indifference or contempt" (30). Her ability to retell these harsh realities drew her fellow slave sisters' empathy, encouraging their involvement in the abolitionist cause. In this regard, Braxton points out that when "viewed from a gynocritical or gynocentric perspective, *Incidents* arrives at the very heart and root of Afra-America autobiographical writing" (383-384). Indeed, throughout the retelling of her story, Jacobs remained true to her identity and was quick to point out that for her to survive in Antebellum America she could not do as the white women did, as she states in this line: "[t]hat which commands admiration in the white woman only hastens the degradation of the female slave" (31). It proves that to understand her struggle all of her identities (e.g., race, gender, body, sexual choice, etc.) would need to be considered to fully comprehend her experience.

Jacobs' narrative demonstrates the value of intersectionality in understanding her experience and the broader struggle against slavery. She highlights the stark contrast between her own experiences as a slave girl and the privileges enjoyed by free, white women. She appeals to the empathy of those women, urging them not to judge her harshly but to understand the immense challenges she faced as a result of slavery. She laments the impossibility of maintaining her purity and self-respect under the oppressive grip of slavery, feeling abandoned by society at large, as the passage below shows:

> But, O, ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely! If slavery had been abolished, I, also, could have married the man of my choice; I could have had a home shielded by the laws; … I wanted to keep myself pure; and, under the most adverse circumstances, I tried hard to preserve my self-respect; but I was struggling alone in the powerful grasp of the demon Slavery. (60)

Hence, this book was a way for Jacobs to tell the world of the cruelties perpetuated by the institution of slavery and "was the first to address the sexual exploitation of women under slavery" (Sherman 167). She illustrated the stark contrast between the lack of repercussions faced by her tormentor, Dr. Flint, and the immense sacrifices she had to make to escape from him.

Throughout her life, Jacobs faced harsh consequences for her defiance. Despite being the victim of unjust treatment, the white community falsely accused her of impropriety, while her tormentor, Dr. Flint, presented himself as the victim.

His distorted perception fueled a vow to make her suffer until her "last day" (Jacobs 86). Dr. Flint's wife also vilified Jacobs while pitying herself as a "martyr" (Jacobs 37). The autobiography clearly shows the difficulties of being a black female slave in America. Jacobs expressed that she believed any other life would be more favorable than her own existence, as she wrote: "I would ten thousand times rather that my children should be the half-starved paupers of Ireland than to be the most pampered among the slaves of America" (34). Sherman points out how "not only was slavery's threat more sexual for women, but genteel codes for their behavior were more stringent. The standards of free people differed for men and women" (170). This sentiment is further echoed in Jacobs' writing, where she asserts that living under the control of an "unprincipled master and a jealous mistress" would have a dehumanizing effect on anyone and give rise to feelings of profound despair, anguish, and helplessness (34).

Despite the harsh realities of slave life, Jacobs remained undeterred. She understood that traditional notions of demureness and chastity, often expected of women, would not serve as effective weapons for her as a black woman in the face of her abusive master. She recognized that overt displays of purity and submission would not protect her or lead to improved treatment. On the contrary, they would only invite further abuse and exploitation from her master. As Sherman put it, chastity and purity in women "could be a significant weapon against male aggression, but it also opened new areas of vulnerability" (170). Recognizing the constraints of her situation, she realized that clinging to traditional notions of purity and chastity would only play into her master's desires and further worsen her circumstances.

Therefore, to put a stop to the ongoing harassment and unwarranted sexual advances from Dr. Flint, Jacobs made the decision to engage in a relationship with another man. She reflects, "I knew what I did, and I did it with deliberate calculation" (Jacobs 60). Moreover, Jacobs advises her readers not to judge her actions based on conventional expectations of women's behavior, as her circumstances as a slave were vastly different from those of free women. With the hope of deterring Dr. Flint's obsession with her, she sought the companionship of another white man who showed "sympathy" towards her plight (Jacobs 60). Jacobs believed that if it became known that she had a lover, Dr. Flint's infatuation would gradually lessen over time, or this perceived act of betrayal would compel her master to sell her. As she candidly states, "I thought he would revenge himself by selling me, and I was sure my friend, Mr. Sands, would buy me. He was a man of more generosity and feeling than my master, and I thought my freedom could be easily obtained from him. The crisis of my fate now came so near that I was desperate" (Jacobs 61). Even in the unjust circumstances of

being owned by another, Jacobs demonstrated her ability to assert control over her own life and body.

Through this strategic use of her sexuality as a form of resistance, Jacobs empowered herself, protecting herself against the constant threat of sexual violence. However, her act of defiance did not yield the desired outcome. Rather than selling her as she had hoped, her master responded with even greater discrimination and abuse, subjecting her to further hardships, such as, making her work in the plantation rather than in the house. Also, when Jacobs gave birth, her lover did not provide the support she had anticipated and hoped for. Instead, once again, Jacobs found herself completely at the mercy of her master, having to face him on her own without any assistance:

> Dr. Flint had sworn that he would make me suffer, to my last day, for this new crime against *him*, as he called it; and as long as he had me in his power he kept his word. On the fourth day after the birth of my babe, he entered my room suddenly, and commanded me to rise and bring my baby to him. … I rose, took up my babe, and crossed the room to where he sat. "Now stand there," said he, "till I tell you to go back!" My child bore a strong resemblance to her father, and to the deceased Mrs. Sands, her grandmother. He noticed this; and while I stood before him, trembling with weakness, he heaped upon me and my little one every vile epithet he could think of. (86-87)

The birth of Jacobs' child from her relationship with Mr. Sands added another layer of complexity to her pursuit of freedom. Being a mother meant that she could no longer simply escape and leave her child behind. She had to consider the well-being and freedom of her child as well. This compelled her to search for ways in which both she and her child could escape the oppressive bonds of slavery. Jacobs elaborates that her plan was to hide herself "at the house of a friend and remain there a few weeks till the search was over," hoping that Dr. Flint would "get discouraged, and, for fear of losing [her] value, and also of subsequently finding [her] children among the missing, he would consent to sell [them]" (101). This re-expresses the challenges faced by female slaves, who could not prioritize their own safety but also needed to secure the freedom of their children.

Gendered Experiences and Forms of Resistance in the Two Novels

Both male and female slaves in Antebellum America experienced the harsh realities of slavery, but their experiences were often shaped by their gender in different ways. This is well explained by the intersectional theory introduced by Crenshaw, who states that understanding the "various ways in which race and

gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions" provides deeper insights into the experiences of individuals that would otherwise remain unexplored (1224). Douglass and Jacobs, both slaves in 19th-century America, had to experience similar kinds of exploitation. However, there were also distinct differences in the forms of oppression they faced. To fully understand these differences, it is crucial to consider all aspects of their intersecting identities. While both individuals were black and enslaved, their gender became the defining factor in how they were exploited.

Being a woman was enough to experience a bad life in 19th-century America. But Jacobs was not just a woman – she was black and a slave. So, her trials were three-times more difficult than any contemporary white woman. Furthermore, her anxiety was heightened when she discovers that she gave birth to a girl child. She states: "[M]y heart was heavier than it had ever been before. Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women" (86). From an intersectional perspective, Jacobs' statement reflects the compounded oppressions faced by enslaved women. By stating that slavery is far more terrible for women, Jacobs recognizes the additional layers of oppression and suffering experienced by women within the institution of slavery. Not only were they subjected to the brutalities and dehumanization endured by enslaved men, but they also had to contend with the specific forms of oppression that targeted women. This included sexual exploitation, abuse, and the denial of their reproductive autonomy. According to Yellin, Jacobs' book "was the first to address the sexual exploitation of women under slavery," while also acknowledging the "rhetorical strain" faced by Jacobs for openly discussing such topics (qtd. in Sherman 167). While Jacobs' narrative may be seen as less forceful compared to Douglass' classic autobiography, the "ambivalence and troubled voice point toward its strength" (Sherman 167). As Jacobs struggles between the oppressive bonds of slavery and the ideals of true womanhood, she goes through severe tensions and moral conflict. Jacobs vehemently denounces the evil system of slavery while grappling with uncertainty and the complexities created due to her gender identity.

As stated earlier, slavery affected both men and women, but it had a unique and deeply personal impact on enslaved women. Enslaved women were often used for breeding purposes, as concubines, wet nurses, or caregivers. This meant that their ability to bear children was controlled and manipulated by their enslavers. Slavery posed a particularly intimate and brutal threat to women because it denied their sense of self and identity, allowing their masters to behave more selfishly and cruelly, without recognizing their humanity. For example, after giving birth, children would often be forcibly separated from their mothers, a practice designed to undermine familial bonds and exploit enslaved women

further. This act of tearing families apart further served as a means of exerting control and perpetuating the dehumanizing nature of slavery. Both Douglass and Jacobs, in their writings, elaborate on the brutality inflicted upon slave mothers. Jacobs expresses the anguish felt by slave mothers, stating that they never knew when their "children … may all be torn from her the next morning; and often does she wish that she and they might die before the day dawns" (18). Similarly, Douglass recounted his own experience of being forcibly separated from his mother at a young age. He reflected on this painful event: "My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant – before I knew her as my mother. It is a common custom, in the part of Maryland from which I ran away, to part children from their mothers at a very early age" (Douglass 46). These firsthand accounts reveal how slave mothers were unable to keep their own children after giving birth. Ironically, they would be forced to work as "wet nurses" for their masters' children while their own children were cruelly sold off to distant plantations, never truly knowing the love and care of their mothers.

Perhaps the most horrifying aspect of slavery for female slaves was the constant threat of sexual violence they endured. As Sarah Way Sherman points out, "slavery denied the female slave's selfhood, it tempted her master to monstrous selfishness, unfettered by recognition of their common humanity" (170). The sexual autonomy of slave girls was brutally violated by white men, resulting in the inevitable loss of their innocence. Unlike free, middle-class women who had the privilege of choosing their husbands and exerting control over their adult lives, enslaved women like Jacobs had no such luxury. Interestingly, male slaves (both men and boys) were also commonly sexually exploited but the incidents might be "mostly unarticulated" (Foster 446). Foster provides a number of forceful "sodomy" cases which involved the male slaves (445-447). However, Douglass does not share any such incident in his autobiography.

Despite these differences in treatment, there are numerous similarities in how enslaved black males and females were treated. Both were subjected to the dehumanizing effects of slavery, enduring physical and emotional abuse. They were both denied basic human rights and treated as property, bought and sold at the whim of their owners. In his account, Douglass vividly recalls the brutal whipping his aunt endured at the hands of his master after being caught in the company of another man. The master whipped his aunt hardest "where the blood ran fastest" (49). Aunt Hester being a woman did not dissuade Douglass' master from subjecting her to brutal whippings, highlighting the disregard for gender when it came to physical harm inflicted by masters. As stated earlier in this paper, Douglass himself endured many similar beatings.

Furthermore, enslaved black males and females were denied education and intellectual development. Both were denied the opportunity to read, write, or pursue education, which further perpetuated their subjugation and limited their ability to resist their oppressors. Fortunately, Douglass' ability to teach himself how to read played a crucial role in his journey towards opposing the institution of slavery. Through his reading, he realized that education and slavery were fundamentally incompatible. The knowledge he gained from books instilled in him a deep desire to challenge the oppressive system and advocate for freedom. Similarly, Jacobs would not have been blessed with the knowledge of words if it had not been for the benevolence of her first mistress, as she honestly states, "While I was with her, she taught me to read and spell" (12). Moreover, despite the prohibition, Jacobs made efforts to pass on her knowledge of reading and writing to Uncle Fred: "There are thousands, who, like good uncle Fred, are thirsting for the water of life; but the law forbids it, and the churches withhold it" (Jacobs 82). Thus, she makes a visionary step towards "collective" freedom.

Another commonality between Douglass and Jacobs is their mixed heritage. Jacobs claimed that her "parents were a light shade of brownish yellow, and were termed mulattoes," a term used pejoratively to refer to people of white and black heritage (7). Similarly, Douglass plainly stated, "[m]y father was a white man. He was admitted to be such by all I ever heard speak of my parentage" (46). The intersectional theory not only shows how different identities intersect to compound oppression, but it also acknowledges how these intersections can give rise to privileges. Although Jacobs and Douglass largely found themselves thrown in with other black slaves when it came to the kind of punishment and dehumanization they faced, it could also be argued that some of the leniency in the treatment they enjoyed, which allowed them to flourish and become exceptional individuals, may be due to their mixed heritage. This suggests that if the other slaves were considered to have the "desired complexion" by their white slave masters, they too might have been given more chances to flourish and face less punishment.

Conclusion

The autobiographies of Douglass and Jacobs provide invaluable insights into the lives of enslaved individuals during the Antebellum period in America. Through a comparison of their narratives, it becomes evident that male and female slaves faced different forms of oppression, largely influenced by their gender. The difference in experiences, along with their unique methods of resistance, expresses the complex nature of slavery. Furthermore, the intersectional lens shows how race and gender compound the experiences of an enslaved individual's life. Understanding the differences in the treatment of male and female slaves and

acknowledging the gendered aspects of their lives is essential in comprehending the complexities of their experiences.

Delgado and Stefancic claim that the advancements in racial relationships between whites and blacks in America are "being rolled back" (461). In the midst of persisting violence and racial discrimination in modern America, exploring autobiographies from even more segregated societies of the past can provide valuable insights into the diverse methods of resistance present to people of color in the present-day United States. From acts of physical rebellion to more subtle and covert forms of resistance, the stories of those who fought against oppression during the era of slavery can inspire and inform the fight for social justice today. Studying these narratives not only provides historical insight into the lives of enslaved individuals but also serves as a stark reminder of the enduring legacy of slavery and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of oppression.

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The Creature Becomes a Monster: Using Feminist Disability Studies and the Politics of Recognition to Read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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Abstract

In my paper, I employ the framework of feminist disability studies to critically examine how the intersecting factors of disability, gender, and the politics of recognition weave an interpretation of the narratives of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Victor Frankenstein creates a creature in his lab and is frightened afterwards because the creature looks different from what is perceived as "normal." He immediately recognizes the creature as a monster," "fiend," and "devil." After being rejected by his creator, the creature interacts with other characters and receives similar reactions because society conforms to a certain set of ableist norms about physical appearance. Frankenstein's misrecognition has a damaging effect on the creature's understanding of himself as he emulates the socially induced behavior of misrecognition and behaves monstrously. I argue that though the creature is artificially created by Frankenstein, the disabled monster is the byproduct of sociocultural stigma and oppression. Drawing from feminist disability studies, I demonstrate how societal norms and expectations shape the experiences of disabled individuals, particularly in relation to gendered expectations. By conducting a thorough textual analysis of the novel, I also argue that Shelley's narrative serves as a powerful commentary on the marginalization of those perceived as different.

Keywords: feminist disability studies, Frankenstein, monster, politics of recognition, stigma, gender

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) showcases how early 19th century society viewed and treated those who looked different from the conventionally accepted non-disabled individuals. Shelley ingrains herself in the textuality because her position as a woman writer resembles the social condition of the creature which Victor Frankenstein artificially created in his lab, but society refused to recognize him and stigmatized him not for being in able-bodied shape, but for looking different and deviant. The creature opens his eyes to see the denial in Frankenstein's eyes and to later deal with a collective societal denial and misrecognition which leads him to form an identity of his own. The creature's social and self-identities

collide when the monstrous identity is projected onto him. I argue that the creature's disability is a social stigma which begins with his first encounter with its creator Victor Frankenstein. I proclaim that the creature is not born, but becomes a monster due to societal denial, stigmatization and misrecognition. Mary Shelley's authorial inculcation makes it a gender issue. Thus, I will use the intersectional lens of feminist disability studies to read the novel.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* has been read and interpreted from various theoretical perspectives. Barbara Johnson views Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as an "unsettling formulation of the relationship between parenthood and monstrousness" (2). She considers the book as an autobiographical documentation of monstrousness and selfhood as Shelley claims her feminine authorship through a first-person narrative. In the novel, three characters – Walton, Victor Frankenstein, and the creature – are seen to be using the pronoun "I" while narrating the story in three different autobiographical voices. The author, like her characters, narrates the story of her writerly life.

Mary Shelley's 1831 introduction proves her attempt to inculcate her story into her fictional work. Cynthia Pon writes that the attempt to create and then destroy the incomplete female monster is significant to understand Shelley's own literary evolution in a society dominated by male writers. Pon compares the destruction of the female monster with Shelley's writerly birth as she writes, "Out of the dismemberment of the female creature, something 'unnatural' came into being – Mary Shelley the artist – who likewise resists representation" (43). However, Shelley textually gives birth to a multiplicity of female discourse which create a pathway towards a feminist figure of humanity.

On a similar note, Bette London claims that "The narrative that the painting details thus binds Shelley's preeminence (public and private) to the lasting rites of masculinity" (253). Mary Shelley's self-presentation as an author in the realm of male dominated authorship is like the monstrous representation of the creature. London further claims that since Frankenstein created the monster by collecting body parts of men, his creation remains incomplete, "facilitating its installation in the feminine economy" (256). Though the novel does not represent a single whole voice, but rather presents a constellation of three voices, Eleanor Salotto claims that it is the single voice of the author herself that is infused in the narratives of the characters. She suggests that Shelley "resuscitates the dead voice or body of the traditional narrative of woman, and in its place creates a feminine voice or body that speaks in many different voices, thereby upsetting the notion of a single feminine identity" (191).

Barbara Johnson also refers to Mary's 1831 introduction where she discloses the process of the writing of the story of Frankenstein. In that case, it is safe to say that "*Frankenstein* can be read as the story of the experience of writing *Frankenstein*" (Johnson 7). *Frankenstein* is a story of a man who "usurps the female's role by physically giving birth to a child" which Johnson equates with a female's desire to write (Johnson 8). The conventional viewpoint was that when a man gives birth and a woman writes, they produce monsters. Though Johnson mentions that monstrosity and femininity do not go together, Shelley's attempt to write at a time when male writers were dominant proves her atypical nature of femaleness. Also, being a daughter of two writers, Shelley "usurps the parental role and succeeds in giving birth to herself on paper" (Johnson 8). *Frankenstein*, thus, becomes Shelley's autobiographical story in a way.

Amber Knight, on the other hand, finds a problem in how Frankenstein and other characters in the novel (mis)recognize the creature. Knight sees Frankenstein's creature through the lens of recognition politics. She comments that the creature is recognized as visibly disabled and monstrous by its creator. Other characters of the novel also recognize him as a monster and disabled creature. This misrecognition cognitively affects the creature for which it could "never see himself as anything other than a monster since he is never afforded the positive recognition he desires" (Knight). Knight analyzes the novel through the lens of feminist disability studies to show how disabled individuals are tragically treated. The creature's tormented language in "I desired love and fellowship" shows how he experiences the politics of recognition as a "form of social oppression." Knight explains, "The Creature may have been artificially and unnaturally created by Victor, but the monster he becomes is the artificial and unnatural byproduct of social oppression." Eleanor Salotto, in her "'Frankenstein' and Dis(Re) Membered Identity," writes how Victor Frankenstein creates the creature first through his project and then through his narrative. Therefore, it is the language of conventionally "normal" people that others and stigmatizes those who do not conform to the traditional idea of "normal."

On this note, Lennard J. Davis states that "To understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm, the normal body" (1). He further writes, "When we think of bodies, in a society where the concept of the norm is operative, then people with disabilities will be thought of as deviants" (3). Victor Frankenstein's fear that his creature, which he labels as a monster, might mate and produce more monsters, emphasizes "the terror with which the 'normal' beholds the differently abled" (Davis 4). Therefore, Victor destroys the half-completed female creature.

Taking Frankenstein as a tool to understand the crucial positionalities of disabled

individuals, Knight, like Davis, shows how disabled individuals are often victims of the ever-damaging oppressive politics of misrecognition. I build my argument mostly on the scholarship of Amber Knight because I agree that misrecognition leads the creature to form a deformed identity of his own.

Martha Stoddard Holmes claims that the creature in Shelley's *Frankenstein* is "physically a super-sized adult, but experientially a baby with no past history" (372). Victor Frankenstein aimed to create a new life from the dead bodies of humans and animals. In that case, the creature, as Holmes claims, is not a purely "new" being. She suggests that readers should read the novel using the lens of disability studies. Victor Frankenstein, after encountering the creature as a living presence for the first time, experiences a sense of incongruence. He considers himself a failure for giving birth to a disabled creature. The creature is identified as deformed because its physical appearance conforms to the social construction of deformity. The creature experiences multiple rejections from the society he is manufactured into. Holmes argues that disability is treated as a form of "spoiled" identity of the scientist Frankenstein in the novel (380). What horrifies Frankenstein is not the creature's unlikeliness with the human form, but "the intensity of its humanness" (Holmes 83). So, he stigmatizes and marginalizes the creature and corrupts its ability to identify its social and individual identity positively. Therefore, the theoretical framework of feminist disability studies becomes the most suitable lens through which to examine the text.

Feminist disability studies provides an intersectional lens consisting of feminism and disability studies. It "reimagines disability" (Garland-Thomson 1555). Disability can be understood as a system of oppression and exclusion that stigmatizes individuals with physical or mental impairments. It is a "cultural interpretation of human variation" (Garland-Thomson 1555). Alison Piepmeier, Amber Cantrell, and Ashley Maggio, in ""Disability is a Feminist Issue: Bringing Together Women's and Gender Studies and Disability Studies," trace the links between disability and feminism. In their conversation, Amber notes that "Feminist disability studies allows us as scholars to really thoroughly examine how our world is physically and socially constructed in incredibly tangible ways" (Piepmeier, et al.). Regarding the concept of "interdisciplinary bodies," Amber again commented that "Disabled bodies are socially constructed, stigmatized bodies. That's a lot of bodies. Women's and gender studies does have tools to engage with embodiment, but disability studies offers a different perspective" (Piepmeier, et al.). It is important to note from their conversation that disability studies validates our bodies whereas "gender studies supports our choices and self-expression" (Piepmeier, et al.). Using an intersectional lens consisting of feminism and disability studies imply that the analysis of the text begins with

disability but does not end with it. Rather, the lens investigates the link between gender and disability.

Before exploring and locating the link, it is important to see how the literary world depicts disability in textual spaces. In "Disability and Representation," Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes about the importance of representation of disabled bodies in literature, art, film, and popular culture. She writes, "disability is a story we tell about bodies" whereas "representation structures rather than reflects reality" (Garland-Thomson 523). The aim of disability studies is to challenge the conventional representations of disability and problematize its nature of oppressiveness. She claims that an inclusive understanding would "alter our sense of what is beautiful and proper" (Garland-Thomson 525). It challenges conventional ideas. It relocates disability to social, cultural, economic, and political registers (Goodley 84). Dan Goodley further argues that "having an impaired body does not equate with disability. In contrast, disability was a problem of society" (84). Where the idea of disability as a social stigma and social oppressive system works to exclude individuals from the mainstream, feminist disability studies move from exclusion to inclusion.

In *Frankenstein*, Shelley depicts a society that does not accept a creature such as the one Frankenstein has built. The disability theory lens is used here as "an attempt to break down the dualism [of] impaired/non-impaired and explore how these dualisms have obscured connections between people with and without impairment" (Watson 197). The creature's unacceptance in the "normal" society resembles Shelley's hesitant existence as a woman writer in the male dominated writing circle.

The Politics of Recognition and Identity Formation

In "Politics of Recognition," Charles Taylor argues that our identity is shaped by recognition or misrecognition. He further writes that "nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being" (Taylor 25). Taylor gives evidence of how women in a patriarchal society, people of color in a white-dominated social structure, and non-European people in a colonial world are misrecognized. Similarly, disabled bodies in the world dominated by abled bodied individuals are also misrecognized, stigmatized, and unacknowledged. As a result, disabled individuals are influenced to form a marginalized identity which they themselves often disregard and even hate. Where misrecognition leads people to self-hatred, Taylor argues, "Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (Taylor 26).

Taylor further writes that the importance of recognition is intensified by the

notion of individual identity. Also, the ideal of authenticity is related to the idea of Herder: an idea that "each of us has an original way of being human" (Taylor 30). Taylor confessionally writes, "being true to myself means being true to my originality, which is something only I can articulate and discover" (Taylor 31). He also claims that in earlier societies where identity and dignity were a matter of social hierarchy, people's identities depended on their social positions.

Pachan Markell differs from Taylor by expanding the idea of the "politics of recognition." He writes that we cannot control how our identities will be perceived by others, so the pursuit for recognition is elusive and should be abandoned (Markell 38). He further argues that demands for recognition overlook the reality that identity construction is an ongoing and unpredictable enterprise. One cannot give a guarantee of being recognized by others in a desired way. Rather, people recognize the identity of the self and the individual in a dynamic way. As Knight writes, "identities are not fixed, and we often cannot control how someone will receive us. The dialogical process of subject formation is unpredictable and malleable, which makes it impossible to require someone to recognize another for who they *really are"* (Knight).

Though, according to Taylor, recognition and identity should ideally come from within, the human condition has a dialogical character to be influenced by the "rich human languages of expression" (Taylor 32). By language, Taylor refers to both verbal and nonverbal modes of language. Humans understand themselves and their identity through the dialogue they have with their significant others in the "intimate sphere" whereas "the politics of equal recognition" plays bigger roles in the "public sphere" (Taylor 37). In *Frankenstein*, the creature is misrecognized by other characters which shaped the way he thinks of himself. The creature is artificially created in the lab, but misrecognition gives birth to the monster.

Textual Analysis

Textually, the story's significance begins with Mary Shelley's introduction in the 1831 edition of the novel. Upon being asked by the publisher of Standard Novels to "furnish them with some account of the origin of the story," Shelley writes an introduction in the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* ("Introduction"). Johnson writes that "Mary Shelley herself makes the repression of her own autobiographical impulse" (4). There, in the introduction, Shelley explains her journey as a writer. Shelley has been to many places in her childhood. Her spatial presence is reflected in her way of writing. She explains, "It was beneath the trees of the grounds belonging to our house, or on the bleak sides of the woodless mountains near, that my true compositions, the airy flights of my imagination, were born and fostered" (Shelley, Introduction). Thus, she becomes a constellation of stories of a woman writer coming from a writers' lineage in a

male writer-dominated literary world.

However, it is interesting to note that Shelley does not "make myself the heroine of my tales" (Introduction). There is a subtle, yet direct connection between the author and the creature. Also, Mary Shelley was impacted by her mother's death due to childbirth while she was pregnant with Mary. Later, after her birth, Shelley was raised without a mother, and so "she shares with Frankenstein's monster some of the problems of coming from a single-parent household" (Johnson 4). The creature is not born naturally, but artificially in the young scientist's laboratory because Shelley had a fear of induced labor pain. She shares the story of how she creates the monster while passing a ghost-story night with Lord Byron and P.B. Shelley. She writes,

> My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw—with shut eyes, but acute mental vision, —I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, showed signs of life, and stirred with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handywork, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench forever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes. (Shelley, Introduction)

A creature, artificially created without any involvement of a woman, is born with an unconventional appearance. After creating the creature in her imagination, Shelley goes on narrating the story in three male autobiographical voices. Shelley chooses a unique narrative style to craft the text.

Beginning as an epistolary novel, Frankenstein echoes the voice of Captain Robert Walton who shares his journey to the North Pole in the form of letters to Mrs. Saville. He finds a nearly frozen Frankenstein and feels connected with him. He begins to "love him as a brother; and his constant and deep grief fills me

with sympathy and compassion" (Shelley, Letter IV). Walton takes care of him and nurses him back to health. As Frankenstein feels better, he finally says, "Do you share my madness? Have you drunk also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me, —let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips!" (Shelley, Letter IV). Thus, Victor Frankenstein unfolds the pages of his life-story in his first-person narrative.

Victor Frankenstein, an aspiring scientist, is interested in natural philosophy as he claims, "Natural philosophy is the genius that has regulated my fate" (Shelley, Chapter II). To fulfill his dream of pursuing more expertise and knowledge in natural philosophy, he joined the University of Ingolstadt where "natural philosophy and particularly chemistry, in the most comprehensive sense of the term, became nearly my sole occupation" (Shelley, Chapter IV). Later, he is fascinated with "the structure of the human frame" and becomes interested in physiology and anatomy. His ardent desire to see life happening leads him to experiment with the corpses of animals and humans. He says, "Although I possessed the capacity of bestowing animation, yet to prepare a frame for the reception of it, with all its intricacies of fibers, muscles, and veins, still remained a work of inconceivable difficulty and labor" (Shelley, Chapter IV). Depriving himself of "exercise and amusement" (Shelley, Chapter IV), Victor works rigorously for months to complete his creation.

On a November night, when his candle is dimmed, Victor "saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs" (Shelley, Chapter V). Before the creature comes to life, Victor praises its features and beauty. He says,

> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavored to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same color as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion and straight black lips. (Shelley, Chapter V)

Victor shifts between a third person masculine "he" and a third person unidentifiable pronoun "it" while talking about the creature. The inconsistency in his word choices shows his impulsive attitude to see the creature coming to life. He seems to be proud of his creation on which he has worked for nearly two years to infuse life into a lifeless body. However, the description Victor shares is

how he looks at the creature, not how it looks like. As soon as the creature comes alive, "the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (Shelley, Chapter V). The opening of the eyes metaphorized the birth of the other. The other is born, the self, which is the creator, disregards his existence. He is "unable to endure the aspects of the creature" (Shelley, Chapter V) because the outcome is not what he expected it to be. He recognizes it as "the miserable monster" (Shelley, Chapter V). As he describes,

> He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed downstairs. (Shelley, Chapter V)

Frankenstein's gaze becomes the gaze of the readers. Still, it is a subjective perception of the creature because of Frankenstein's use of the autobiographical "I". The narrator Frankenstein does not only describe the creature but also gives attributes and judgements. The creature becomes a monster because it is identified and recognized as such. Since Frankenstein created it at the cost of rest, sleep, and social interactions, he does not want others to see it and his failure to create a normal life. When Henry visits him, he "dreaded to behold this monster; but I feared still more that Henry should see him" (Shelley, Chapter V). The creature becomes a social shame for the creature. He, in a way, un-members it from his family and friends' circles.

Throughout Frankenstein's narrative, whenever he refers to the creature, he calls it "wretched" and "monster". He expresses his negative impressions and tense thoughts about it. The creature has been hiding from his vision for a long time till in chapter X Frankenstein witnesses someone "advancing towards me with superhuman speed" (Shelley, Chapter X). When he clearly sees it,

> as the shape came nearer (sight tremendous and abhorred!) that it was the wretch whom I had created. I trembled with rage and horror, resolving to wait his approach, and then close with him in mortal combat. He approached; his countenance bespoke bitter anguish, combined with disdain and malignity, while its unearthly ugliness rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes. (Shelley, Chapter X)

His heart is full of hatred and terror. He is unable to utter a word after seeing the "devil" and "dæmon" (Shelley, Chapter X). As the voice shifts to the creature's first-person narrative now, the readers, for the first time, come to know how the creature feels. He knows that he is hated by others but does not know why. He asks his creator, "All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated,

who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us" (Shelley, Chapter X). Frankenstein keeps on cursing him saying, ""Abhorred monster! fiend that thou art! the tortures of hell are too mild a vengeance for thy crimes. Wretched devil!" (Shelley, Chapter X). As he recognizes the creature by all these words, the creature internalizes the qualities of the monster.

The creature, without reacting, tries to persuade Frankenstein and reminds him of his duties as his creator. He says to him,

> Remember, that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous. (Shelley, Chapter X)

The creature claims that the abhorrence and hatred of humankind leaves him alone and detested. He convinces Frankenstein to go to the mountains with him and listen to his stories of survival. The way the creature narrates the story proves that he is his creator's other who possesses a keen interest in science and invention. As soon as he explores various functionalities of fire, he finds the necessity to long for food and shelter. When he goes up on the mountain, he finds a small hut and an old man preparing breakfast. The old man looks at him and runs away. This behavior again otherizes the creature. He encounters a young girl and a young man followed by the cottagers whom he develops wonderful amiable relations with. Another old man, De Lacey, is blind and cannot see the deformity in the creature's body. So he offers him a warm space of empathy and friendship. The creature's first-person narrative proves him to be an empathetic individual who values family and community, understands people's struggles and laments over poverty, and appreciates love and friendship.

However, De Lacey's family members, Felix, Safie, and Agatha, who are all visually fit people, are frightened to see him. Later, the creature develops self-hatred as soon as he looks at his own reflection in the water. He narrates,

> how was I terrified when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable deformity. (Shelley, Chapter XII)

The terror the creature experiences after looking at his body, which he now identifies as deformed, is the result of abhorrence he has received from the people who do not accept him for his unconventional physical attributes. As the creature learns more from the conversations he has with Felix and other cottagers, he notices that he looks and behaves differently from others. He gradually becomes curious of his own identity as he asks himself,

> What was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even of the same nature as man. I was more agile than they, and could subsist upon a coarser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded theirs. When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned? (Shelley, Chapter XIII)

The "reflections" of others' stares and gazes induce an agony in the creature. Knowing about parental relationships with children from the book and De Lacey, he feels more tormented and asks introspective questions recurrently. He is disowned and dis-membered by everyone including his own creator who should have fathered him. At this stage, he cannot perceive himself as anything other than a monster. He internalizes the perspective of others and becomes a monster. His narrative proves the ever-damaging effects of misrecognition.

Burdened with hatred and misrecognition, the creature asks Frankenstein to create a female partner for him. He says, "You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This you alone can do; and I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse to concede" (Shelley, Chapter XVII). Frankenstein first refuses and then is persuaded by the creature because the creature promises to leave Europe and man's society as soon as he gets a female partner with whom he can share the similar emotions of his own being.

After working in his lab for months to create a female version of the creature, Frankenstein thinks that it will be a dreadful mistake to create another "fiend." He thinks to himself, "I was now about to form another being, of whose dispositions I was alike ignorant; she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness" (Shelley, Chapter XX). The creature has promised to leave Europe, but the female creature has not. If the male and female creatures consummate and beget a race of monsters, it will bring more disasters to the human world. So, Frankenstein

breaks his promise and says, "never will I create another like yourself, equal in deformity and wickedness" (Shelley, Chapter XX). The creature is again misrecognized and assumed to be monstrous.

The continuous misrecognition, especially from the creator, shapes the self-understanding of the creature. He becomes a monster and acts monstrously. As Victor Frankenstein dies in Walton's boat wishing to destroy the monster he created, the monster runs away from the boat wishing to kill himself. It is the self-hatred caused by misrecognition that kills both the creator and the creature. Though the creature's death is not confirmed in the text, his suicidal narrative proves his self-hatred.

Discussion and Conclusion

Eleanor Salotto suggests that Shelley "resuscitates the dead voice or body of the traditional narrative of woman, and in its place creates a feminine voice or body that speaks in many different voices, thereby upsetting the notion of a single feminine identity" (191). In this way, Frankenstein becomes Shelley's autobiographical narrative of struggle to give birth to a woman author. Shelley's mother Mary Wollstonecraft's literary greatness and father William Godwin's exceptional writing persona were two of the major obstacles for Mary Shelley to claim her authorship. Shelley uses language of identification in her novel to emphasize how language becomes a tool to oppress the other and stigmatize one's body.

As human condition is influenced by the "rich human languages of expression," the creature's monstrous conditioning largely depends on how he is verbally called and nonverbally meant to be a monster (Taylor 32). He is not born a monster, but rather becomes one when Victor Frankenstein and other characters in the novel induce the identity in it. Walton and Frankenstein use their language to recognize the creature as "monster," "fiend," "devil," and so on. However, when the creature shares its narrative in the first-person account, he "reveals the disjuncture between the creature's own sense of self and the misrecognized identity of 'monster' that is foisted upon him by his father's and society's negative reactions to his physical features and visible impairments" (Knight, Disability). The misrecognition leads to the mis-formation of the creature's identity. Also, Frankenstein disowns the creature and leaves him feeling lonely and miserable. The feeling of misery and loneliness dis-members the creature from the human world and gives birth to a desire of having a female creature of his own race. The destruction of the half-done female creature strengthens the politics of misrecognition and firmly establishes the creature's monster-identity.

However, Frankenstein's destructive behavior only proves the society's

conventional idea and treatment towards the concept of normalcy. Elizabeth A. Morales writes, "Society's discomfort with the creature serves as a reflection of its own disability as a social body; exploring this aspect of the connection between the creature and society, reveals society's limited critical self-awareness, denying its own humanity and allowing for hatred of self, perpetuating violence and stereotypes" (Morales 1-2). Davis comments that "Dr. Frankenstein's fear that his monster might mate and produce a race of monsters emphasizes the terror with which the 'normal' beholds the differently abled" (4). Looking at the text through the lens of feminist disability studies discloses the abnormality of the 'normal' society to exclude individuals possessing differently abled bodies.

Feminist disability studies shows disability "as a significant human experience" which needs to be accepted by general people (Garland-Thomson 524). Disability, like gender, is a social justice issue. When we read and teach literary texts considering social justice issues to be a vital inclusion in literature, we can dream of building a better and more inclusive future for disabled people. This reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* reiterates the concept of "becoming." One is not born, but rather becomes a monster. Therefore, it is possible to undo the monsterization process by becoming more accepting of disabled people in society.

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The Liminal Space between Imprisonment and Freedom: Trauma in Mustafa Khalifa's *The Shell*

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Abstract

This paper aims to study *The Shell* (2008) by the Syrian writer Mustafa Khalifa. It analyzes the physical as well as the psychological trauma suffered by the protagonist Musa, who was imprisoned for fourteen years without knowing the cause of his imprisonment. After studying film in Paris, a Catholic student Musa returns to his homeland, Syria, and upon landing at the airport, he is unjustly arrested. He is mistaken for a radical Islamist and is imprisoned with detainees who were either with or suspected of being affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. He is locked up without trial in Tadmur under Bashar al-Assad's regime. Tadmur has been called the "absolute prison" by dissident Yassin al-Haj Salih and the "kingdom of death and madness" by Syrian poet Faraj Bayraqdar. Musa remains oblivious to the crime he has been charged with until just before his impending release. From the very beginning, his life is endangered not only by the harshness of daily torture and humiliation but also by the Islamist extremists in his confinement who deem him deserving of execution as an unbeliever due to his Catholic faith. He faces exclusion because others perceive him as impure. This isolation is enforced not just by the jailers but also by his fellow prisoners, mirroring the suppression experienced by several political detainees who made their way through Tadmur and other prisons in Syria and were unable to share their suffering. The paper argues that Musa is trapped in a liminal space, that is, he is physically released but has never truly been released, and thus is a victim of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) suffering emotional numbing.

Keywords: Trauma, PTSD, imprisonment, torture, witness

Tadmur, the military prison, which was located in the desert near Palmyra, was originally erected by the authorities of the French Mandate. The horrifying circumstances of torment, random execution, and regular deprivation experienced by the prisoners in Tadmur raise the question of penetrating inspection by local and international human rights organizations until the shutting down of this detention center. Faraj Bayraqdar, the Syrian poet, called this military prison a "kingdom of death and madness" (qtd. in Taleghani 21). Dissident Yassin al-Haj Salih considered it an "absolute prison" (21). Amnesty International reported it as "synonymous with brutality, despair and dehumanization" (1). Applying the theoretical framework of trauma, this paper explores physical as well as psychological trauma endured by Musa, the protagonist, and other prisoners in Mustafa Khalifa's *The Shell* (2017). For several decades, they endured imprisonment without trial in Tadmur. The paper argues that Musa, who lost his identity during his imprisonment, is trapped in a liminal space, and thus is a victim of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) suffering from emotional numbing.

Several detainees have written about the tormenting memoirs of their imprisonment. Muhammad Salim Hammad's *Tadmur: Shahidwa-Mashhud* (1988), a prison memoir, is about a prisoner suspected of being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and recounts the suffering and torments he faced at the detention center. The prison memoir of Faraj Bayraqdar, *Khiyanat al-Lughawa al-Samt* (*The Betrayals of Language and Silence*), published in 2006, includes a chapter titled "Tadmuriat" that explores the fear-provoking moments he experienced during his time in prison. For more than four decades, the Assad regime has imposed silence, and these works focused on the trauma of imprisonment in Tadmur. Yasin al-Hajj Salih, who was imprisoned for sixteen years, calls Tadmur "just a closed place that doesn't open up except [for one] to receive food … and punishment. That is Tadmor prison: the Syrian shame that is indelible. In this prison, time does not pass. It accumulates over the prisoners and suffocates them" (22). The Human Rights Watch Organization has published several reports condemning the torture and abuses occurring in the prison. In a report from 1996, they noted that "Tadmor is infamous throughout Syria not only for its harsh conditions but also for the depredations against civilian political prisoners that have occurred within its walls since 1980, such as torture and summary executions" (qtd. in İnanç). Additionally, a 2001 report by Amnesty International on Tadmur stated that "political suspects have most frequently been tortured during the initial period following arrest while being held in incommunicado detention in prisons and detention centers throughout Syria. Torture has been used as a means of extracting information and also as a form of punishment" (qtd. in İnanç). Tadmur is elucidated by al-Bara' al-Sarraj

as a "symphony of fear" (qtd. in Hilleary 1) which makes it difficult for the detainees to reveal the truth about their horrifying experience as it may lead them once again to the prison.

The autobiography, *Khiyanat al-Lughawa al-Samt* (*The Betrayals of Language and Silence*) published in 2006 by Faraj Bayraqdar depicted his detention at the center of interrogation and in the prisons of Saydnaya and Tadmur, where he was consistently tortured for fourteen years. He also recounted the bitter experiences faced by his inmates. He did not share his memories chronologically but rather with fragmented scenes and momentary anecdotes. At the beginning of the chapter titled "To the East," he reminisces that they were expecting that they would not be shifted to Tadmur, but their expectation went in vain when they found themselves in there as an additional punishment. Upon their arrival, they started the journey of suffering. Bayraqdar describes his harsh "reception" and "hospitality" of the prison personnel, employing euphemisms specific to Tadmur and other Syrian jails. In the chapter titled "Circles of Continuous Inhalation," he recounted how he was horrified after witnessing the assassination of prisoners in the corridor. They were frequently subjected to torture and fatal beatings at the hands of the guardians. It could be anyone's turn. Bayraqdar considered it "the breather in the courtyard is a true cutting off of breath, and sometimes a final cutting off of breath" (qtd. in Taleghani 23). The terrifying sound of the blows alert that one more prisoner was going to die. This chapter ended when a guard forced a prisoner to swallow a mouse. Despite having survived, he deteriorated mentally and his sanity was lost. In the last chapter titled "Tadmoriyat: Beyond Surrealism," Bayraqdar represents the horror in both prose and poetry:

> *High walls of stubborn cold cement…*
> *Observation towers…*
> *Barriers and checkpoints…*
> *Fortifications and highly trained military units…*
> *And finally … surrounded by lessons of pure, national fear…*
> *Even if all of Syria fell,*
> *Surely, it would be impossible for this prison to fall.* (qtd. in Taleghani 23)

With this, the poet arouses the link between terror and the physical elements of the prison and its vicinity.

Raymond Corsini states that trauma is "the result of a painful event, physical or mental, causing immediate damage to the body or shock to the mind" (qtd. in Swart 48). Sigmund Freud, in his essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), introduced the word "death" where he focused on how the traumatic experience

recurs by itself unknowingly or knowingly, and he called it "traumatic neurosis," an "unwished for repetition of trauma as a result of some risk to life" (18). Freud witnessed how the psychological disorder replicates the inevitable burden of past events in the mind. He observed that when the mind becomes fixated on an unpleasant reality, it results in the experience of terror, fright, and anxiety. Cathy Caruth denoted Paul de Man and Freud to theorize trauma and its delayed effects on the mind in her 1996 book *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. As defined by her, trauma is an "overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which response is delayed, uncontrolled and repetitive" (11). While describing certain characteristics of trauma, she mentions Freud: "Freud describes a pattern of suffering that is inexplicably persistent in the lives of certain individuals" (1). Caruth proved that Freud theorizes in his essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" that the mental wound is "the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world" (4) and it became the prime source of trauma. Healing is necessary for both the mind and body. Although the physical body may recuperate, the mind consistently fails to neutralize the compelling wound, and the mental disturbance of the survivor becomes a long-lasting component of their life. Both Caruth and Freud postulate that the traumatic experience is overpowered by the paradoxical, complex incomprehensibility of survival. By using the theoretical tools of Freud and Caruth for this study, this paper attempts to find the physical as well as psychological trauma suffered by the protagonist Musa and other prisoners in Mustafa Khalifa's *The Shell*.

The word "liminal" derives from the Latin term "limen," signifying threshold. The phrase "liminal space" was initially introduced in the early 20th century by Arnold van Gennep in his book *The Rites of Passage* (1960). A liminal space denotes the interval between "what was" and "what follows." It is a locus of transformation, a period of anticipation and uncertainty over the future. Richard Rohr characterizes this place as, "where we are betwixt and between the familiar and the completely unknown. There alone is our old world left behind, while we are not yet sure of the new existence" (qtd. in "Inaliminalspace"). Liminal space can evoke emotional turmoil, as they often need confronting difficult truths about oneself, addressing unresolved issues stemming from prior traumas, and navigating substantial losses and transformations. Lindsey Tong, Clinical Director of Profound Treatment in Los Angeles, articulated that "People feel overwhelmed and confused with their emotions raw and exposed …. The uncertainty and lack of direction can be anxiety-provoking, making you feel adrift" (qtd. in "Healthline"). Homi Bhabha characterizes liminality as an instance of a third space, a "fantastic location of cultural difference where new expressive cultural identities continually open out performatively to realign

the boundaries of class, of gender, … contingent upon the stubborn chunks of the incommensurable elements of past, totalized identity" (qtd. in Eimke 12). The in-between is a realm characterized by liminality, resulting in a blend of elements, hybridity, synthesis, and fusion.

Musa, a Catholic film student, in Mustafa Khalifa's *The Shell*, is apprehended at the airport on April 20, following his repatriation from Paris, on the unfounded suspicion that he is an adherent of the Muslim Brothers. The Kafkaesque concept of incarceration or mistaken identity for uncertain reasons is instituted when this happens. Security forces forcibly drag him to the interrogation center, where the smell of torture and cruelty overwhelm him. It is "human torture" (Khalifa 5). The noise of shattering and screaming during the interrogation of other detainees shock him. He is frozen and numbed by the "scattering specks of blood and fragments of human flesh … the voice of a young man in pain … sounds, sounds" (Khalifa 5-6). He is shocked and in a state of disbelief. Lots of questions come to his mind regarding his current situation, but there is only one hope: it must have been a mistake by the authorities. He is neither aware of what they wanted from him nor the reason for his torture as it is impractical for him to belong to a Muslim Brotherhood – he is a Christian. Throughout his imprisonment of thirteen years, he is haunted and traumatized by not getting the answer to his questions: "Why did they put me here? Why did they bring me here?" (17); "What sort of world was this that I'd been shoved into? Was this just the beginning? And where would it lead?" (19-20); "Had they not yet resolved on my death?" (47). He cannot not sleep as these questions come to his mind naturally. He thinks about his family. His father and mother were expecting him to arrive home, but he had not yet done so. He questioned, "How would they be explaining my absence all this time? What had they done to find out where I was, where and why I had disappeared …?" (49). He questions the existence of God. He considers his current situation and the misfortune that had happened to him to be the best examples of the nonexistence of God.

Throughout the novel, physical as well as psychological trauma is apparent. The regime inflicts such horrendous and unbearable torment that the prisoners long for death. They pray to God for death: "Please God, let me die, spare me this torture" (Khalifa 34). Musa had been continuously afraid of military police, security services, beatings, pain, and death. But after going through near-death experiences and witnessing the deaths of fellow prisoners, Musa becomes like stone and starts lacking feelings and sentiment, "with no thoughts, no reactions. Total paralysis, total submission" (47). The regime deliberately tortures him by prolonging his life of terror and fear so that he would reveal the secrets of the Muslim Brotherhood. He is also disliked and traumatized by a few cell mates

who were extremists and considered that it is their duty to kill a Christian, whom they consider an unbeliever. "You wretch … you unbeliever, this is the end of you, you dog! … overflowing with hatred and malice, bursting with insistence and determination … sort of mental paralysis overtook me" (46).

The field court commissioner visits the prison twice a week by helicopter, as Tadmur Prison is in the desert and far away from the capital of Syria. The commissioner is there to sentence death. Prisoners term the helicopter "death or the angel of death" (Khalifa 77). The landing of the helicopter terrorizes them. Near the court, the party of torture starts as the job of the police to make them confess. The court decides their fates by taking less than a minute without issuing any verdict. The court was run on two competencies: it had the power to order the death penalty for as many as it wished and to continue the detention of the prisoner for as long as it wished. The Syrian regime had not bestowed any power on this court to set any innocent prisoner free.

One of the most traumatizing episodes involves an elderly prisoner who was incarcerated alongside his three sons. The captors subjected him to an unimaginable form of psychological torture: they forced him to choose one of his sons to be spared from execution. Torn and anguished, the elderly man ultimately chooses his youngest son as he is unmarried and in the "flower of his youth" (Khalifa 167). This heart-wrenching decision is made in the desperate hope that at least one of his children might survive. However, the depths of the captors' cruelty is revealed when the execution list is released. To the elderly man's utter shock and horror, his own name is omitted, but all three of his sons' names are included. The choice he was forced to make is a sadistic trick, designed to inflict maximum psychological torment. This deliberate act of cruelty leaves the father and the other prisoners in a state of deep consternation and despair. The atmosphere in the prison becomes palpably heavy with grief and trauma. The arbitrary and brutal nature of the punishment inflicted on the elderly man and his sons shatters the already fragile morale of the inmates. Witnessing such cruelty, the prisoners collectively mourn, their empathetic sobbing and weeping a testament to their shared pain and helplessness. The seventy-year-old father, devastated and confused, finds himself questioning the very existence of justice and the presence of a merciful God in such a world of relentless cruelty and suffering. This exemplifies the extreme psychological torture employed by the captors, showcasing the profound impact of arbitrary and senseless cruelty on the human spirit. It not only devastates the elderly father but also serves as a grim reminder to all the prisoners of the merciless nature of their captors, deepening their collective trauma and hopelessness. The seventy-year-old father is confused, devastated, and questions God:

> Why like this? …why do you let these evildoers wreak havoc with us, why? What will you say? Will you say that God may move slowly but is never neglectful? And will words like that bring back my children? O God! Are you happy that As'ad, my twenty-five-year-old, should be executed at the hands of these evildoers? Tell me, answer me, why are you silent … O God, if you had three sons and they were all going to be executed in a single moment, what would you do? Eh? Very well, just answer this small question, you, Lord of the worlds, are you with us or with these evildoers? (168-169)

All three sons are executed brutally, leaving the elderly father to endure indescribable suffering. The loss of his children, compounded by the cruel manipulation that led to their deaths, plunges him into a profound and inconsolable grief. This horrific incident resonates deeply within the prison, sparking a collective response among the inmates. In an act of defiance and solidarity, the inmates decide to hold an open prayer during the funeral, despite the severe risks involved. In the oppressive environment of the prison, the recitation of the Quran or any form of prayer is strictly forbidden and brutally punishable. Nevertheless, the prisoners choose to honor the memory of the deceased sons and support the devastated father through their shared faith. This act of collective prayer becomes a form of silent protest against the inhumanity of their captors, a way to reclaim a sense of dignity and spiritual solace in the face of relentless oppression. The open prayer is not just a religious act but a profound expression of their collective grief and a demonstration of their unbroken spirit. Despite the ever-present threat of brutal retribution, the prisoners find strength in their faith and each other, creating a moment of sacred communion amidst the darkness of their imprisonment.

The execution of the sons is inhuman, and one can sense the physical as well as psychological suffering of the old man and of the other cellmates who witness it. Witnessing this execution directly through a hole, Nasim is appalled and succumbs to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Day by day, his condition deteriorates. He prefers to stay alone and refuses to speak after being convinced by his cellmates. Whenever he opens his mouth, he would say, "Where do they bury the corpses of people who are killed … Would Sa'd, Sa'id and As'ad's bodies already have decomposed? … The worms must now be eating into flesh of the three brothers. Worms in the eyes, worms in the belly, worms in the mouth, worms coming out of the nostrils, worms, worms" (Khalifa 175). He stays in deep thought for about two months, and all Musa's efforts to bring his cellmates back to a normal meets with great failure. Anti-depressants are given to Nasim forcibly by the prison doctor to control his PTSD, but he is not the same person

as he used to be. Musa notices slight changes with deep significance in Nasim, as he loses the capacity for bewilderment. There is a fake smile that is constantly hanging on his face or a smile that is mixed with depression. He does not show any anger, even if something is done against his will. He either smiles a lot or asks philosophical questions: "What is the purpose of life? … Is it comprehensible that this life should have been created by God? What does God gain by creating a life like As'ad? God brought him into this life and he suffered a lot, then was executed. … He didn't even have enough time to prove whether he was a good or bad man!" (176).

Musa receives a surprise when he is transferred to another prison before his release. In the beginning, he is not directly tortured in that new prison, but the sounds of pain and suffering in that solitary prison are alarming and torture him psychologically. His nerves weaken gradually. He does not succeed in ignoring the screams of pleading and pain. In fact, it is easier for him to be in a situation of torture than to hear the sounds of screaming. He is asked the same question repeatedly: Which organization do you work for? He is sure that a confession would never make the regime cut down on the torture, but instead, they would increase it as he weakened. Those who confessed to a crime they had not committed were either executed in prison, rotted away, or on the way to death. He is ready to give up his life with this physical torture, but he would not confess. He is imprisoned for almost thirteen years, and his youth and the best years of his life are lost under this regime, and now, like thousands of detainees who wrote thank-you letters in blood to the regime to get released, he is forced to thank the president as a condition of his release.

Out of prison, Musa's life recounts the hurting and bizarre months, a telling précis of the emotional trauma wreaked over this perpetuity of institutionalized mortification. The changes in his life are devastatingly poignant and palpable: from an impassive, rebellious, young man with optimism, boosted by strength, full of energy to start his own business, he is now unimaginably transformed into an old man, crestfallen, alienated, and worn-out in the outside world. He questions himself, "Am I the same person I was thirteen years ago? Yes and no. A small yes and a big no" (Khalifa 3). His family becomes anxious for him, making their best efforts to bring him back to a normal life and start a family, but he finds a gap between himself and other people. Even his feelings for his family are neutral and detached. He believes that his language for communication is dead. He isolates himself completely from his surroundings, and feels that they "had their world and I had mine, or else that I had no world at all. Certainly, I did not belong to their world" (240). He finds the outside world meaningless and boring, though he had been planning to do a lot of things while he was inside

the prison. He has no desire to adopt a new life, and, on the contrary, considers it "tiresome and stupid to live like them" (251). He becomes increasingly isolated from the company of humanity and remains immersed in the prison life he had grown accustomed to. One year passes, but still, he finds himself in the Desert prison. He questions, "Would I take my imprisonment with me to grave?" (250) or "had the joy died inside me in that crush of death? Would I remain like this? And why? Would I have to carry the threshing floors of death and torture on my chest forever, to choke everything that was beautiful in life?" (216). He tries to escape all the dejection and misery, but there is something inside him that refuses to accept happiness and laugh wholeheartedly. He cannot recover from the misery he faced during his imprisonment and is thus unable to release himself psychologically.

In the context of the Syrian civil war, Mustafa Khalifa's *The Shell* has emerged as a potent symbol of opposition, aiming to expose the acts of brutality and violence perpetrated by the regime. The book serves not only as a denunciation of the Syrian government but also as a universal rallying cry for freedom and justice against arbitrary military and political oppression. Khalifa's narrative captures the harrowing experiences of those who have faced dehumanization, cruelty, and suffering, hoping to ensure that Syria will never again witness the construction of another military prison like Tadmur. The narratives of innocent prisoners, who endured unimaginable hardships and were often executed without cause, must not be forgotten. The widespread dissemination of evidence, including photographic proof of the atrocities committed in Syria, has amplified global awareness of the regime's inhuman activities. These visuals shared on social media platforms have brought the traumatic conditions endured by Musa and countless other prisoners into sharp focus, providing a vital standpoint on the tragic realities faced by the Syrian people under Assad's regime. Musa's story, as depicted in *The Shell*, exemplifies the psychological toll of institutionalized detention. Over time, Musa becomes deeply entangled with the community of detainees, a psychological condition that renders him unable to fully disentangle from his experiences. The trauma of his imprisonment manifests as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition that continually forces him to relive the horrendous incidents of his past. For Musa and others like him, the scars of such tribulations are enduring, preventing them from ever fully recovering. Musa's release from physical imprisonment does not equate to liberation from his psychological captivity. He remains trapped in a liminal space, caught between the semblance of freedom and the lingering effects of his trauma. Despite being physically free, his mind is perpetually haunted by the memories of his imprisonment, making him a lifelong victim of trauma.

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Exiles and Their Ethico-political Responsibility: Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*

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Abstract

Written in the form of a memoir, Shaila Abdullah's novel *Saffron Dreams* (2009) is the fictional representation of a young Pakistani-US Muslim woman who lost her husband in the terrorist attack of 9/11. So contemporary realities such as rising Islamophobia in America, ethno-racial violence against Muslims, brewing tensions between mainstream Americans and Muslim immigrants are some of the main issues the book deals with. This paper focuses on the ethico-political responsibilities that exiles perform in their host country. I argue that Abdullah's novel, through fictional representation, shows that exiles have agency, and they play significant ethico-political roles in their host country, especially by representing (or imagining) their community. Drawing on the theorization of "exile" by Edward Said and Ashwini Vasanthakumar, first I will focus on the definition and function of the exile and then will examine how this human condition sketched in *Saffron Dreams* is "exilic" by those definitions. I will illustrate how and to what extent the protagonist plays the ethico-political responsibility for the Muslim community, and why that matters so much in the contemporary west.

Keywords: *Saffron Dreams*, Muslim immigrants, exile, 9/11, ethico-political responsibility, Islamophobia

The Exile

Edward Said defines the exile as "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place" and considers the "heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life" (we see these in literature and history) as the efforts "to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement" (173). Despite this overpowering sense of "estrangement" in exilic condition, Said also acknowledges optimistic aspects that point to the exile's great contributions to the host culture. Ashwini Vasanthakumar observes three significant elements in the condition of the exile: first, "exiles are physically absent from the political community with which they engage"; second, "exiles' absence is *compelled by political pressure*"; and finally, "exiles remain *politically oriented* towards their

homelands, often evinced by a notional aspiration to return" (Vasanthakumar 4). As she reviews the construction of the exilic condition in normative political theory, Vasanthakumar demonstrates how the exile has often been framed as a passive victim in the hands of either their homeland's oppressive regimes or the cruel and antagonistic policies of the receiving country. For her, "political agency and moral complexity are rarely acknowledged" in these "millions of so-called ordinary exiles" (Vasanthakumar, "Introduction" 1). However, she stresses on "a different story of exile and exile politics" (2). This is how she theorizes exile agency and ethico-political responsibility:

> On this telling, exiles can be rescuers and representatives, nation-builders, peace-makers, and witnesses to the suffering they have left behind. Exiles give expression to perspectives marginalized back home, activate and sustain transnational solidarity networks, advance their own ideals back home, and help hold powerful actors to account. In short, they are instrumental actors, in the countries they have *fled*, and in the transnational domain into which they have flung. (2)

So the crux of Vasanthakumar's theorizing of exile is that far from being an object of victimization by the oppressive regime in their homeland and the pathetic face of sorrow and grief awaiting humanitarian mercy and attention from the host country, exiles have very significant ethical-political roles to play in connection to their home country. While I do not mostly disagree with Vasanthakumar with regards to the exile agency, autonomy, and contribution to their native country they left behind, I also extend that they exercise this powerful agency in their present context, in their host country. Besides, I argue that Shaila Abdullah has also weaponized the idea of victimization which Vasanthakumar critiqued in her theorizing of exiles as simplified and typical.

Exiles in Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*

By considering the theory proposed by both Said and Vasanthakumar, I argue that Arissa, the protagonist of *Saffron Dreams,* and her Pakistani American Muslim community are examples of the exile. First, they are territorially absent in their home country and displaced people living in the US. Second, this physical absence is caused by some "political pressure" in Pakistan, though there are no issues of forced displacement, threat of genocide, or mass enforced deportation or refugee crises. There are, however, sufficient background and hints in the novel which make the case that Arissa and her family are the victims of *displacement* and they acquire the status of *exiles*. There is at least one direct hint, among others, in the text, which makes a connection between the political instability back in Pakistan and Arissa's family's migration to the US. In chapter four, Abdullah has Arissa put an entry dated "May 1993" in which a wedding

ceremony at Khan's palace took place in Pakistan, and the conversations among Abu and his close friends illustrates the political deadlock in her home country resulting from overwhelming bureaucracy, corruption, bribery, instability, people's loss of trust on political leaders, and the interference of the military in the running of the state (Abdullah 18-19). Abdullah, through some historical glimpses of the time, tells a story of national corruption, overriding bureaucracy, and state malfunction when, for instance, one needed to wait "twenty months to get a phone line" (18). The scene illustrates vividly the malfunctioning of a state. Historically, this was the time when Pakistan faced a serious political crisis leading to anarchy and the probability of military intervention. However, the installation of Moin Qureshi as the Interim Prime Minister of the country gave a ray of flickering hope, especially with his anti-corruption programs and some important reform projects, but his short stay in office (three months) could not sustain that hope. The civil frustration over such political chaos and pandemonium in the home country may have accelerated Arissa-Faizan's decision to migrate to the US in the hope of a better, secure, and comfortable life far away from home. For Vasanthakumar, "exiles remain politically oriented towards their homelands" (4). But by making a little appropriation of that theory, for Arissa and the community represented in the novel, I assume that Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* is "politically oriented" to the host country, the current place they inhabit. Most importantly, in tune with Vasanthakumar's theory, Abdullah as a voice of exiles aims to perform ethico-political functions by writing and publishing *Saffron Dreams.* In parallel, Arissa as the protagonist does the same thing by finishing the book her husband left incomplete.

Why Write Fictional Narrative and Publish

In discussing Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*, we encounter two books and two authors. The first one is *Saffron Dreams* by Shaila Abdullah, the primary text. The other is Arissa-Faizun's collaborative work *Soul Searcher,* the one Arissa completes after the tragic death of her husband in the 9/11 attack. What are Abdullah's aims for writing in the first place? What is the role she plays in focusing the 9/11? Is it simply just another fictional representation of exiles' lives, living, and daily disaster? Or is it a manifestation of an ethical duty to one's people or community? Or to the land one has left far away? An homage to her homeland? Abdullah as an immigrant writer might have several reasons for writing on 9/11. To start with, the attack was aimed at big US establishments (World Trade Center, the Pentagon, etc.) and American civilians by a small section of extremist Muslims from the Arab world (McFadden). No one involved in the attack were from Pakistan. Years later, a 9/11 commission report reveals that a Pakistani national named Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was the mastermind behind 9/11 ("September 11 Attacks"). This perhaps provides a reason for writing this novel

by Abdullah who is a Pakistani American immigrant writer. Even if no Pakistani nationals were involved in the attack, the possibility of writing such a novel by Abdullah does not diminish in the least because Pakistan is a Muslim-majority country and Abdullah identifies herself as a Muslim woman. Shaila Abdullah has taken this up as one of her subjects in *Saffron Dreams*. In a realistic mode, she describes how this incident has had a cataclysmic impact on the lives of refugees, immigrants, diasporas, and exiles living in the US for many years, including Arissa, Faizan, and their Pakistani-American family. It is undeniably true that Americans were primarily victimized in the attack; many of them lost their lives with their traumatized families and relatives mourning their deaths. On the other hand, the "other" people, the Muslim exiles and immigrants who were killed (no matter what country they hailed from), were doubly victimized. For example: Faizan, Arissa's lover and husband was killed in the Twin Tower plane crash, which has had severe traumatic consequences for her and her family members. On the one hand, she lost her husband in the terror attack; on the other, she and her family members (and the whole community of Muslims) were living in constant fear of being under racial and ethnic attack from mainstream white Americans.

Ashwini Vasanthakumar makes a compelling argument in her book *The Ethics of Exile: The Political Theory of Diaspora* that, contrary to the normative beliefs that exiles are simply victims and an object of mercy and sympathy, they are rather creatures of agency and have ethical-political responsibilities. Abdullah's novel, I believe, extends that idea of "responsibility" to the extent that exiles have and often perform the duty to the community they are living among/with. Exiles have very important ethical-moral responsibilities not only to their home community, the people they have left behind but also to the community they are now living in, that is, both to the people of their own nationality or religion and the people of their host or receiving country. In the case of *Saffron Dreams,* the community that is mostly invoked are mainstream Americans, exiles, or Pakistani-US Muslims and the community of global people with a conscience. In writing this novel, Abdullah has made Arissa, her protagonist, the mouthpiece of Muslim exiles coming from different nations into the US. When in the wake of 9/11, Islam was made a target for American victimization, it became the ethical responsibility of the exile populations to safeguard themselves from the ongoing attack of hate crime and other racial violence. Different methods might have been feasible, but as a writer of conscience, Abdullah has brought this ethico-political duty upon herself to represent her community's (Muslims in particular) suffering, trauma, and loss just after the disastrous 9/11 and show to the world how innocent and vulnerable they are in the post-9/11 America. *Saffron Dreams* has a strong voice in testifying and appealing to humanity and

the global conscience regarding their trauma and suffering in an effort to plead for something significant to be done to safeguard their lives so they can live in the "receiving country."

I argue that Abdullah's writing of fiction, that is, *Saffron Dreams*, has a close parallel to her main character's writing/completing the unfinished work, *Soul Searcher*, of her late husband Faizan. Why does Arissa need to finish Faizan's work? Why is it so important in Arissa's life as an exile? As is expected, she could mourn Faizan's death for a while and resume her own life by marrying another young man. That could be just as simple and straightforward as that. However, she does not do that. She chooses a much more difficult life for herself and her disabled son Raian to embark on a journey of commitment and responsibility. This is, however, not merely a question of finishing a book her husband left unfinished. The seriousness of Arissa's collaborative work with her now-dead husband can be realized when her relationship (after Faizan's death) with Zaki fails after some initial friendly moments. Zaki, cast like any other ordinary audience, raises the question and interrogates her because the project keeps her busy all the while and obstructs their blooming relationship from reaching maturity: "It's a book like a million others. I'm sorry but what would this one do for the world that others have not done already?" (Abdullah 205).

In a meta-narrative style, Zaki's question is poised more for the author Abdullah than it is for Arissa, the writer's fictional creation. My critical position is that this is where Abdullah addresses the justification for writing her novel on 9/11. Obviously, Arissa acts as the spokesperson for what the writer Abdullah intends to convey to the readers. A few lines later, Arissa is found to be openly addressing this question with a commitment: "It is not just another work. It's a legacy" (205). She adds later that the work is intended to give "life" to Faizan, to Zaki's utter bewilderment. As to the purpose of the book, Arissa also declares, "It's not for others, it's for him" (205). Despite such seemingly open declarations of *self-containment* and *subjective interest*, the book's purpose does not end up being parochial and personal. As Arissa struggles to finish the work of Faizan in which he also recounted the experiences of exile life, trauma, and racial encounters, these issues leap out of the pages and embrace the character Arissa or the writer Abdullah.

Saffron Dreams can be considered a "testimony" to Arissa's multifaceted traumas: her childhood life and growing up in a broken family, her husband's sudden death in the 9/11 attack, the ethno-racial attack on her in the NYC subway, the White American gaze on her as a Muslim woman, and her deep trauma emanating from Raian's CHARGE Syndrome of multiple birth defects (Abdullah 170). Given the theory of trauma and testimony that states "Testimony as a genre more

closely resembles a monologue than a dialogue," this novel is narrated in memoir mode (in fact, the first few chapters are written in the form of diary entries) and first-person narrative, and there is a predominance of the voice of *monologue* across the narrative structure ("About Trauma"). Besides, testimony aspires to be "definitive," true, and authentic, and it has "the quality of a declaration" ("Testimony creates the trauma it discovers"). In a mode of testimony, Abdullah has, with empathy and compassion, portrayed her protagonist Arissa Illahi, her loss, trauma, wounds, and her fight against racial injustice and stereotyping of which she is a direct victim along with others. Other than performing a victim, she also bears witness to trauma, hers and her exilic community's, which is unique to a "literary testimony": "Conceived as artistic semblances that refuse fixity and occur through encounter, literary testimony founded in affective gestures can bear witness in new and productive ways to tortures…." (Richardson, "Introduction" 22). So, in telling her own story, she is also telling the many stories of other people of her community. Arissa's personal narrative functions as an allegory of the suffering and trauma that other Muslim men and women undergo in the exile community. It is true, unlike the political agency that Vasanthakumar identifies as one of the significant characteristics of an exile, here, at least, one would not come across something of that scale. Evidently, the main character Arissa is not engaged in any serious political activity: in dethroning a corrupt/totalitarian regime or government or funding a guerilla group back home to oust an illegal regime and set up a new legitimate one in its place, or campaigning against a corrupt and oppressive regime at home to the global populations. We encounter nothing of the sort in this book. However, it does not imply that the book and its main characters lack any definite/explicit political connection to the outer world. In the first place, Abdullah, through representing Arissa, her personal narrative, and the violence targeted against her and her Muslim community, works as a mouthpiece of the exile populations living in the US. This choice of writing fiction in the realist mode, capturing an educated Muslim woman, her struggling life in the US, and her vulnerability as a believer in a faith that has been in many ways marginalized and labeled as a "terrorist religion" after 9/11, is an ethical-political choice.

The Effect of the Terror Attack on Muslim Exiles

The effect of 9/11 on Pakistani-American Muslims was really devastating and traumatic. The immediate effects were fraught with fear, tension, worry, and insecurity in the day-to-day life of the Muslim community. The first and foremost consequence was the public gaze: "a heightened awareness of any kind of glance" among the exiles leading to attempts to erase or hide their own religious and linguistic identity which they have brought to the US from their home country. In a long paragraph, Abdullah graphically describes the ways these desperate,

vulnerable, and minoritized population displays its "loyalty to a nation under attack": cutting their beard, stopping the wearing of hijabs, putting up American flags on shops, cabs, and other establishments, adopting silence in public places and not speaking in their native language for fear of being discriminated against (Abdullah 60).

The main responsibility that is thrust on exile Muslim writers is to re-present the people of a community in a way that would sufficiently foil the stereotyped stories which have been circulated against Islam and its adherents, that all Muslims are "terrorists" and there is an inherent *problem* with Islam, that its ideology promotes terrorism and violence. To achieve this end, Shaila Abdullah has created characters who are as diverse as any other community on earth: Arissa is an artist. She is an educated and sensible woman who has always been committed to her father's (and later her) family in the absence of her mother. Faizan is an English literature graduate, an ambitious writer, very sensitive, emotional, and committed to his wife and family. Abu is a cardiovascular specialist who is an idealist in politics but indifferent to his wife's demands and wishes. Ami is presented as a voice of female freedom who is languishing in a *prison* created by patriarchy. Divorced and lonely, Zaki is very rich and an engineer by vocation. He lives with his two grown-up children. Ma and Baba are just two ideal and loving parents who devoted all their time and energy to Faizan-Arissa and their special needs son, Raian. Besides, there are other minor characters who have also been created as diverse as possible with Abdullah's artistic craftsmanship.

An important mission of writing *Saffron Dreams* then is to re-present the characters and deal with the themes of a terror attack, Islam, and xenophobia in ways that can counter the existing propaganda poised in stereotyping and essentialism against Islam as a semitic faith and its adherents. Abdullah has done this by paying her focused attention to the personal lives of the Muslim exiles and immigrants, their cultural trauma, struggles in the host country, and their capacity for empathy for the fellow-victims even though they are doubly victimized.

The life of an exile is not all prototypical: they have their own negotiations, dialogue, argumentation, and issues of intricate problems and dilemmas in the context of the foreign host culture. Questions regarding the attitude of the exiles to the host country and its cultures where they now live arise as do questions like how they initiate dialogues between the two? How much do they appropriate and how much do they leave? To what extent do they carry from their homeland, the country they have left behind? How much do they embrace from the new culture? The following is a poignant description by Abdullah where she looks at a central problem in exile life, in particular its unbearable dilemma: "We are

homesick individuals in an adopted homeland. We could not break free of our origin, and yet we wanted to soar. The tension in our hearts left us suspended in mid-air" (Abdullah 60). This trauma of suspension or the condition of deadlock is an important condition of exile life. Edward Said calls this a "fundamentally discontinuous state of being" (Said 177). On the one hand, these people have brought their own faith (Islam), rituals, costumes, food habits, language, and so on to the host country. On the other hand, they have an ambition to avail the good opportunities in the US. Perhaps the writer wants readers as witnesses to see into the very dilemma of an exile life, which works as a counter-narrative to the existing propaganda that propagates the exiles as one-dimensional: they arrive at an alien land but do not belong to it. There is another important moment in the novel which also tells of a shared and co-existing reality of two cultures in an exile mind: the culture of their homeland and the host culture they have arrived at. This is the moment in which the writer also examines the exile *loyalty*. Do they forsake the old way of life completely and embrace the new and promising one? Or do they live in the host country while cherishing everything from their past life? Is this an "either…or" issue? Or a "both…and" issue? In a personal moment of nostalgic self-reflection, Arissa projects a future in which, as her son Raian grows up and asks her questions about their identity, she thinks of replying thus:

> I might also tell him that when you leave a land behind, you don't' shift loyalties – you just expand your heart and fit two lands in. You love them equally." (Abdullah 174)

In the context of multicultural exile identity, we hear a lot about "appropriation" and "hybridity." It appears that Abdullah has created Arissa in a mold to fit that category of multicultural identity. In response to populist stereotyping, essentialist ideas, and monolithic propaganda about Muslim exiles in the US, she has touched upon the ideas of hybridity and fluidity in the formation of identity. For instance, Arissa's veil/hijab is an important cultural issue in the text. There is an interesting dialogue between two opposite positions with regards to the hijab. Originally, she had no intention to wear it as she had never worn it in her father's house before marriage but the women of Faizan's family have been observing the tradition for ages (in fact this corresponds to a predominant Islamic culture existing in different Muslim countries, including Pakistan). So afterwards, out of respect for Faizan's long family tradition, she consents to wear a hijab. Over the years, she develops a sense of belonging to this garment and after Faizan's tragic death, she once considers dropping it (because after her "iddat time" as a Muslim woman, she is totally free from all marital responsibilities) but later she decides to continue the tradition as it is one of Faizan's legacy. Next, months

later when she is victimized in the NYC subway, she gives up wearing it. The following is the description how one day she feels without her hijab in public:

> I felt naked, like a prostitute, my wares exposed for all to see. In reality, the busy world around me scarcely noticed my loss or collective losses. I longed for the veil I had let go. (Abdullah 116)

So, in contrast to an outside gaze, the observation of a tradition like this is not always a personal choice, but rather a community ritual/convention which is thrust on women. But later in the subway occurrence, it is the hijab for which she is labeled as an "extremist" or "Islamic fundamentalist' to the teen gang who made an attack on her, cutting off her hijab in public, humiliating and name-calling her. So as the White Euro-American gaze fixes her identity in the box of "extreme Islam" or "fundamentalist Islam," her personal struggle with the hijab along with her subsequent negotiation with a long family tradition is utterly lost. The *one story* that is constructed, spread, and reproduced about a Muslim woman in the US is that she is a very conservative person with a monolithic existence, one in whose life there is hardly any argumentations/dialogue. Thus, *Saffron Dreams'* re-presentation of Arissa's hijab episode functions as a counter-narrative which underscores the dangers of creating one type of discourse about Muslims and their choices in life. Moreover, the way Abdullah portrays Arissa's affair with Faizan – their free mixing, erotic moments, and premarital sexuality – consolidates the notion that Muslims are not always the ones who the west is often predisposed to imagine. Another great example of a counter-narrative is the sketch of Ami, Arissa's freedom-loving and "irresponsible" mother who leaves her kids and husband in the hope of finding a new life with Uncle Jalal. Her passion for freedom, struggle to break down the shackles imposed on her by patriarchy, and her erotic journey with Arissa's Uncle Jalal are manifestations of a misfit character within the traditional Pakistani society. So, the point is that on Abdullah's large and diverse narrative canvas, there is a crowd of all kinds of people, good, bad, religious, erotic, dutiful, sensuous, ambitious, political, filial, conservative, and mysterious, and this canvas is the perfect space for resistance against stereotyping and essentialist ideas.

Reception of the Novel: The Role of Fiction and its Author

The overall reviews of the common readers on *Saffron Dreams* are positive. Of all global ratings, 60% rated the book as "five stars." Readers from the Euro-American zone are usually positive about the book's treatment of widowhood, a Pakistani-US Muslim woman's lone struggle over her husband's premature death in the World Trade Center attack, her subsequent grief management, and her emotional struggle with her son, Raian's CHARGE syndrome. However, readers stressed the theme of prejudices and stereotyping against Islam and

Muslims in the US. A reader named Edgar R. from the US wrote the following review on Amazon on May 25, 2013: "I was surprised by how much I liked this book. It opened my eyes to the prejudice against Muslims and how wrong it is" (Amazon.com: Customer Reviews). Another reviewer wrote on Goodreads: "The discovery of her husband's unfinished manuscript may be the key to her survival. And perhaps by finishing Faizan's legacy, Arissa will redeem a race" ("*Saffron Dreams* by Shaila M. Abdullah").

These kinds of comments are in abundance on Amazon and Goodreads' virtual platforms. The first reader-reviewer explicitly focused on the main concerns of the novel: clear images, stereotypes, and other myths against a religious community. In the Goodreads review cited above, the catchy phrase "[to] redeem a race" echoes the fundamental duty of exiles towards their community in the host country, not in the homeland. In both examples, Euro-American readers/reviewers underscored their reception by hinting at the functionality of the novel in a time of crisis for US Muslims or the social-ethical role that Abdullah played by writing the book in the aftermath of 9/11.

Writing Books/Memoirs as an Act of Representation and Resistance

Saffron Dreams is engaged with multiple books/memoirs and meta-narratives. First, Abdullah has written the novel in the form of a memoir. Then in the book, her main character Arissa is also engaged in writing/completing a novel (entitled as *Soul Searcher*) that was left unfinished by her late husband Faizan. Next, there is the mention of another of Arissa's memoir (14-page-long) about her personal life, her loss of Faizan, her trauma, grief and sorrow, and struggle over her disabled son written for the arts magazine Arissa works for. This is not a mere coincidence that all these narratives focus on self and subjectivity, Muslim identity, trauma, struggle, victimization, and a resistance against prejudices and stereotypes about Muslims in the US.

The Face of Victims and Weaponizing It: "I am as much a victim as you are"

One viral propaganda against Islam is that it is a terrorist religion and all Muslims are bad and dangerous believers. This kind of disinformation and myths spread across America and Europe giving rise to Islamophobia in the minds of the populations of the host country. Abdullah's portrayal of US Muslims as much *victims* as the Americans are, in some cases more vulnerable than the latter, is a counter-representation and has an edge of performativity in real life. Quite far from solely endorsing "art for art's sake," or writing fiction as simply an aesthetic practice the author of this novel makes connections with the crises brewing on the 9/11 terror attack and the life-shattering consequences in the lives of the real exile population. The writing of this novel renders such a deep impression which is an immediacy of performativity, the performance of a wake-up call:

See, you Americans and the world! That's not our face as you know, look, this is us, we are also victims. That is why, when in the subway incident Arissa is labeled as belonging to a "race of murderers" by the blond teen, she resolutely retorts, "I am as much a victim as you are" (Abdullah 62). I argue that this angry retaliation of Arissa is deeply significant and in writing the book Abdullah may be saying the same thing to her American audience (addressing her host country people is more important than her homeland people in the present context of crisis, racial trauma, and hate crime).

Though there is an equivalent scale of trauma, suffering and loss for the Americans and Muslim exiles, the scale weighs down for the exiles. First and foremost, they are displaced people who have left their homeland quite a long time ago. Their everyday life is engraved by a deep sense of loss: of homeland, of their own cultures, of political liaisons, and of self, a sense of "estrangement" for Said. When this sense of rootlessness is joined by other malaises such as racial violence, mainstream white gaze that is discriminating and stereotyping all the Muslims by one label, "terrorists," then the trauma and grief of these people is tripled, and they become the most vulnerable people on earth.

On Shaila Abdullah's personal website (shailaabdullah.com), readers will find an extensive book review by Debora Hall. She describes the novel thus: "S*affron Dreams* is an important American novel. The Pakistani American immigrant story has not seared enough the consciousness of the American psyche. *Americans often think that 9/11 was a singular American tragedy*. *Saffron Dreams* reminds us that 9/11 hurt Muslims in more devastating ways because it stole their innocence and reputation" (my emphasis). And the book reviews shared above confirm that far from "a singular American tragedy," 9/11 is also a tragedy for Muslim exiles and immigrants living in the US.

Transnational/Transcultural Trauma and Empathy

Abdullah's treatment of transnational trauma and empathy also works as a form of counter-narrative and subtle but powerful resistance on behalf of the exile experiences. In a disjointed post-9/11 era, identifying oneself as Muslim is an act of resistance and boldness. Again, the portrayal of a bond between an American and a Pakistani-American is more so. At the close of the novel, we encounter two characters: one is Zaki who is a Pakistani-American businessman and divorcee with two adult children. Arissa's meeting with him raises a hope in the audience that the novel may end in a restoration of conjugal happiness even in Faizan's absence. However, after some initial dates with him, Arissa keenly realizes that such a relationship is a far cry. However, there is another person, an American woman named Anne Marie who lost her husband in the Vietnam war many years ago. She is the person from whom Arissa can retrieve Faizan's last-

minute memories as the woman was a regular customer at the restaurant Faizan had worked for in the World Trade Center as an attendant before the terror attack. Her subsequent friendship and bond with this American woman during a critical time of trauma, fear, racial violence, and Islamophobia indicates the novel's capacity for endorsing a transnational trauma and empathy. This is how Arissa evaluates this moment of empathy across time and space based on similar traumatic experiences: "We were joined together by a chance meeting, unified in our sorrow, years apart in our losses" (Abdullah 127).

Below is another Goodreads review by a general reader who also emphasizes the book's transnational empathy and illustrates the novel's aim to be received across boundaries and borders:

> In the end, this book is not about 9/11, her husband's death, her child's disabilities or even her religion. *It's about what binds us together even though we are from different homelands and different cultural backgrounds*, which I believe is the crux of this book. Though not easy, it's definitely something that deserves to be read" ("*Saffron Dreams* by Shaila M. Abdullah," my emphasis).

Final Remarks

As a Pakistani-US Muslim immigrant writer in an exilic condition, Shaila Abdullah weaves a literary narrative centering around a young Muslim woman's loss, trauma, and grief around 9/11. Taking up a sensitive as well as sensational event as her subject, she underscores that Pakistani-American Muslim exiles are victims as much in the horrific terror attack as any American citizen. Making use of memoir, meta-narrative, and testimony, Abdullah, through her aesthetic and creative flair, writes a counter-narrative of resistance and rebellion which helps readers see into the heart of hearts of Pakistani-US Muslims in exile and their ethos. In a time fraught with Islamophobia, a zeal of "war on terror" and millions of false propaganda against Muslims around the world, identifying oneself as Muslim is an act of boldness and of resistance. In writing a fiction about a Muslim woman and in completing a book left by Faizan, both Abdullah (the writer) and Arissa (the writer's fictional creation) respectively embody an ethical responsibility thrust upon exiles on the eve of a transnational crisis and trauma.

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Kaiser Haq's Reminiscence Poems: A Dialectic Reading of Memory and History

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Abstract

Bangladesh's leading Anglophone poet, Kaiser Haq, resents both the ontological manifestations of history as a site of contestations and miseries and the politicized reconstruction of history as a potential tool serving the agenda of the ruling class. A 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War veteran and a discerning witness to the country's transformative phases, Haq deplores uncritical representations of history in Bangladesh's literature. Consistently, he has formulated a poetics that engages more with personal memory and subjectivity while still opening alternative windows into the historical timeline paralleling his maturation as an individual and, particularly, as a poet. This article reveals the inherent dialectic between history and memory in Haq's poetry, and underscores the poet's turn to memory through reminiscence poems that exemplify what Pierre Nora terms *les lieux de memoire*. These poems register his disillusionment with the post-independence state of affairs – that contravene the fundamental principles of Bangladesh – and his late-life moral reflections on life's entanglements in the country's evolving socio-cultural and politico-economic reality evolving since the 1950s through the subsequent decades to the present. Consequently, this paper offers a retroactive understanding of Haq's poetry within Bangladesh's literary history.

Keywords: Bangladesh, history, dialectic, memory, history, Kaiser Haq, reminiscence poems

My memory is again in the way of your history/…/Your history gets in the way of my memory.

(Agha Shahid Ali, "Farewell")

What we call memory today is therefore not memory but already history. What we take to be flare-ups of memory are in fact its final consumption in the flames of history. The quest for memory is the search for one's history.

(Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*" 13)

Introduction: History as a "nightmare"

Agha Shahid Ali's poem "Farewell" marks an ontological divergence between personal memory infused with the pain of loss and state-modulated history that often overpowers personal recollections. While memory grapples with the obligation to reveal intense feelings and hitherto unexplored experiences from the viewpoints of subjectivity, history with its methodological claim to objectivity tends to impose a grand narrative on the individual voice. Bangladesh's avant-garde Anglophone poet Kaiser Haq must be aware of such a dialectical union of memory and history in the country's archival as he exhibits an uncharacteristic acrimony towards history in favor of memory, especially the varied ways history unfolded in the 20th century as a site of contestations and hegemonic pursuits. His reflection on history is finely encapsulated in the four-line poem "O Clio" composed anytime in the decade immediate to the Liberation War. The title addresses one of the nine Muses in Greek mythology usually portrayed with an open scroll or a book as the matron of history. Referring intertextually to Stephan Dedalus who – out of a sense of entrapment, anguish, and a desire to break free from the traumatic weight of historical experiences – declares that history "is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake" in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1920/2000, 42), Haq wishes the harsh truths of the past did not impact private lives as intrusively as it does:

> If history is
> a nightmare
> let me sleep on —
> at least it's unreal (Haq, *Published* 176).

Like Dedalus, the poet might be blasé about history as a horizon of inevitable catastrophes, struggles, and discontinuities concealed by the "redemption-seeking" nationalist and the ruling class in the name of linear progress (Benjamin 389-400) or history rendered into "a costly superfluity and luxury," "a hypertrophied vice," or "a dark, invisible burden" that neither serves life nor lets ordinary citizens go beyond its manipulative uses (Nietzsche 59-61). Haq's discontent with history – even after his necessary involvement in its rerouting in South Asia through the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War – manifests itself in his recent poem "Barbecue" (included in *Pariah and Other Poems*) where he anxiously ponders whether his well-intentioned engagement has unintentionally aligned him with vested groups, making him complicit in deleterious actions without his awareness:

> Am I responsible to an extent for the whole series,
> Am I, if only by an iota, culpable
> For the horrors flashed on TV

Or at least implicated, however tenuously, enough
To feel duty bound to play the concerned citizen
Lining up on the pavement in a human chain? (Haq, *Pariah* 21)

This ethical reconsideration of becoming a cog in the wheel of history is significant on the part of a Bangladeshi poet who is conscientious about the evolution of an Anglophone literary genre in the country's cultural domain. What unsettles him is his having to witness the perpetuation of a conflict-rife state even after independence as if all acts – visionary or transgressive – are connected "in the chain of history" so that life still remains subject to the same "horrors" that should have been things of the past with the post-war new beginning. But if events are destined to repeat themselves, engendering nightmares for subjectivities across successive phases of history, the "self-indulgent, metaphysical question" of culpability proves "irrelevant, anyway" (Haq, *Pariah* 21). About two decades ago, Haq's metaphysical thinking would prioritize the spatiality of life over its temporality; to him "time, a wriggling eel" tendentiously grasped by modern historiography's markers like "pre and *post-*" (Haq, *Published* 227) could be conquered by life's immediate fulfilments in the private sphere where the "absolutes" of infinity and eternity become tenable to "the space / between our bodies —" as we go,

making naught
of the nightmare
of the separateness,
by the simple act

of leaping into
a tight embrace (Haq, *Published* 228)

Composed in the 1990s – the decade of Bangladesh's tremendous politico-economic transition but also the era of political regression, of the attenuation of secularism by religious fundamentalism, of the rise of militancy and of the marring of democratic processes (Riaz 76-108) – the above two poems and others in Haq's fourth collection *Black Orchid* (1996) evidence the poet's "libertarian" penchants for Eros or love, desire, attraction, and creative energy (Alam, "Kaiser Haq: A Bangladeshi Writing in English" 335), all the while insulated against the state of affairs constantly disorienting the sensible citizen about the changing landscape of history. All the same, the most obvious case for Haq's umbrage about history as a site of contestation and power dynamics or as a point of reference for the ruling-class ideology in the overall ordering of things can be made from his avowed unwillingness to revisit the longue durée of 1971 either in poetry like his contemporary Bengali-language poets or by intentionally writing a full-fledged

memoir beyond just a few short prose pieces, even though we know he fought the war as a commissioned officer leading a 200-strong company from October of the year following weeks of rigorous training at the legendary Indian military camp called *Murti.* However, all this amounted to "an existential choice" – or a timely exigent involvement, as indicated above – to free the country and to go back to a projected, normal life (Sources cited in subsequent sentences). In fact, Haq posits that the choice became inevitable after the 25th March crackdown "plunging 70 million people into a cauldron of terror, panic, anxiety, but also strengthening a collective resolve to resist and overcome" (Haq, "'For your sake…"). Hence, the prevailing trends of memorialization of the war history through nationalistic exaltation or through creative writing hardly do justice to the immensity and intensity of the collective experience, as Haq professes on several occasions (Haq, "Introducing a Bangladeshi Writer in English 110-119;" Haq, "In Conversation with Bangladeshi Poet…;" Haq, "It Was an Existential Choice…;" Haq, "Forty Years' Worth of Poem;" Haq "Nationality and Other Difficulties"). To some extent, Haq's argument harks back to Adorno's much cited skepticism in his 1949 essay "Cultural Criticism and Society" about the legitimacy of writing poetry on dehumanizing experiences (Adorno 34). But Haq's disinclination to romanticize war and its aftermath stems from his critical stance towards the often-idealized representations of the Liberation War in Bangladeshi literature. Historical fiction works like Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* (2007), the first in her *Bengal Trilogy*, fall short of realism for their "starry-eyed, optimistic" treatment of history purged of "[a]ll complications" involved in the chaotic and uncoordinated reality of the time (Haq, "In Conversation with Bangladeshi Poet…"). Then there is Bangladeshi "war poetry about lying low in trepidation" while thousands of freedom fighters like Haq battled the enemy braving death (Haq, "In Conversation with Bangladeshi Poet…"). While saying this, Haq might have in view the unofficial poet laureate, Shamshur Rahman, celebrated for his embodiment of the country's struggles and aspirations from the 50s (Radice 2006; Islam 2022), the nationalist poet who sought the "reassurance [of a secured refuge] amidst the tension and terror, the daily arrests and murders, the ominous noises of military vehicles, and the sound of boots," and wrote the poems of his collection *Bondi Shibir Theke* (1972) in hiding (Haq, "'For your sake…"). By contrast, Haq was "more clear-headed" about history's betrayal as the euphoria of liberation was quickly overshadowed by disillusionment, political discord, and a sense of abandonment felt by those who fought on the ground. It is no wonder that those experiences have left him skeptical and unwilling to indulge in the triumphalist narratives that tend to dominate discourse on the war. Cognizant of all the contradictions, the poet regrets: "It's very painful to write about" (Haq, "In Conversation with…").

The 1971 history being too complex and too painful to aesthetically verbalize, the three poems Haq brought himself to write after the war touch the real scenario only tangentially, not with the seriousness of intent per se to transmit history. These poems are included in *Published in the Streets of Dhaka: Collected Poems* (2017) and have become part of the vast post-liberation corpus that, according to Kabir Chowdhury, obsessively centers on "the theme of war" (105). "Dateline, Dhaka, 25 March 2006," one of the three poems, rather opens with the quotidian, unperturbed life of some "Cynical romantics / Pretending insouciance, / Talking realpolitik" till they are jerked awake by the game of history:

> Who'd have thought
> We'd be waylaid
> By History —
> Sounds portentous
> But how else to put it? (Haq, *Published* 67)

It is only after the outdoorsy friends have been shocked by "impoverished barricades," "exploding skies," and "slain bodies" on their way home that they suddenly figure out their "ultimate choice — / Fight or flee —," as they all find themselves locked "in a gorgon's stare." Then and there they resolve to fight back ("We stared back, unpetrified"). Haq recounts those moments of their self-discovery invoking a historical consciousness:

> It was precisely
> Half a biblical lifetime ago
> Though on this day once again
> It feels like it was yesterday. (Haq, *Published* 67)

Clearly, Haq's empirically informed perspective on history discredits the linear, progress-oriented narrative of the nation's struggles for statehood and its outcomes; rather it speaks to an exceptionally enlightened understanding of evolving human conditions in South Asia through ages and through man's being and becoming in the world, for that matter. This claim could be safely authenticated by a more extensive study of his oeuvre that, other than poetry collections, includes prose writings and occasional interviews. This article leaves the task for future research. However, one instance of Haq's view on historical consciousness can be cited here to support this article's premise that Haq is more prone to mining his memory through poetry than turning to formal, state-modulated historical narratives. The tendency might be uncharacteristic of a 1971 war veteran but can be validated by the way Haq views the *Muktijuddher Chetona* or "spirit of the Liberation War" – occasionally popping up in the

present-day politico-cultural discourse of Bangladesh. He defines the spirit in terms of "the national unity" the then East Pakistani populace across all differences felt at that particular historical moment about which one can now be only "nostalgic" in full knowledge that "we cannot recreate it [the spirit] for we are no longer in the same historical situation" (Haq, in interview with Eresh Omar Jamal). Elsewhere Haq dismisses the linear progression of this spirit on the ground that the "ideological questions" the spirit evolved around "have not been fully resolved" in the post-independence era, an indicator being the newly liberated state's failure to manage its demographic dividend (Haq "Nationality and Other Difficulties"). It needs emphasizing here that when Haq expresses his divergent view on how to interpret history, he inspires – to quote Ramin Jahanbegloo introducing Romila Thapar – "an unavoidable step to critical lucidity and transformative clarity … against the logic of society and state" (xi). In other words, Haq's perspective is inclined towards a critical understanding of history that often challenges the dominant narratives imposed by societal and governmental institutions.

Turning to Memory as an Urgency

The French historian Pierre Nora, renowned for his distinction between memory and history in his trailblazing essay "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," attributes the significance of the *lieux de memoire* or "sites of memory" – where memory solidifies and is preserved – to the realization of a rupture from the past, when we are left with a sense of "torn" memory. This disconnect is intertwined with the feeling that memory has been disrupted, yet in a manner that raises the issue of how memory is embodied in certain locations that maintain a sense of historical continuity. Nora argues in clearer terms: "There are *lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de memoire*, real environments of memory" (7). These sites dictate how the past comes down to the present via "commemorative vigilance." The strongest raison d'être of these sites are their potential to countervail history's workings: "if history did not besiege memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating and petrifying it, there would be no *lieux de memoire*" (12).

A number of Haq's poems composed in the form of unpretentious reminisces dialectically engage with prevalent historical narratives of lived conditions of the 50s and 60s in the erstwhile East Pakistan through the post-Partition years and of the 70s in the post-independence era of Bangladesh. Read with reference to his prose writings and interviews, these poems testify to the poet's disinterest in the country's ubiquitous historical consciousness that tend to thrive on certain binaries, elisions, and on appropriation. In contrast, it is life above everything else that concerns him, as his poetics is "very much in the swim/ of things" and

"jostles the crowds / even as it stands apart" in the hope of an objective look on the lived, complex conditions (Haq, *Published* 260). Haq's resort to memory is valid given that memory is dynamic and "open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting" and is increasingly being subjected to the "conquest and eradication" by history which is "a reconstruction" of the past, hence "always problematic and incomplete" (Nora 8). Citing his intellectual predecessor, Maurice Halbwachs, the French historian draws a more pragmatic contrast between the two key terms:

> Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. Memory is absolute, while history can only conceive the relative. (Nora 8-9)

This section of the article underscores a growing sense of urgency in the increasingly age-conscious poet's ongoing attempt to recollect the past in verse, to connect the past to the present and probably to anticipate a future, thus seeking a coherent selfhood confronting the snare of an alienated existence – both as an individual and as an Anglophone poet – in the temporal order. It is as if these poems sprang from his consummate desire to reaffirm his place in the nation's cultural-political archive. In hindsight, we may take Haq's recollections as the result of an awareness aligned with the caveat of the ancient Greek philosopher Plutarch who once emphasized remembrance as loath to disconnecting oneself from their own history and experiences ("On Tranquillity of Mind," 217-18).

Not willing to write a full-fledged prose memoir, Haq now wishes to mark his progress, at par with his fellowmen, from a semi-urban, middle-class Anglophile to a Bangladeshi neorealist poet trekking the jagged course of Anglophone writing and publishing in the post-independence era when he found himself to be impersonating "a pariah" or "a hijrah" – indeed, the two terms he frequently uses to interpret the Anglophone poet's predicament in the country's cultural sphere (Haq, "The Hijra Comes in from the Heat and Dust;" Haq, "English-medium boy;" Haq, "A Highbrow 'Hijra'?" 140). Remarkably enough, in the process of his poetic reminiscences, Haq demonstrates an alternative perspective on the formative history of Bangladesh and subjectivities within it. And in doing this, he assimilates what Uta Gosmann distinctively terms as "historic memory" that allows the poetic self to assert itself "by the conscious, recollectable experiences of the past" and "poetic memory" that is more than a "remembered biography" as it is free from the bindings of "the accuracy, linearity, causality, or coherence of historic memory" and thus "reaches beyond the accountable facts of life towards the notion of a self that is dynamic, expansive, and full of potential." According to Gosmann, the two types of memory are not mutually exclusive nor does

poetic memory become "a critique of history or historiography as a highly varied and theoretically sophisticated discipline." This is because, explains Gosmann, poetic memory is "aware of the limitations that derive from a self grounded in a narrative of its past" (1-3). Seen through this critical lens, Haq's five-decade-long conception of the tenets of modern poetry finds its veritable manifestations in his reminiscence poems, as they can be read in the light of this genre that, in Gosmann's assertion, works as "a *medium* of memory" as well as "a *system* of memory," and "*represents* and *thematizes* memory, its contents and functioning" (emphasis original, 5). However, within its permissible range, this article focuses on only the first aspect.

Remembering is self-sustaining in the midst of rampant chaos and uncertainties. On the tripartite threshold of memory, language, and subjectivity, remembering resolves the fundamental question of the Anglophone writer's belonging to the milieu that hardly recognizes his creative contributions only because they are not being produced in the dominant literary language, Bengali. So a strong reason for revisiting childhood times nestled in the collective history is to confute the long-held deprecation of English-language writing and its practitioners within the ambit of Bengali-lingua-cultural nationalist imaginings, and thereby to vindicate that the poet, regardless of the apparent detachment through Anglophony, has always shared the lived conditions of the populace having to reconfigure its statehood and with it subjectivity through persistent struggles. It is notable here that most of Haq's new poems in *Published in the Streets of Dhaka* (2017), and the poems in *Pariah and Other Poems* (2017) and *The New Frontier* (2024) betray a sense of disillusionment about the country's present reality of political violence, economic injustices and inequalities, environmental degradation, human rights violation, etc. that seem to have bounced beyond ameliorative action. It pains him to find "Everything a tad worse / Each morning—" (Haq, *Pariah* 26). Now disillusioned about the receding light of promises once projected into a redeeming future (that happens to be the present deviating reality), the 1971-war-veteran poet becomes nostalgic of those times of material constraints and complacence, of ideological conflict and activism, and of loss and prospects – those times when struggles for a regime change promised democracy and equality in a liberated land. Added to all these preceding considerations is the palliative effect of memory contra the feeling of an old-age angst as one is "heading fast" toward the "damned … invisible" finish line of life's journey (Haq, *Pariah* 77). If living carefree has been stunted as much by the current politico-economic reality as by his waning psychophysical state, writing also cannot escape their fatal blow on his once-unbridled creative outpourings. In the conundrum further intensified by the Covid-19 terror, he retrospectively wondered: "How poems would appear / Like bean sprouts / A sudden flash of fresh green / Or like flaming red chillies /

Ready for combat" (Haq, *The New Frontier* 21). So one more reason to draw on personal memory can be the poet's wish to reconcile with the challenges of aging on the idea of "eros" (life instinct) or with Nietzsche's idea of "eternal recurrence." Upon turning sixty, Haq felt the toll of aging; yet he could proclaim: "I'll just take things easy, / let eyes wander where they will" in the poem "Senior Citizen" that closes with the poet's tenacity to hold on:

> I wish mad old Nietzsche were right —
> wouldn't it be lovely
> living this unexceptional life
> over and over
> all eternity … (Haq, *Published* 3)

Consistently, the anxiety about ineluctable infirmities surfaces in the poem "Nearing Sixty-Five" where he visualizes old-age quirks and kinks that, despite their inducing some musings on death, are supposed to remain "ultra-private" (Haq, *Pariah* 70). Negating this anxiety, the memory of growing up, of pursuing an existential meaning of life, and of writing in the still unsophisticated natural setting in the 50s and 60s energized him during the most precarious spell of Covid-19 at the end of which he celebrates his acquired resilience: "I'm still here" (Haq, *The New Frontier* 16).

Memory as a Window into History

The individual's delved-out memory interacts with the community's past and gains objective significance through its interspersing with certain watershed moments in history and their aftermath which the individual has been a witness to. The timeframe that Haq's reminiscence poems – particularly "Barbecue," "Beginnings," "Pariah," and "Belated Mirror Stage" from the last two collections – cover are documented as the most decisive decades (i.e., 50s, 60s, and 70s) for the creation of Bangladesh as a nation-state through a succession of ideological-cultural struggles and political movements. In these poems, Haq first depicts his childhood self as a spectator still trying to make sense of the world around him and then presents himself as a partaker imbued with the zeitgeist of the moments. These two roles are central to understanding Haq's poetry in relation to the evolving historical context that produced a band of politically-conscious, instrumental Bengali-language poets of his generation who, among many others, include Shamshur Rahman (1929-2006), Syed Shamshul Huq (1935-2016), Al Mahmud (1936-2019), Rafiq Azad (1942-2016), Shahid Qadri (1942-2016), Abdul Mannan Syed (1943-2010), Mohammad Rafiq (1943-2023), Mahadev Saha (1944-), Nirmalendu Goon (1945-), and Abul Hasan (1947-1975).

Haq grew up witnessing the rise of what historians term as "a vernacular elite"

that, in the 1950s-60s, had to instrumentalize its distinctive collective identity first at variance with domineering Hindu elite rooted in West Bengal/Calcutta and then through a more direct confrontation with the hegemonic ruling of the "military elite" based in West Pakistan (Hashem 61; N. Anam 326-27; van Schendel 233; Jahan 184) or, as Serajul Islam Choudhury defines it, with the "Panjabi hegemony" (quoted in Anam, *A People's History* 51). Haq remembers: "even as a very small boy I felt the tension between being a Pakistani, and a Bengali" (Haq, "Nationality and Other Difficulties"). Nevertheless, in those tumultuous times he discovered "his sense of being" to be "complete" as an adolescent impersonating the "hierarchically" conceived tags of "South Asian, Bengali and Muslim," as he recollects in the bildungsroman-style poem "Belated Mirror Stage." This poem records his progress from a phenomenological understanding of selfhood in the post-Partition arrangement of things to a more conscious "self-fashioning" endeavor in sync with writing creatively in an attempt to withstand "the drab prosody of life" (Haq, *The New Frontier* 15-16). Self-fashioning as a private practice anytime during the 23-year-long military regime following the Partition, that relegated East Pakistani Bengalis to "second-class citizens" can be conflated into the collective struggles for self-determination. Though far-fetched, the connection ought to become worthwhile in understanding the Bengalis' resistance to the legacy of "racial stereotypes" fabricated by the British Raj and wielded by West Pakistanis. Haq explains:

> The "martial" Punjabi took it as his right to dominate the "non-martial" Bangalee. When the Pakistan Army launched its genocidal onslaught, little did it expect an effective popular resistance. The Bangalee freedom fighters not only helped liberate their country but also removed the mind-forged manacles of racial stereotypes. Bangladeshis could henceforth project a self-image free of an inferiority complex (Haq, "'For your sake…").

The English-medium schooling Haq received on the projected fervor of his father – whom he dubs as "an Anglophile to boot" with a nationalist consciousness typical of the day – was a bourgeois entitlement that few in his neighborhood could afford and, indeed, turned out to be "the defining moment" in the development of his socio-cultural identity among the milieu (Haq, "English-medium Boy"). His memory of living in the semi-rural middle-class vicinity of Nayapaltan – as the sprawling site was gradually being appended to Dhaka's rapid modernization and expansion process – and of playing football and *kabadi* "barefooted and baretorsoed" (Haq, "English-medium Boy") brings to us the ideal Bangladeshi childhood experience flushed with nature's bounties. The poem "Beginnings" echoes snippets of Haq's childhood memory with reference

to the history of Bangladesh since the culmination of the British rule the legacies of which boasted "no statues / at crossroads for crows to crap on," but only a club, a university, racecourse, the Mughal gun named Bibi Mariam, and, of course, a collective rush for Western modernity (Haq, *Pariah* 46-47). The winds of change over the next two decades could be termed a pervasive transformation from what Haq termed as "backwaters" in describing Dhaka (Haq, "Every Poet Has to Find His or Her Own Way") or what Salma Sobhan calls "a rural hinterland" vis-à-vis West Bengal (304). One of the symbols that represent this new elite's search for modern tastes and sensibilities in the poem is *Radiant Reading* English-medium students like Haq would read "amidst a sacramental hush / in the amber light of hurricane lanterns / while fireflies and stars lit up / a world of wonderful possibilities" (Haq, *Pariah* 48-49). Now shocked by the increasing temporal and spatial disconnect from that relatively assured way of life, Haq conjures up the evening reading scene in his mind's eye so that he can have a consoling view of his young self, unaware of the terrors of everyday life meted over the questions of democracy, human rights, cultural autonomy, among various other issues. Despite its commemoration of blissful times, a return to the childhood reality cannot escape the permeating politico-historical currents that, more than the Anglo-American literary themes Haq absorbed from his voracious reading, might have encroached upon the young consciousness. What he deems "my paradise" in the closing line of the poem "Beginnings" is threatened by the series of events that reconfigured subjectivity and the very idea of nationhood:

> through discontent
> and demonstrations
> and war and coups
> and varieties of misrule
> and people and more people
> and I am elsewhere looking back
> on a locality that's only a name. (Haq, *Pariah* 49)

Put into the perspective of historical consciousness, these seven lines synthesize the crucial pre- and post-independence happenings in Bangladesh over the five decades that also comprise the parallel span of Haq's poetic career, and hint at his presently being "elsewhere," nostalgic about the past whose material traces have been buried under the accumulating heaps of structural progress. Like Baudelaire pining for the old Paris yielding to Haussmann's massive urbanization and modernization project (See: Sanyal; Kerr), Haq feels displaced from the topographic scene that now exists only in memory inducing a desire to go back to the unmodulated native tradition. All the same, while these events in the nation's history have sprung from the politico-economic contestations over power and

its modus operandi, it is selfhood that dominated Haq's understanding of the world in flux. Often the observant and introspective selfhood was analogous with "stray dogs," if not entirely with Baudelaire's modern *flâneur*, as Haq depicts his juvenile camaraderie in terms of a "local pack" whose adult leader was driven by a "desire for power" and was catapulted into "the despair of not having it" ultimately turning into "the local lunatic." The darkly ambitious leader's loss of sanity in an apathetic world and Haq's growing up are juxtaposed with the reckless but vulnerable living of stray dogs in the vicinity and the multiple, simultaneous happenings in the country's broader socio-political fabric:

> while the strays ran around
> playing their own game of survival
> and demonstrators ran into police bullets
> and genocidal wars spread like bush fire
> and refugees filled up maps
> and independence lit up the sky with fireworks
> and varieties of misrule flourished
> and slums grew like leaves in spring
> and trade and manufacture sped up like falling meteors
> and every outfit grew a thousand eyes like Indra
> to keep an eye on what was or wasn't going on
> and people scattered like autumn leaves (Haq, *Pariah* 52–55).

The two reminiscence poems analyzed above outline how Haq's transition from an English-medium student to a historically shaped individual witnessing the burgeoning nation's successive struggles and transformations through the 50s, 60s, and 70s to the post-independence era made him conscious of his place in history. But it is not merely as a witness to those events that he portrays his childhood self. Occasionally in prose and poetry, he brings up his childhood memory of chanting "blood-curdling slogans" through a megaphone improvised out of a rolled-up piece of cardboard, of subscribing to the demand for the recognition of Bangla as a state language, and of enlightening himself about the economic exploitation of East Pakistan by West Pakistan, particularly in terms of using foreign exchange earned through jute exports to finance development projects in West Pakistan (Haq, "English-medium boy;" Haq, "Nationality and other difficulties").

One of the early outcomes of the growing consciousness in Haq in the 60s comes out in the poem "Barbecue" where he recounts his "first protest march on a broiling summer day" in which he partook even as an English-medium student, that raged across the country against the 1962 East Pakistan Education policy propounded by the Sharif Commission at the behest of the military regime

of Ayub Khan. Officially named as "Commission on National Education," the policy would have made English and Urdu mandatory institutional subjects, rendered education more inaccessible to the economically underprivileged and, according to Alam, would have rescinded students' "right to maintain any connection with political parties" (21). Haq's experience of joining this student movement when he was a twelve-year-old student at Saint Gregory's, of rallying to "the shade of a legendary mango tree" – the historically celebrated *aamtala* on Dhaka University campus where Haq would later pursue his English studies – and of quenching his thirst at Madhu's Canteen on that day (Haq, *Pariah* 19-20) underscores the poet's upholding of the collective patriotic zeal materializing, to cite Fakrul Alam, towards the vision of East Pakistan's self-determination through subsequent movements (21). Once attuned to the spirit of protesters, he must have felt the "progressiveness" that, as Quazi Faruque Ahmed recalls, the 1962 education movement "inculcated and infused" into the East Pakistan/ Bangladeshi society. Though he did not write poems in response to those events, he acknowledges the symbiotic link between poetry and zeitgeist at various critical stages of Bangladesh (Haq, "For your sake"). It is worth mentioning here that Haq started "scribbling" free verse in the late 60s towards the end of his secondary schooling after he had had "a conversion experience" under the tutelage of his teacher-mentor Brother Hobart, and soon set to honing Anglophone poetry to depicting the native conditions (Haq, "Introducing a Bangladeshi Writer" 113; Haq, "The Hijra" 5; Haq, "Many Histories" 44; Haq, "British Poetry and I" 8). An adolescent living in the erstwhile East Pakistan, he must have inculcated the sweeping spirit of the 1960s – the timespan that Basu terms "a transformative, radical era" and also "a decade of hope, protests and rebellion" (1-2) and that Bangladesh's eminent political scientist Talukder Maniruzzaman commemorates for the "ideology-based" agitations of 1960, 1962, and 1969. But this research finds that it is only through the few reminiscence poems that Haq looks back at his childhood self in those years of high politics. For reasons yet to be determined in further research, Haq did not feel an urge, like contemporary Bengali-language poets, to simultaneously respond to those events through his English-language poetry.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis sheds light on Haq's awareness of the ontology of history with a particular focus on Bangladesh – an awareness enlightened by his exposure to the several evolutionary stages in the pre- and post-independence times and evidenced in his poetry, prose writings, and interviews. His view on history significantly stands askew to the grand nationalist narrative that prioritizes politics and ideological binaries over the nuances and aspirations of individual lives. A *Muktijuddha* or freedom fighter upholding the sine qua non of his choice

to participate in the making of history with no political or ideological affiliations, Haq reels from the "nightmarish" unfolding of history across South Asia and in Bangladesh, and is anxious about any iota of complicity – if only because of his existential, situation-demanded choice – in the deviational workings of history contrived by vested groups. It is life possessing a treasure trove of memory that Haq celebrates and gives the center stage in his poetry. He resents that history is treated, rather uncritically, in literature and other discursive media with resultant popularity as a quid pro quo. So his discontent and nonchalance about the trends of historical consciousness in the country is evident in his divergent Anglophone poetics and in his staid reluctance to memorialize the 1971 history in his Anglophone verse except for writing three short poems. In fact, this particular stance distinguishes him from his contemporary Bengali-language poets, such as Shamshur Rahman for one, and makes his poetry a curious case, beyond the perennial language question, for the researchers of Bangladeshi literature and culture, for another.

As narratives and counter-narratives on aspects of history preoccupy everyday discourse, Haq's turn to memory becomes significant for its potential to bring up the past in an alternative strain. Additionally, Haq seems to think old-age reminiscences not only ascertain his native rootedness despite being an Anglophone poet or having, for that matter, an apparent estrangement from the Bengali-lingua-cultural imaginings of nationhood; they also sustain life compensating for the loss of the best lived times at childhood. To serve any or all of these ends, Haq has composed a number of reminiscence poems that may together be considered a substitute for a full-fledged memoir or an autobiography useful to understanding the poet in relation to his context. Though composed as a way of looking back at the poet's younger self maturing along the timeline of the nation through the 50s, 60s, and 70s, these poems offer windows into some of the decisive historical events from the poet's subjective point of view, and contrapuntally countervail the all-encompassing grasp of historical narratives, thus pointing to the complexity of life's material conditions in the past, by extension, in the present. That a minor and his peers growing up in the nascent elite milieu would chant the Language Movement slogans then in the air testifies to the pervasiveness of the movement itself in the collective consciousness of a Bengali speaking populace rising against the imposition of Urdu, the West Pakistani ruling elite's language. Again, that an English-medium school boy would entangle himself with the exploding protest against the 1962 education policy mandating English among other things underscores the urgency of the movement for a broader nationalistic cause. Furthermore, the pictorial representation of Dhaka as a sparsely populated semi-urban area in the immediate post-Partition era ought to make older generation-readers nostalgic

about those times now lost irretrievably to history while younger readers may divine a once-pristine locale unfamiliar with today's urban space disorders.

Finally, despite being creative recollections, these poems become a kind of history-telling from present perspectives, as they refer back to the pre-independence collective movements and struggles and post-independence tribulations of the nation. These poems may be deemed as the materialization of Haq's "late style" after Said's conceptualization of the term on Adorno's fashion of reflections on Beethoven's last works. For Said, with its accumulated wisdom and old-age endeavor to make sense of the world, late style is "*in*, but oddly *apart* from the present" (Said 24). And for Haq too, lateness far from being belatedness opens a more mature vantage point to see life in all its complexities and nuances as it has evolved through history's many turns and twists in this land now called Bangladesh.

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#BlackLivesMatter: An Afrofuturist and Afropessimist Reading of "The Deep" and *The Deep*

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Abstract

This article undertakes an afrofuturist and afropessimistic reading of an American experimental hip-hop band clipping.'s (stylized as clipping.) song "The Deep" (2017) and Rivers Solomon's novella *The Deep* (2019) to examine how the narratives of trauma and collective memory work to create a futuristic nexus of emancipation, liberation, and technology. Through a variety of narrative discourses and forms, afrofuturism has frequently dissected concrete and figurative traverses that intersect and engage in interaction with one another across the Black Atlantic and beyond. On the same note, afropessimism focuses on the infinite consequences that the black body confronts as a nonexistent slave, a space and often as a defenseless being prone to ceaseless violence. Theoretically grounding on Mark Dery's perception of afrofuturism and Frank Wilderson's perspective of afropessimism, this article also critically examines the primary texts from the outlook of collective trauma and loss of memory. Based on the mythology of Detroit electronic band Drexciya, clipping.'s song "The Deep," a multilayered and evocative sci-fi tale, and Solomon's *The Deep* will be examined to further inspect the power relationship. The aim of the article is two-fold. Firstly, underpinning afrofuturism and afropessimism lenses, it seeks to explore the texts to portray embedded collective trauma and memory to redefine, re-explain, and reimagine the archived history/ies. Secondly, the article will connect the texts to the Black Lives Matter movement.

Keywords: media, technoculture, ethnicity, African historical folklore, speculative literature

"Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children." (King 6.08-6.15)

#BlackLivesMatter

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a movement in quest of racial impartiality, the abolition of systemic racism, police brutality against African-Americans, marginalization, persecution, and the destruction of global oppression of Black people that stemmed from a 2013 social media hashtag campaign,

#BlackLivesMatter. This decentralized movement was co-founded in the United States in 2013 by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi (Ray), employing a range of discussion and involvement, counting action that frequently takes place online, offline parades, community organizing, and stirring political contribution to achieve ethnic uprightness. Online support for the #BlackLivesMatter movement enhanced and gained extensive media attention after the 2014 Ferguson rebellion against Black juvenile Michael Brown's death at the hands of police officer Darren Wilson, as opposed to Trayvon Martin's death in 2012, which first rushed the hashtag's popularity. The event sparked intense resentment across the nation for months, representing that Black people were engaged in absolutely "nothing"; hence, the need for observing and examining the past, present, and future of Black slaves through the application of science and technology to scrutinize their trauma is inevitable.

Afrofuturism and Afropessimism: Digging into the Past, Present, and Future

Afrofuturism often has been defined as a black prism through which to view, operate, and envision the circumstances of living in the future. The term "afrofuturism" was first used by cultural critic Mark Dery in his essay "Black to the Future" (1994) to define the medium of fiction that challenges African-American leitmotifs and glitches through technoculture and African-American cultural production that contain an appropriation of high-tech imagery and cyborg futurity. Dery explains it as "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20th century technoculture – and more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future" (180). Science fiction and afrofuturism are intimately associated but afrofuturism offers more, as Lisa Yaszek explains Dery's definition of afrofuturism:

> it [afrofuruism] is a larger aesthetic mode that encompasses a diverse range of artists working in different genres and media who are united by their shared interest in projecting black futures derived from Afrodiasporic experiences. (42)

From the intricate mythology presented by experimental jazz performer Sun Ra, Lee "Scratch" Perry's creepiest "Reggae" to the extravagant stage performances of 1970s bands like George Clinton's band "Parliament, Funkadelic," and Jimi Hendrix's avant-garde work such as "Electric Ladyland," afrofuturist culture has absorbed and built upon many well-known speculative fictional tropes. Afrofuturism draws on science fiction, magic realism, speculative fiction, cyborg fiction, African historical folklore, pulp fiction, technocultural fiction, and African mythological traditions, and it works against the erasure of African American history and the dominant, white-centered imaginations of the future.

Dery considers that a shared black past has been "deliberately rubbed out" (180), that prompts an investigation into the real history and facts in order to treat the trauma and memory loss.

On the same note, afrofuturism may raise concerns about afropessimism, a theoretical lens that explains why civil society relies on anti-black violence – a system of violence that views black people as its own enemies. It acts as an outlook of grasping how the trans-Atlantic slave trade, prejudice, and other historical events involving enslavement in the United States have affected structural conditions as well as African-Americans' subjective, lived experiences, and embodied realities. Writing about a black person's agony from an afropessimist perception emphasizes how the black flesh of the slave, set outside of history, family, and modern variations, cannot be comprehended within the confines of Western discourses such as postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, feminism, or other discourse. Frank Wilderson, in his book *Afropessimism* (2020), explains that being a slave is a permanent condition for Black people and afropessimism conveys that "Blacks are not Human subjects, but are instead structurally inert props, implements for the execution of White and non-Black fantasies and sadomasochistic pleasures" (15). It serves as a diagnostic tool for reasoning regarding how Black people are confined, positioned, and condemned within dominant discourses and structures, making the black people "a perpetual corpse, buried beneath the world and stinking it up" (Cunningham 1). Being victims of "social death" (Wilderson 227) is the current situation of black people, who are sadly always and everywhere excluded from a society. This is an adaptation of the afropessimist axiom: the black person is not considered generally as a "body," but rather as "flesh," definitely not a "human subject," but rather a "sentient being" (Wilderson 3). The afropessimist conception of blackness and its incommensurability with other socially oppressive stances is determined by slavery. In the minds of afropessimists, "the black is positioned, a priori, as slave" (Douglass et al. 1). Emphasizing the harsh realities of Black life in the world, it provides a vital point of view that identifies the constant challenges and anguish that Black people endure and acknowledges the historical pain, collective trauma, memory, and suffering that comes eventually with being a "Black." Afrofuturism and afropessimism share the goal of emancipating Black people from restrictive narratives and bringing self-awareness to the conversation about Black life. When afropessimism seeks that Black people are subjugated, afrofuturism conveys the idea that black people may create their own futures free from the constraints imposed by their history. Afropessimism works as a prism through which to see the racism that exists in the world and afrofuturism is one way to create a world free from such oppression. This study, which identifies an intrinsically speculative aspect in the two distinct bodies of thought, interprets

communal trauma and memory in the texts discussed and illustrates how Black people must thoroughly create a redemption plan.

Before endeavoring a comprehensive study of the selected texts through the lens of afrofuturism and afropessimism, however, a look back into the theory of collective trauma and memory is vital.

Collective Trauma and Memory

The psychological distress that a group, generally a whole culture, society, or other significant number of people, endures in response to a shared trauma is known as collective trauma. Each of these factors – religion, culture, ethnic background, sexual orientation, and class – can serve as a tool to impose social suffering. Such traumas tend to be disastrous in their magnitude and effect to influence the entire group, and are "symbolic renderings that reconstruct and imagine" (Alexander 4) the real event or distinct suffering. However, the emergence of a common cultural trauma is not always assured. Shared trauma depends on collective cultural interpretation processes, as collective traumas are not "found," but rather "made" (Alexander 98). In the study of cultural traumas like the Holocaust or chattel slavery, the term "collective memory" is commonly employed to signify something that goes beyond an individual's memory. It can be summarized as a shared body of information in a social group's collective memory. It is crucial to remember that the term "African American" is a historically produced collective identity that required first and foremost the articulation and approval of people it was intended to include where the memory of slavery would play a key role in this identity formation. Whether or not a victim of slavery, it established one's identity as an African-American and was the reason why direct experience led to the emergence of the labels "former slave" or "daughter of slaves" within this identity which can act as a medium, a communal, and common memory to bind all Americans of African descent (Eyerman 16-17).

Since the trauma of slavery required complete surrender of not just physical productivity but also of African customs, cultural, and psychological standards, their submission is both in terms of their status as slaves and also in terms of their identity. Eyerman asserts that due to such widespread "collective memory," which is manifested as collective trauma, traumatic events are by definition painful and subject to many types of appraisals. It may take a lifetime for a collective memory that is based on a horrific and deadly traumatic event to become public memory; occasionally it might take even longer, and other times sometimes "it may never happen at all" (Eyerman 15), which can be considered as Foucauldian "counter-memory" (Foucault 160). In this regard, Igartua and Paez contribute to this generational cycle's explanation of the presence of the

essential psychological distance needed for recalling a terrible incident, whether it be communal or personal. The anguish that comes with recalling a terrible incident may subside and reduce with time (83-84).

"The Deep"

The experimental hip-hop group clipping.'s intriguing song "The Deep," included in their 2014 album "CLPPNG," highlights crucial issues related to ethnicity, history, and identity. The classic Detroit electro-techno band Drexciya gets recognition in the song "The Deep" where the undersea nation of "Drexciya" was home to the unborn offspring of African women who had been cast off slave ships when they became pregnant. These fetuses then developed the ability to breathe underwater. Just as afrofuturism envisions alternative universes that address racial politics and belonging by fusing science fiction components, "The Deep" also envisions an underwater world where the descendants rise up, calling on the resources of their collective memory for guidance with the urgent cry "y'all remember how deep it go" (Diggs et al. 0.27-0.28) after surface-dwellers destroy the civilization in their quest for oil. The children's offspring launch a rebellion as oil exploration companies attack their cities. The song intensifies as it discusses the attack, the rise of society, and the aftermath. Solomon acknowledges that "The Deep" had multiple layers and textures and it contains "diaspora and slavery, ecological devastation, memory and remembrance" (Liptak 4). Considering water as the main component of this song, it can also be categorized based on different ocean zones according to their transition temperament, generating a non-anthropocentric link between the ocean residents and the human beings, which also points to our seafaring ancestry, fluid state of existence, and evolutionary history. As Dery explains, "afrofuturism reboots our historical memory" (qtd. in Yehoussi 6) and enduring the suffering of the consequences of an abusive past to remember is beneficial because it enables one to learn about one's identity, heritage, and individuality. The developing human fetus is found in the amniotic fluid and humans are thought to be primates that have migrated across the land-sea interface to adapt to a particular environment. In the same way afrofuturism compares the realities of forced migration and captive slavery to speculative literature's depictions of extraterrestrial invasion and physical metamorphosis, "The Deep" reflects the connection between water and the womb, indicating the dormant and untamable mysteries and strengths of water to transcend boundaries. As Dery describes, "it's important that progressive voices reclaim the future" (qtd. in Yehoussi 2). The song uses Black cultural lenses to revise historical accounts and forecast future events, as well as to reclaim and liberate Black people, paying homage to the distinct African vicious history. In order to renegotiate perceptions of the past, present, and future, and to navigate these temporalities simultaneously, the

oppressed, the excluded, and the marginalized are retaliating and confronting their potential oppressors. Rising to the surface, the residents experience both the wind and sunlight for the first time. The inhabitants of the underwater world have no way to defend themselves when the explosion occurs; their coral castles collapse and they perish in large numbers.

The oceanic zones represented in the song are reversed in the sense that the whole world is upside-down to repress the African people, their history, culture, and tradition. The song concludes with the water-dwellers eradicating the human beings by summoning a tremendous tidal wave as vengeance for "the blast, the drill, and the gas" (Diggs et al. 4.50). The narrative of the song destabilizes the western gaze by telling the story of Black victims. "The Deep" implies that there was no social life for slaves and that slavery and the condition of African women are synonymous with social death. The African women who were thrown off the ships were not even considered as human beings. They lost their agency and "personhood" (Cunningham 1) to become exploited, portraying afropessimism as it acknowledges that the violence considers them nothing but "a mass of flesh" (Wilderson 164). Wounded, traumatized Black flesh acts as the ultimate symbol of otherness, alienation, and difference. It presents African Americans as less than human and Wilderson notes, "It is hard to be a slave and feel that you are worthy, truly worthy, of your suffering as a slave" (101). "The Deep" echoes the principles of afropessimism concerning Blackness, enslavement, and Black non-existence, and argues that there was never a moment of balance for slaves, and that Blackness is a unique condition that is associated with slavery and identical with social death. As inert props, violence envelops Black flesh, and remembering these historical and social settings might help human beings recognize and acknowledge the subliminal trauma. Rather than the Black culture being erased and drowned in the oceanic world, the oppressed are eliminating their oppressor. Afrofuturism tends to acknowledge both communal and individual "black historical trauma" (Karam and Kirby-Hirst 4), and reflecting utopian African alternate history, "The Deep" has a close relationship with trauma. The song grants African people the ability to both retell their futures and look back to their pasts, where they are extraterrestrial creatures, energized by both historical and collective trauma, the latter of which is known as "intergenerational trauma" (Karam and Kirby-Hirst 4). Manifesting the cosmopolitan authenticity and the inherent dynamics of afropessimism, "The Deep" estimates Wilderson's query ceaselessly as to why African people are not considered as human beings, and are "instead structurally inert props" (Williams). The inhabitants, "already dead to the world" and cannot be "wounded or killed" (Patterson 155), only have to tick the boxes of an uprising as there will be "no more deep," only "sunshine" (Diggs et al. 3.57). Thus, destabilizing the status quo afrofuturism and afropessimism,

"The Deep" proceeds towards an alternate world where the minority takes over the majority, remembering and overcoming their collective trauma.

The Deep

The mythological Drexciya's universe is a joint effort amongst a range of lyricists, storytellers, visual artists, and painters. It spans media and narrative genres and the ultimate result is a multifaceted piece of art that, rather than having a single author, reflects a collection of individuals. In one of its more fascinating modifications, author Rivers Solomon has adapted the song "The Deep" by clipping. into a novella that is upholding an already-existing artistic heritage and Solomon is listed as the author, with Daveed Diggs, William Hutson, and Jonathan Snipes.

Solomon creates a context for discussion on greater topics of afropessimism and afrofuturism, as well as the significance and construction of collective traumatic memories in forming who outcast African people are, by fully exploring gender fluidity and interactions across species. Being a nonbinary who uses the pronouns they/them and fae/faer, Solomon describes themself as "a refugee of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade" (1), indicating faer embarking on a journey into the heart of the ocean and beyond the margins. The novella opens with Yetu describing how her throat aches from crying while attempting to recall the past that is gone. Wajinru people, which means "chorus of the deep" (Solomon et al. 10), choose their gender in a fictitious "Secondary World" (Wolf 24), and elect a single community member in the role of historian who is to remember the past, history, and their beginnings. Yetu has been given this challenging responsibility. The numerous beginnings to *The Deep* come from various historians of the Wajinru people, where the first historian ponders the horrifying beginning of their civilization: "What does it mean to be born of the dead? What does it mean to begin? First, gray, murky darkness. First, solitude" (Solomon et al. 42).

The protagonist Yetu, meaning "ours" or "us" in Kiswahili, is the Wajinru's current keeper of the ancestral memory, which she shares with the community during a regular Remembrance ritual. While the pregnant ladies perished in the water, their progeny survived and prospered in a submerged utopia. They forget about their past, leaving only the historian to preserve their recollections, believing it to be too horrific for anybody to recall. She runs to the outside to avoid the memories, the expectations, and the duties and finds a world her people long ago abandoned. She is going to discover more about her own history and her people's destiny than she ever could have imagined. They must embrace the memories, take back their identities, and accept who they truly are if they are all to live.

Indistinguishably, as afropessimist discourse portrays how Black people are placed, confined, and penalized, *The Deep* offers an afropessimist reading where the Wajinru people suffer a social death. Here, Yetu represents the essential sign of being Black and a slave, rendering her body an ever-vulnerable object exposed to relentless abuse. After turning into Wajinru "flesh," the Wajinru people have "neither gender nor history" (Weier 423) and the flesh becomes a simple commodity, susceptible to the whims and desires of society. They lament the ongoing threat of black death though they fail to remember it. In a similar way, non-African people or white people are termed as surface-dwelling creatures, land creatures, two-legs in *The Deep*, signifying African people as "other." The Wajinru community negotiated an aquatic environment in a Black body in this novel by refusing to adhere to western conceptions and the Black existence functions in a space of possibilities. The book is a protest against the ways that Black subjects have been rendered susceptible by white supremacist violence and manipulation against Black bodies. The book's afropessimistic concepts also call for protecting the Black lives while they are subjected to racist oppression to prevent the possibility of their lives being erased,

> "Tell us!" someone shouted, their voice high-pitched, loud, and demanding, a screech that sliced through the water. "Tell us! Tell us now!"
> "Remember," Yetu told them. "Remember." (Solomon et al. 31)

Engulfed in that "deepest deep" (Solomon et al. 31) region of history, the Wajinru people are a collective, "they were all in this together" (Solomon et al. 32). And this collective thought reflects and honors the African culture which concurrently explores these temporalities and modifies views on the past, present, and future, promising afrofuturism. In other words, because everything negative is attributed to Black people, Black bodies end up serving as substitutes and representatives for the catastrophes that strike white Americans. Afrofuturism seeks to counter this discourse by transforming the negative image of blackness into an optimistic one. As the process of afrofuturism entails a complete re-imagining of the past and a hopeful vision of the future, both the outer world and the in-text world contain elements of this past, the African history, and culture to serve as an escape, *The Deep* offers a futuristic world that aims to eradicate the systemic racism and oppression that Black people face. Even though Yetu departs from the Wajinru community, she meets Oori who enables her to appreciate the significance of their painful past and establishes the necessity of history, "But your whole history. Your ancestry. That's who you are." (Solomon et al. 95).

In the end, Yetu embraces her ancestry, "instead of taking the History from

them, she could join them as they experienced it … they would bear it all together" (Solomon et al. 148). To put it in another way, deciphering the memory and trauma, Solomon aims to counter the monolithic official discourse by documenting the genuine and tangible experiences of African history.

Afrofuturism also acknowledges hierarchical dualisms and binary oppositions, and the binary opposition is at the heart of Solomon's tale – slave traders and Africans, Wajinru and the historian, Yetu and her surface-dwelling companion Oori, land and underwater, the roaring ocean and the tranquil tidepools, recollecting and forgetting – suggest the binary of us/them. Derrida's "Hauntology" (1993), the returning of persistent presence of memory and how "the present is haunted by the metaphorical ghosts of lost futures" (Ashford 4), fits with the notion of afrofuturism that aims to compile counter memories that contradict the historical record and demands to place "the collective trauma of slavery" (Eshun 288). Yetu's memories keep coming back like ghosts, tormenting her, and soon she is psychologically devastated by this role, having post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, and flees the group to escape from the agony of remembering the historical truth. As traumatized Yetu's sensorimotor level of the brain is actively and constantly processing information, the hyperaroused state of Yetu's results in her having invasive numbness or a lack of emotion and sensation, which is followed by passivity and, most likely, anxiety and paralysis (Ogden et al. 26). Yetu is taking the burden of collective trauma: her body becomes the vessel of other people and she turns into "every Wajinru who had ever lived possessed her in this moment. They gnashed, they clawed, desperate to speak" (Solomon et al. 28). Ultimately, the collective trauma becomes too painful for them, yet history is so appealing to Wajinru people that they thrive for it, "Tell us! Tell us! We must know!" (Solomon et al. 31). Solomon retells the importance of remembrance of the identity, "How could you leave behind something like that? Doesn't it hurt not to know who you are?" (94). Collective memory is used as one form of historical testimony as Yetu begins to remember,

> whales, their gigantic, godlike forms. She remembered shelters made of seaweed and carcasses. Castles, too, made out of the bones of giant sharks. Kings and queens. Endless beauty, endless dark. Then death, so many deaths." (Solomon et al. 34)

She transmits the memories to her people. She also takes the needed psychological distance to recall everything, and later on decides to return to her people, to the History.

Conclusion

This article attempts to provide a critical reading of the functions of

afropessimism and afrofuturism in "The Deep" and *The Deep*, which seek to rescue Black people from historical marginalization and social death as well as to refute the apocalyptic predictions by creating a futuristic world. Exploring the concerns and problems of the Black struggle through cyberculture, mythological reinterpretation, and speculative fiction, both afrofuturism and afropessimism encompass a variety of mediums and can provide an escape from reality due to the institutionalized oppression and racism experienced in everyday life. Emerging from Afro-diasporic experiences, it can also be used to envision and open up new possibilities that may not seem possible given the current circumstances. Because history is where communities derive their sense of culture and belonging, paying tribute to the experiences of ancestors is essential to the collective healing process from trauma. "The Deep" takes its listeners on a journey that delves into the depths of African-American history and the current struggle for equality with their signature amalgamation of influential lyrics and artistic soundscapes. It transcends and blurs the distinction of memory and traumatized history between past and present, navigating towards a hi-tech journey to the center of emancipation. Simultaneously, "held captive by the History, living the lives of the ancestors from beginning to end" (Solomon et al. 39), *The Deep* interacts with the present, for an empowered future through the means of magic realism, African folklore, traditions, and ritual. History becomes so important to the Wajinru that it "included triumph and defeat, togetherness and solitude" (Solomon et al. 34) in *The Deep*. William Hutson says that, "the song and book are two different lenses through which one can access a single fictional world" (Liptak 9). The texts encourage discussion on Black identity, Blackness, afrofuturism, afropessimism, collective, cultural, historical, and traumatizing history documentation; transcending the binary opposition of we/them, creating a futuristic world. This is where #BlackLivesMatter intersects with everything, technology is the unifying factor, and altering the future is the shared objective, overcoming the collective trauma. The persistent iteration of #BlackLivesMatter, whenever the existing circumstances call for it, provides the aspect of the movement that has always been absent from the narrative. Ultimately, reimagining the past and the history, both "The Deep" (2017) and *The Deep* (2019) offer persuasive, reworked counter-histories and counter-hegemonies.

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Listening to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: Aural Recognition in a Post-9/11 Democracy

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Abstract

This article focuses on Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) and explores the challenges of reciprocal recognition and the impact of power dynamics on trust between the West and Muslim communities in post 9/11 America. Bart Moore-Gilbert's critique of existing models of recognition politics, specifically models developed by Fukuyama and Taylor, reveals the limitations in addressing the Muslim experience and Islamic fundamentalism within western liberal-democratic societies. The failure of ocular-centric approaches – prevalent in the western tradition – to adequately represent the Muslim experience, guides me towards sound theories which provides the theoretical underpinning to this analysis. Thus, I denote this shift as a practice in decolonial listening. Drawing on Nicole Furlonge's analytical framework of "listen in print" and the concept of "aural recognition," I argue for a more comprehensive recognition through an aurally-engaged practice of reading and political engagement. Ultimately, I advocate for listening to develop trust and for a compassionate stance towards lives and encounters of Muslim minorities in post 9/11 America.

Keywords: Muslim experiences, recognition politics, sound theories, post-9/11 studies, interfaith distrust

In *Culture, Diaspora, and Modernity in Muslim Writings*, Bart Moore Gilbert introduces the general Muslim experience, and specifically Islamic fundamentalism, into existing, secular-liberal democratic frameworks of political discourse, with particular attention to models developed – on the basis of recognition politics – by Francis Fukuyama in *The End of History and Last Man* and by Charles Taylor in *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*. Fukuyama's model suggests that the new productive era of recognition, has enabled a reciprocal recognition between citizens; but, as Moore-Gilbert contends "With the qualified exception of class relations, Fukuyama has little to say about the struggle for 'recognition' amongst groups within nation-states" (184). Similarly, Charles Taylor criticizes the formulation of recognition through a "difference blind fashion" and calls

for a more "hospitable" form of liberal society. Though Taylor's faith in a more hospitable approach resonates with minorities within western democracies in general, his "engagement with Islam is scarcely less limited. The issues posed by Muslim immigration to the West elicit a single paragraph in the essay," referring only to the Rushdie affair (Moore-Gilbert 185). This guides Moore-Gilbert towards his inquiry of Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Kureishi's *The Black Album*, as both works represent the Muslim experience within and outside western liberal-democratic societies pre and post-9/11, and because, notably, the idea of Islamic fundamentalism is central to these texts. His analysis revolves around the degree at which these two novels engage with Fukuyama and Taylor's formulations of recognition politics. Moore-Gilbert concludes by propounding the texts' failure to adequately represent the Muslim experience and Islamic fundamentalism, and questions "whether it can ever be represented adequately in the current climate of vexed relations between the West and certain Muslim formations" (197). Moore-Gilbert thus calls for a "new kind of social imagination," and a shift in emphasis within "'the politics of recognition' towards the acknowledgement of what is new" (197). In my inquiry, I answer Bart Moore-Gilbert's call for a new conceptualization. Specifically, instead of an ocular-dominant analysis that is central in the western tradition – as quoted in *Sound and Literature*, the "sensory hierarchy binds vision to knowledge" (Anna Snaith 7) – I aim to extract recognition aurally. First, I highlight the withdrawal of recognition from Muslims after the incident of 9/11 by contrasting our protagonist's sense of belonging pre-9/11; and centering on the notion of "inter-racial distrust," I propose that the termination of recognition is symptomatic to a rise in "inter-faith distrust" post-9/11. I engage with the idea of a "discourse of distrust" as my assertion is that Mohsin Hamid's narrative choice of a dramatic monologue is deliberate because it compels readers to pose as listeners. I accept Hamid's coercion and take the form of a listener and attempt what Nicole Furlonge conceptualizes as "listen in print" that allows for new ideas to emerge and to trace a more comprehensive "aural recognition." I further attempt to "generate trust" which I label as an act of "decolonial listening" as it exposes the power-disparity that exists between our Muslim protagonist and the American interlocutor. In the end, we fail to achieve an absolute "Aural Recognition" due to a lack in reciprocity from the west's end. However, my resolve to listen to *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is not to derive a complete recognition but a more comprehensive recognition of the Muslim quotidian in post-9/11 America.

Mohsin Hamid represents the Muslim condition on either side of 9/11 through Changez's sense of belonging as a New Yorker pre 9/11, and his growing disillusionment towards the USA post-9/11: "Nothing troubled me; I was a young New Yorker with the city at my feet. How soon that would change! My

world would be transformed …" (Hamid 33). It can be said that, prior to the transformation brought on by 9/11, Fukuyama's model of a democratic state held true with a sense of reciprocal recognition between citizens, and "Thus the economic system represented by Underwood Samson (as its initials suggest, a metonym for the 'US') welcomes workers irrespective of ethnicity or geographical origin" (Moore-Gilbert 191), and it is here at Underwood Samson/US, Changez feels so much at home that, "On that day, I did not think of myself as a Pakistani, but as an Underwood Samson trainee" (27). Even when Changez wears a white *kurta* on the subway he feels recognized as a true New Yorker, "It was a testament to the open-mindedness and—that overused word— *cosmopolitan* nature of New York in those days that I felt completely comfortable on the subway in this attire" (35), and it is only after 9/11, on the same subway where Changez felt recognized, he became the victim of verbal abuse because of his beard: "More than once, traveling on the subway—where I had always had the feeling of seamlessly blending in—I was subjected to verbal abuse by complete strangers" (78). To add to this withdrawal of recognition, Moore-Gilbert says

> Changez becomes increasingly liable to the cruder forms of racist exclusion, most notably when he is misrecognized as a 'fucking Arab' during his mission to New Jersey. The 'recognition' he has thus far earned is progressively withdrawn, even in Underwood Samson, once he rebels against the new dispensation by the simple measure of growing a beard." (192)

If Underwood Samson is a metonym for the US, then the people at Underwood Samson can be considered a metonym for the citizens of US: "at Underwood Samson I seemed to become overnight a subject of whispers and stares" (Hamid 78). In *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*, Danielle Allen critically analyzes acts of citizenship and reveals that "An honest look at the political situation in the United States leads to a related recognition that among our core political problems is not racism, but interracial distrust" ("Talking to Strangers" xiv), and that "Within democracies, such congealed distrust indicates political failure" (xiii). Centering on the concept of "Interracial Distrust," I propose that there is a rise in "Interfaith Distrust" against the Muslim community in post 9/11 America.

My assertion of an "Interfaith Distrust" can further be supported by Mohsin Hamid's narrative choice. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is structured in a first-person monologue with dramatic registers that situates the reader in a stifling, affective space of distrust. The western interlocutor whom the narrator addresses is never given a voice, rather, Changez's answers guide, or rather, force the reader to formulate questions in alignment with Changez's monologue. Moore-

Gilbert's echoes this:

> Changez's western guest never speaks directly and everything is reported through a narrator whose account, he himself hints, should not necessarily be taken at face value. This reinforces the claustrophobic nature of the reading experience, aligning the reader with the American, making him/her struggle to gain sufficient distance to make decisions about whether Changez is, indeed, a 'fundamentalist' and, if so, of what kind. (195)

However, what Moore-Gilbert fails to extract is the deliberation behind Hamid's narrative choice. This guides my discussion towards *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative*, where Stepto explores writing strategies of African American writers and how "Distrust motivated them to improve their writing skills and to venture into new areas of inquiry and writerly performance" and Stepto conceptualizes as a "discourse of distrust" (198). This distrust formulates a new mode of writing that "accommodates the performative aesthetic of oral storytelling" by opting for a narrative voice that takes on the role of a story-teller (200). Thus, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the Muslim protagonist poses as a story-teller and the cramped nature of the narrative structure is explained by Stepto as how it coerces "authors and readers … into teller-hearer relationships" (200). I find the use of the term "hearer" quite intriguing as Stepto emphasizes that "only the storytelling paradigm posits that readers, in 'constituting' themselves through engaging the text, become hearers" (200). His assertion, as mentioned in Furlonge's *Race Sounds: The Art of Listening in African American Literature* is that "a 'discourse of distrust' runs through African American literature, leading writers of these texts to embed within their fiction heavy instruction about how to listen to each text and explicit chastisement when reading goes awry" (3). Each time I return to Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, I am reminded of how sound moves us: "Excuse me, sir, may I be of assistance. Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America" (Hamid 1). First, it is the quivering of the body of the reader / listener generated by the sonic; second, it urges the reader to shift emphasis from the visual – the "beard" as the stereotypical reduction of Muslims in a post-9/11 climate – towards the aural, and to listen to the speaker with sonic attentiveness. Thus, by endorsing the idea of a "discourse of distrust," Hamid invites the reader to take on the responsibilities of hearing/listening to what Changez has to say.

In my exploration of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, I embody the role of a listener and attempt what Nicole Furlonge, in her ground breaking text *Race Sounds: The Art of Listening in African American Literature*, terms "Listen in Print" as a way of interpreting texts that allow for new understandings

to emerge when texts are approached through listening (12), and "to cultivate a practice of engagement that attunes readers to print as it provokes or calls forth an aurally inflected, multisensory reading practice" (3). I, likewise, draw on Furlonge's framework of listening in print, and extend this aural manner of engaging politically, culturally, and intellectually with texts towards Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. In her development of an aurally engaged citizenship, she defines "Aural Recognition" as the desire "to be listened to and be afforded the chance to listen" ("Race Sounds" 120). In *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*, Taylor urges "Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (26) and that "What has come about with the modern age is not the need for recognition but the conditions in which the attempt to be recognized can fail" (35). My assertion is that the shift in emphasis from the need for recognition to scrutinizing the failure of recognition is what led Furlonge to shift from the ocular to the aural and focus on "Aural Recognition." I expand on this notion and lend my lidless aural cavity towards Changez, the protagonist of Pakistani-Muslim heritage and I listen in print in order to derive – if not fully – a more comprehensive recognition, particularly an "Aural Recognition" of the Muslim experience and Islamic Fundamentalism within and beyond post 9/11 western democratic societies.

Danielle Allen holds a rather dejected position regarding the solution to distrust between citizens: "I cannot now offer some simple policy solution to democracy's difficulties. They're irresolvable; we have rather to learn how to live with them." ("Talking to Strangers" 102). Even though Allen does not directly point towards the importance of listening as a solvent of distrust, Nicole Furlonge urges that "her study does point to the necessary work of listening in conversation between citizens, between strangers, as a key way of developing habits that can improve the workings of democracy" ("Race Sounds" 15). In *Listening for Democracy: Recognition, Representation, Reconciliation*, Andrew Dobson explores a similar "distrust" in democratic practices. Dobson, in stark contrast, advocates for listening and disperses hope that beyond the management of distrust, productive possibilities of reducing distrust may emerge through listening, and it is because "the roots of distrust often lie in monological talking and the concomitant impression that no real dialogue is taking place" ("Listening for Democracy" 89). Dobson attempts to "Generate Trust" in modern democracies by employing the faculties of listening. Dobson's employment of the ear is deliberate: "to explore the role that listening might play in democracy, and to outline some institutional changes that could be made to make listening more central to democratic processes" (2); and thus, it will not be unfair to define the administration of sound theories into the political realm as an act of aural decolonization as it entails a shift from traditional, institutionalized democratic

practices. The term "decolonial" entails that there exists a power disparity and this becomes procedurally visible as Changez partakes in unidirectional dialogical exchanges with American interlocutor throughout the novel. In the initial pages, we see the American take a seat with his back pressed against the wall:

> "You prefer that seat, with your back so close to the wall?"
>
> "And will you not take off your jacket? So formal!" (Hamid 10)

Both gestures – the safeguarding of any phenomenon that is beyond the central and the peripheral vision, and the reluctance towards taking off a protective layer so as not to expose oneself – point towards an exercise of power that enables one to express reluctance to listen. A more direct form of domination is seen when Changez escorts the American interlocutor to his hotel: "Yes, you are right: they have paused. What do you mean, sir, did I give them a signal? Of course not! I have as little insight into their motivations and identities as you do" (104). The ability to confront the other with the absence of consequences renders the power-disparity even more prevalent and creates the dichotomy of powerful and powerless. Andrew Dobson defines this relationship as "listening and the withholding of listening are exercises of power in themselves. This power can be expressed through the refusal to listen to particular others, or the refusal to listen to whole identities" ("Listening for Democracy" 8). However, listening as an analytical process can also be deployed as a "solvent of power":

> This effect is found, for example, in committees of truth and reconciliation, when the previously powerful are forced to listen to the previously powerless. There is evidence to suggest that this turning of the tables is experienced as power by those who have been systematically marginalized and excluded. (Dobson 8).

Therefore, centering on Mohsin Hamid's narrative choice and the deliberate "muting" of the dominant western voice is not just an attempt at shifting emphasis from the visual to the aural, but is also an attempt to restore the power disparity between the west and Muslim communities to pave the way for a more comprehensive understanding of the Muslim experience.

One notable moment that shrieks out of the print is when Changez speaks about Juan-Bautista:

> But your expression, sir, tells me that you think something is amiss. Did this conversation really happen, you ask? For that matter, did this so-called Juan-Bautista even exist? I assure you, sir: you can trust me. I am not in the habit of inventing untruths! And moreover, even if I were, there is no reason why this incident would be more likely to be false than

> any of the others I have related to you. Come, come, I believe we have passed through too much together to begin to raise questions of this nature at so late a stage. (Hamid 90)

Changez believes the American and he are beyond the stage of distrust; however, the American's distrustful gesture indicates that the generation of trust has not been reciprocal, rather one sided. With regards to the lack of reciprocity, Dobson says "Trust (at least where it has to be negotiated rather than assumed) is a function of understanding which is, by definition, a matter of reciprocity" and "reciprocity is best understood as *dialogue*, which is the respectful interplay between speaking and listening" (89). Towards the end of the novel the discordance of trust becomes more prevalent:

> Ah, we are about to arrive at the gates of your hotel. It is here that you and I shall at last part company. Perhaps our waiter wants to say goodbye as well, for he is rapidly closing in. Yes, he is waving at me to detain you. I know you have found some of my views offensive; I hope you will not resist my attempt to shake you by the hand. But why are you reaching into your jacket, sir? I detect a glint of metal. Given that you and I are now bound by a certain shared intimacy, I trust it is from the holder of your business cards. (Hamid 108)

Though we notice a fleeting distrust towards the American, it still does not manage to overtake the one-sided "trust" Changez has developed as he hopes the American is not reaching out for a gun, rather a business card holder. Taking Dobson's model of "Generating Trust" into account, it can be said that, due to a lack of reciprocity from the axis of the west, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* fails to account for an absolute recognition of the Muslim experience in post-9/11 America. Hamid's creative endeavor "mutes" the dominant voice, and though Changez is afforded the chance to be listened to, he is not actually listened to. Through listening, new understandings of "Interfaith Distrust" have emerged, and conflicts have become more apparent, and as I discuss at the beginning of this article, my aim is not to achieve a complete recognition, but to trace a more comprehensive aural recognition by employing my ear in a practice of decolonial listening. Dobson ends his inquiry into generating trust, by propounding that "Listening, especially apophatic listening leading to dialogue, can be a route to lowering levels of distrust" (90), and by drawing on that, I lend a trustful ear towards the reluctant fundamentalist.

In conclusion, the analysis of Bart Moore-Gilbert's exploration of Muslim experience and Islamic fundamentalism within western liberal-democratic societies, as well as the critical engagement with Fukuyama and Taylor's

recognition politics models, exposes the intricacies of reciprocal recognition and the challenges faced by minorities in post-9/11 democracy. Listening to Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* or emphasizing the power of a decolonial, aural analysis in understanding the Muslim experience, reveals the nuances of interfaith distrust and the impact of power dynamics on recognition. The narrative urges the need for a shift towards a more comprehensive recognition, advocating for a new social imagination and aural engagement to reduce distrust between the dominant and the minority within democratic societies. My exploration of listening highlights the potential of aural recognition in developing understanding and trust, ultimately calling for a more inclusive and empathetic approach towards Muslim lives and experiences in a post 9/11 political context.

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The Female Body as a Site of Patriarchal Power Play: Contextualizing Tarfia Faizullah's *Seam*

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Abstract

The female body has been a gendered space upon which patriarchy plays out its power dynamics. The making, re-making, and unmaking of the female body has remained subject to the whims of men. In most cases, women are denied agency and freedom over their bodies. Men have exerted their power on the female body in the form of subjugation, repression, oppression, and exploitation. Hence, rape and all forms of sexual assault on women in the context of wars can be considered a patriarchal tool to assert the dominance of the attacking party and demoralize the community under attack. The victims of sexual attacks undergo psychological trauma during and after the war. In this context, Tarfia Faizullah's debut collection of poems *Seam* appears as a feminist investigation into the narrative of rape victims of the Bangladesh Liberation War. This book lends voice to the rape victims of the 1971 war whose bodies were politicized by the androcentric Pakistani army. Through a feminist lens, this qualitative paper will endeavor to explore how the female body served as a site of patriarchal domination in the Bangladesh Liberation War in the light of *Seam*.

Keywords: patriarchy, rape, violence, Birangona, feminism

Tarfia Faizullah's 2014 book *Seam* is a collection of poems penned after a series of interviews with Birangonas (Bangladesh War rape victims/survivors) the poet conducted as part of her fellowship requirements. The American poet of Bangladeshi origin recorded harrowing details of pangs and sufferings of the ill-fated women whose traumatic experiences are difficult to put into words. Yet, Faizullah took pains to articulate the nearly unspeakable events the Birangonas underwent at the hands of the marauding Pakistan army. The site of oppression has been female bodies where patriarchy of various types comes into play. The wartime rape and other sexual assaults are intricately related to androcentric power play. It purports to destroy female bodies as an expression of male chauvinism on the part of the masculinized military seeking to render feminized the community under attack. The binary opposition between masculinity and femininity

operates here, which privileges men over women. This binary is structurally related to a host of other binary oppositions, such as powerful/powerless, strong/weak, good/evil, right/wrong, superior/inferior, culture/nature, order/disorder, and state/resistance. As it follows, the masculinized Pakistan military sought to crush the popular resistance of the Bengali masses against the Pakistan state by feminizing the latter community in a demonstration of its (manly) power. Hence, bodies of Bengali women became the theater on which to exercise power by the Pakistani servicemen and their Bengali collaborators. A deeply rooted misogyny and androcentricity in South Asian societies motivated the Pakistan army in their genocidal rape campaign. Aspects of racism and androcentrism prevailed in the subjugation of Bengali women in the 1971 war. Using a feminist lens, this paper endeavors to shed light on how patriarchy operates on the bodies of women and reveal the ramifications of sexual assaults. It will also attempt to demonstrate that the Birangonas are doubly damaged, not simply by the immediate perpetrators but also by the host community, patriarchy being the common factor in both cases.

Rape as a Weapon of War

Rape comes across as a weapon of war in different discourses. The military uses it as a strategic tool to subdue the women – and hence, the whole community – by capitalizing on the psychological and social dimensions of the concept of sexual assault. Therefore, it is important to establish the definition of rape and how it appears as a strategic weapon in military conflicts. According to the UN, rape can be defined as the "insertion" of any apparatus, not limited to the penis, into any opening, not limited to the vagina, of the victim "under conditions of force, coercion, or duress" (qtd. in Farwell 392). As it occurs, rape is not constrained to vaginal penetration by the male genital. Under no circumstances, according to this broad definition, is the victim a willing accomplice in her own oppression. The role of power projection on the part of the perpetrator(s) is manifest here. In the same vein, wartime rape is defined by the UN Commission on Human Rights as "a deliberate and strategic decision on the part of combatants to intimidate and destroy 'the enemy' as a whole by raping and enslaving women who are identified as members of the opposition group" (qtd. in Farwell 392). According to Ruth Seifert, rape can happen during and after wars because of the following reasons:

- As part of the ritualized and regulated "games" of wars, rape reflects the exercise of sexual and gender-specific violence;
- The abuse of women during military conflicts is an element of communication between men of two opposing communities, and the graphic expression of triumph over men who failed to protect "their" women;

- Wartime rape is justified by acceptance of the notion that within a military masculine culture, following "rites of passage" soldiers acquire a certain kind of eroticized masculine identity that sanctions "natural" aggression towards women;
- As tactical objectives in "dirty wars," women are systematically targeted with the intent to destroy the adversary's cultural identities; and
- Feelings of hostility and hatred towards women are deeply ingrained in cultures, which are acted out as orgies of rape during extreme conditions.

(qtd. in D'Costa 5)

The rape of Bengali women and girls in the Bangladesh Liberation War must be seen in light of the reasons mentioned above. Applying feminist insights as far as gendered violence embedded in the deeply patriarchalized Pakistani military campaign is concerned, let us explore the brutalization of Bengali girls and women as captured in *Seam* by Tarfia Faizullah.

Female Body as a Site of Control

Patriarchy is predicated upon quite a few control mechanisms, not least the one over female bodies. Male superiority can be asserted via stamping an authority over the women and girls, thereby denying them the agency, subjecthood, and right to their bodies. Rape, especially, during military conflicts becomes a viable option for the military – which is almost exclusively manned by men – as a matter of feeding its "male ego." The "male ego" is nourished by violent self-assertions, musclemanship, and the domination of the feminine "Other." The female members of the enemy community and, by extension, the whole community, need to be feminized (i.e., subdued, controlled, let down, brutalized, oppressed, etc.) by way of sexual assaults to enable the military to express its "maleness." So, the bodies of women become a ground upon which the male ego of the invading military satisfies itself. Card elaborates:

> It [rape] breaks the spirit, humiliates, tames, produces a docile, deferential, obedient soul. Its immediate message to women and girls is that we will have in our own bodies only the control that we are granted by men and thereby in general only that control in our environments that we are granted by men. (6)

This will to control women's bodies and enjoy superiority and psychological edge guides the "male gaze" of the military men, which finds graphic expression in the following stanza:

> – 1971
> And a Bangladeshi
> Woman catches the gaze

Of a Pakistani
Soldier through rain-curved palm
Trees—her sari is torn
From her— (Faizullah 8)

The "male gaze" here is one of intimidation, and the tearing of the sari an action of controlling and subduing the female victim as she is left without a choice but to surrender unwillingly. This heinous act has left the victim voiceless and her body out of her control. As the speaker says,

The torn woman curls
into green silence
.....
the torn woman a helix of blood. (Faizullah 8, italics original)

The victim's subjecthood is compromised, and she finds herself powerless as rape "is the attempt on the part of one subject (the assailant) to overwhelm the subjectivity of the other (the victim) in a particularly sexualized way" (Cahill 25). Here, the Pakistani military man imposes his (male) subjectivity on his Bengali female victim to articulate his superior subject-position.

Similarly, Pakistan army men violated many underaged female subjects whose own sense of subjectivity was yet to be formed. Many victims did not come of age at the moment of their violation. Their recognition of their own sexuality happened in the most unfortunate of circumstances. The brutality and barbarity of rape definitely had damaged their "sense of self" before it came into being. Their coming to terms with their female identity is underscored by a sense of helplessness and victimhood, the scars of which they would have to carry for a lifetime. The speaker lets us know:

Once, she will say, *I didn't*
know there was a hollow inside

me until he pushed himself
into it. (Faizullah 23)

It is evident from the above instance that the experience of rape "is sexual but is not sex itself" (Cahill 140). Therefore, the enforced sexual intercourse strips the underaged victim of her bodily integrity and reinforces her lack of agency and freedom. Again, the intention to control the female body is part of the broader scheme to control the Bengali community. Thus, the female body has been politicized, and misogyny informs and enables such politicization.

Female Body Racialized: Race Feminized

In the context of armed conflicts, sexual oppression of women often assumes racial dimensions. The female members of the enemy community embody the core essence of that community, thus making them a strategic target to attack. The code of honor in a patriarchal society is tied to sexual purity of its female members. The violation of that honor code in the form of sexual assaults, i.e., rape, is tantamount to an attack on the dignity of the whole society. Stigma attached to rape and other forms of sexual violence makes the community, as a whole, vulnerable as if it were emasculated. The attacking army men seek to exact revenge upon the enemies by defiling the bodies of their female members. D'Costa goes on to explain the patriarchal rationale behind the wartime rape campaign in the following words:

> In its symbolic female identity, the nation is often perceived as being threatened by invaders. Further, the feminine construction of the nation also deploys the symbolic identity of womanhood, a view that proves useful to explaining the ideology of rape and forced impregnation during conflict. Systematic rape during violent conflict demonstrates an enemy community's failure to protect its women, thereby 'feminizing' the enemy's land, which is also depicted as 'motherland'. Moreover, forced impregnation of an enemy's women during wartime is designed to disrupt the so-called purity of the enemy's national identity. (23)

In addition, racial overtones and undertones characterize such sexual aggressions. One of the bones of contention between the Pakistani state and the Bengali nation is the language question. The Pakistani authorities sought to eliminate the Bangla language, spoken by the Bengali community of East Pakistan/Bengal. The wartime sexual violence against Bengali women is an attack upon Bangla. In her correspondence with her grandmother, the speaker says:

> *Bangla: language I speak*
> *Now to your grieving daughter, this language*
>
> *The bodies of women were once broken*
> *Open for.* (Faizullah 19)

The bodies of women were "broken open" as part of the ethnic cleansing of the Bengalis, thus politicizing the female body as a weapon of war. Not only that, inferiorization of Bengalis was made possible by enslaving Bengali women and equating them with lesser animals. As a Birangona reveals:

> That evening,
> A blade sliced through string, through

> Skin, red on red on red. *Kutta*, the man
> In khaki says. It is only later I realize
> it is me he is calling *dog*. *Dog*. *Dog*. (Faizullah 25)

The dog analogy by the rapist Pakistani soldier going about his criminal business with his "blade" (male genital) is reflective of the (West) Pakistanis' racial attitude to the Bengalis in general, whom they look down upon as a lesser people. What is more, such racial hatred comes into play during the sexual repression of Bengali women's bodies. That the bodies are cut terribly with "blades" metaphorically reveals the brutal bleeding of the nation at large, which can be termed as "The Rape of Bangladesh" in Anthony Mascarenhas' words. Thus, the female/sexual and the national/political are intertwined through a "body" trope. This is because,

> Rape, as with all terror-warfare, is not exclusively an attack on the body – it is an attack on the "body-politic." Its goal is not to maim or kill one person but to control an entire socio-political process by crippling it. It is an attack directed equally against personal identity and cultural integrity. (Nordstrom, qtd. in Bouta et al. 35)

There is no doubt that the brutalization of female bodies, rooted in misogyny, in the Bangladesh Liberation War, is political. The Pakistani authorities considered Bengali Muslims as lesser Muslims and were intent on destroying their Bengali identity. The Bengalis were on the wrong side of the identity politics within the Pakistani state. The genocidal campaign particularly targeted Bengali women as women are potential mothers of the future generations of enemies. Again, the Pakistan army intended to change the genetic feature of the Bengalis by impregnating their women with babies of (West) Pakistani stock. That is why Bengali Muslim (as well as other) women turned into a matter of "torture porn" in the hands of barbaric military men. Faizullah sheds light on this thus:

> *Are you*
> *Muslim or Bengali*, they
> Asked again and again.
> *Both*, I said, *both*—then
> rocks were broken along
> my spine, my hair a black
> fist in their hands, pulled
> down into the river again
> and again. Each day, each
> night: river, rock, fist— (Faizullah 28)

The modes of torture are varied and underpinned by sadism. Bengali women were dehumanized in the Pakistani torture cells and morphed into mere objects.

Quoting Liz Kelly, Meger argues that "men affirm one another as men through exclusion, humiliation, and objectification of women" (105). The self-affirmation of the men in uniform enabled through consumption of female bodies leads to a gross violation of human rights.

As already indicated, the Pakistan Army's biopolitical assault upon Bengali women's bodies is an enactment of racial hatred. The violating Pakistani soldiers employed racial diatribes against Bengalis as belonging to a lesser stock. The speaker informs:

> I turn
> my face away. *Kutta*, he says. *You smell*. Tell me what
> you know about the body, and I will you how
> it must turn against itself. *Now I've seen a savage*
> *girl naked*, he says. How my body became an eddy,
> a blackblue swirl. *Don't cry*, he says. (Faizullah 34)

By calling the Bengali rape victim as a smelly "Kutta" (dog/bitch) and "savage" and asking her not to "cry" but take things easy, the Pakistani soldier reinforced his racial superiority. On the other hand, the body of the victim "turn[ed] against itself" and became a turbulent "eddy, a blackblue swirl". That the victim lost autonomy over her own body is precisely what the racially inflected rape is all about since "[s]exual violence can result from a misogynist attitude prevalent in a culture" (Kalra and Bhugra 246). Put simply, the Birangonas are victims to a deep misogyny in the Pakistani military establishment.

Sexual Violence on Female Body: Expression of Misogyny

Whether it occurs during peacetime or wartime, sexual violence of all forms has its roots deeply entrenched in socio-political structure. Patriarchy as a system of male superiority thrives on exerting absolute control over women, and sexual attack is a violent expression of that superiority complex. The Pakistani servicemen employed all kinds of scare tactics on Bengali women as a brutal manifestation of their masculinity. As it follows, the "female body" appeared as a viable medium through which the androcentric orientation of the Pakistan armed forces articulated itself. They strategized their war plan, at least partly, around the female body as, Brownmiller contends that:

> rape is not a crime of irrational, impulsive, uncontrollable lust, but is a deliberate, hostile, violent act of degradation and possession on the part of a would-be conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear. (391)

This intention to "intimidate and inspire fear" among the Bengali civilians spurred the Pakistani servicemen on to commit rape and other forms of sexual

violence in the most heinous of ways. The speaker in a Faizullah poem reveals:

> [A] rope steady around my throat
> As they pushed me toward the dark
> room, the silence clotted thick
> with a rotten smell, dense like pear
> blossoms, long strands of jute
> braided fast around our wrists.
> Yes, there were others there. (Faizullah 26)

The inhuman treatment of women, all tied with jute ropes like animals, huddled together in a dark, damp, odorous, and suffocating room is motivated by the mantra of "social control." The women had no agency over their bodies, which were amenable to manipulation in the hands of the Pakistani army. In order to the keep the morale of the masculinized army high, they launched themselves upon the women's physique as rape, by nature, is an exercise of "male domination and female degradation" (McPhail 316). The key intention behind the diabolical rape campaign is, by and large, to reinforce the male ego of the Pakistani servicemen at the expense of Bengali women.

Mutilation of the Female Body: Patriarchal Barbarity

Misogynistic practice is not limited to outright sexual violence against female subjects. There are other types of bodily disfigurement, mutilation, and injuries that can traumatize women. In addition, psychological trauma involving an anticipation of rape or other physical harm can manifest itself in bodily reactions such as nervousness. Faizullah brings to the fore the scene of a horrific beheading of a Bengali woman in the following lines:

> I didn't know my body's
> worth until they came for it. I held
> her as she shook at night: pond water
> scored by storm. She held me
> as I shook at dawn. Don't you know
> they made us watch her head fall
> from the rusted blade of the old
> jute machine? That they made us
> made us made us made us made us? (Faizullah 30-31)

They (the Pakistan military men) came for the "body" of the speaker and thus she realized her "body's worth." This is ironic as the female body here is worthy only as a tool of patriarchal manipulation. The gendered body of Bengali women not only served as a pleasure-seeking site but also as a battleground for Pakistani servicemen on which to demonstrate their military supremacy through utter

barbarity. The mutilation of a female victim by beheading her with "a rusted blade of an old jute machine" is intended to show the brute force of the "manly" servicemen and coerce the victims into helpless submission. Faizullah gives us a glimpse into how causing bodily damage is a male chauvinistic practice:

> All I knew was underground: bodies piled on bodies,
> low moans, sweat, rot seeking out scratches on our thighs,
> the makeshift tattoos he carved on our backs to mark us. (34)

The stacking of bodies upon bodies, allowing infections to spread and scars to form across the bodies, and the carving of tattoos on bodies to mark them are instances of mutilation of the bodily integrity of Bengali women. Taking liberty with the female body and denying women the basic right to their own body is an essential component of the structural foundation of patriarchy, which is intent on dominating women any which way it can as Grace maintains that "sexual violence can be understood as a symptom of a deeper violence in the very constitution of the gendered subject" (36). Hence, the plight of Bengali women in the course of the Liberation War is tied to something more profound than it seems to be.

The bodily dismemberment and disfigurement of women as a mechanism of dominance is underscored by sheer sadism and barbarity. Often, militaries justify wartime consumption of female bodies "with a discourse that claims that men (hardworking soldiers!) need sex and that women are commodities that can (and should) be used" (Boesten 120). Dehumanization and colonization of female bodies in terms of mutilation and consumption to gratify carnal desires, derive visual pleasure, and feed the male ego of the army men is a proof of the heinousness that characterizes the patriarchal institution that is the military.

Starvation as Weapon against the Female Body

Pakistani army men employed starvation against Bengali women as a "biopolitical" weapon. Starvation can affect the human body and mind badly, and it may serve as an avenue through which captives of war can be manipulated, coerced, and objectified. By using food insecurity, many Pakistani servicemen, sadistically enough, pitted Bengali "comfort women" against each other to vie for their attention. The speaker, in the following lines, spotlights food insecurity as an effective control mechanism:

> Over milk tea and butter biscuits, the commander asks
> what it feels like to have dirty blood running through our
> veins. (Faizullah 34)

The Pakistani commander enjoys delicious food and tantalizes the female victims

while slighting them racially with the words "dirty blood." The "dirty blood" symbolizes racial impurity and inferiority, which the Pakistani authorities (as well as civilians) associated with the Bengalis. This impurity is reinforced through mass rape of Bengali women, who were now polluted and dirtied. At a broader level, the effeminized Bengalis were now polluted through sexual violence in the hands of the masculinized Pakistanis. The patriarchal nature of the aggression is hardly concealed. Furthermore, food insecurity is used here as a strategic ploy to punish the bodies of women. Punishing the body through hunger and tantalizing them with a show of mouth-watering snacks, the Pakistani commander here tries to establish his dominance over Bengali women. To satisfy hunger, a basic need of the body, Bengali women would compete with each other to win the favor of the Pakistani service men. As a Birangona confesses:

> There were days we wooed him, betrayed each other
> for his attention
> ……..
> when the time
> came for his choosing, we all gave in for tea, a mango
> overripe. (Faizullah 34)

This confession on the part of a Birangona reveals how the female body has been (ab)used through starvation, tantalization, and sexualization under a deeply inhuman military campaign.

Denial of Subjecthood: Postwar Crises for Birangonas

Despite a measure of state recognition, life for Birangonas in postwar Bangladesh is one of enormous suffering. Stigma and humiliation attached to rape – bodily disintegrity – made it difficult for the Birangonas to get rehabilitated in mainstream society. Except for a fortunate few, most Birangonas were rejected by their own families and communities. The postwar government under Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman recognized the sacrifices of the Birangonas as evident in the following lines:

> the new
> president had wrapped me in our new
> flag: a red sun rising
> across a green field. *You*
> *saved our country*, he said. (Faizullah 49-50)

However, society at large did not welcome the rape survivors of the war. Bengali society is patriarchal, and raped women are considered to be a disgrace to the family and community. Patriarchy, by nature, places high value on the chastity/purity, sexual loyalty, and bodily integrity of women. Any anomaly, be it forced

or deliberate, on the part of women is condemned severely. This patriarchal spirit motivates victim-blaming and victim-shaming. One of the Birangonas interviewed by Faizullah shares her story of postwar rejection thus:

> I stood in the dark
> doorway. Twilight. My grandfather's
> handprint raw across my face. *Byadob*,
> he called me: trouble-
> maker. How could you let them
> touch you? he asked,
> ……
> Leave. Don't come
> back, he said. (Faizullah 49)

The grandfather, who was so affectionate to his granddaughter is now dismissive of her. He even goes on to call her "Byadob" (ill-mannered and a trouble-maker in Bengali) and holds her responsible for her own miseries. It is as if she "allowed" the perpetrator(s) to "touch" her. Again, the metonymy of "touch" underscores the physicality of rape. There is a delusion/prejudice embedded in much of the patriarchal thought process that victims in fact ask to be raped. It is as though there was an element of willingness on the part of women to allow themselves to be sexually violated. This "false consciousness" leads to victim blaming/shaming, and many Birangonas were further victimized as accomplices in their own bodies' violation.

Male insecurities regarding sexual impurity of women motivated the patriarchal Bengali society to ostracize, repulse, marginalize, and reject the Birangonas. These men carry the memory of their emasculation at the hands of the Pakistanis. Despite official glorification, every Birangona turned from "somebody" to "nobody" due to their "body" being violated. Even the official conferral of the designation "Birangona" has its ironic effect as it, generally speaking,

> could not bring acceptance of the victimized women in the society. On the contrary the title Birangana … became synonymous [with] 'Barangona' which means prostitute in Bangla, and instead of a mark of honour it became a mark of shame for these women. (Gautam 264)

The term "Birangona," according to Faustina Pereira, comes with restrictive privileges and many of the rape victims refused to take advantage of the designation as doing so "would be tantamount to focusing on the scar of rape on the victim, thus forcing to risk a social death" (Pereira 62; qtd in D'Costa 13). So, it is beyond doubt that, despite their recognition by the state, almost all Birangonas carry the scars of their wartime ordeals in a patriarchal community.

They are denied their agency and subject, as du Toit considers rape as "an attack on the very conditions of being a self and a subject in the world" (6). It is evident that "rape does not turn women into things: it forcibly reduces their sexual being to that of another, thereby eclipsing their ontological distinctiveness" (Cahill 28). People attribute all sorts of negative adjectives to the rape victim. They are no longer addressed with affectionate terms. They become pariahs and are bombarded with pejoratives. The following stanza sheds light on the fall in favor of these girls and women following their sexual assault:

> *bhalo-me, karap-me*
> *chotto-shundori* —
> badgirl, goodgirl,
> littlebeauty—in Bangla
> There are words
> for every kind of woman
> but a raped one. (Faizullah 29)

Postwar hardships redouble for rape victims who give birth to war babies. They are confronted with difficult choices with regards to their own position in society and the future of their unwanted children. It is not unlikely that they would like to discard the babies as they bear testament to their wartime misfortunes. In addition, the babies carry the DNA as well as the memory of the perpetrators. It is possible that the mothers feel a sense of revenge and revulsion towards their own babies begotten by the brutal military men. The dilemma is motherhood intervenes in such delicate situations. The babies are theirs and not theirs at the same time. The following stanza encapsulates the dilemma, thus:

> I did not want his
> or his or his child inside me,
> outside me, beside me. Never
> will she know that I cupped her
> head and began to press hard, but
> stopped. (Faizullah 39-40)

Usually, motherhood wins over all other considerations. But, such decisions – whether to keep the babies or not – involve an immense amount of psychological drama. In other words, the wartime trauma persists beyond the war and hardly dissipates. While the "Birangonas" are glorified in textbooks, artworks, memorials, museums, etc., there remains a deafening silence about them. People hardly go into detail while talking about them. Usually, they avoid such topics altogether. Despite public commemoration, which is more ceremonial than not, the "Birangonas" are almost a deliberately avoided or forgotten entity.

When a little baby girl visits a museum along with their parents and looks at the portraits depicting the assault on women, she gets curious. But her parents remain awkwardly silent in response to her inquisitive questions:

> the portrait of a raped woman trapped
> in a frame, face hidden behind her own black
> river of hair.
> …….....
> She asks, Did someone hurt her?
> Did she do something bad? Her mother
> Does not reply. Her father turns, shudders,
> as the light drinks our silences …. (Faizullah 54)

The sense of discomfort and embarrassment of the parents is indicative and redolent of our collective attitude towards the "Birangonas". This silence is no less than criminal as the Birangonas suffer all along in silence as they are silenced. As Nayanika Mookherjee puts it, "Worldwide, the dominant understanding is that communities and nations consign sexual violence during conflict to oblivion and silence. It is understood to be a cost of war" (7). Although she contends that public conversation about Birangonas takes place in Bangladesh, how far it contributes to an intimate and authentic understanding and proper documentation of their experiences and memories is a matter of debate. Tarfia Fiazullah's *Seam* is, therefore, a commendable attempt at breaking the relative silence by recording the experiences of the Birangonas and by questioning our unacceptable collective silence and selective vocality.

Conclusion

Tarfia Faizullah's *Seam* seamlessly weaves the fragmented stories of fragmented women who are doubly damaged – once during the Liberation War and then after it. In both time periods and instances, patriarchy in different forms transmute Birangonas into, paradoxically enough, glorified beings in history books, literature, and public commemoration but shamed into (near) silence or oblivion in society. They are silent as "Devalued survivors excluded from the moral universe of the new regime of truth and justice cannot find [a] voice to reconcile and heal" (Saikia 7). They also suffer irremediably as "The injury cannot be healed, it extends through time" (Levi 24; qtd in Saikia 19) for them. However, some of the untold stories of these almost muted but endlessly suffering women burst at the seams in *Seam* redirecting our attention to the collective hostage we are held to patriarchy that runs deep in South Asian societies, not least in our Bangladeshi/Bengali society. Thus, the book unsettles and disrupts the collective amnesia and awkward silence around the "Birangonas," who deserve due state recognition, social-cultural acceptance, welcoming treatment,

and radical empathy. Further research should be conducted to ensure the untold stories of the Birangonas come out, the collective criminal silence is questioned, and the community leaves its patriarchal prejudices and bias.

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Translating Transgressions in Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*: An Affective Reading

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Abstract

Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead is a 2009 murder-mystery novel written by Nobel laureate Olga Tokarczuk and translated into English by Antonia Llyod-Jones in 2018. It follows aging eccentric Janina Duszejko as a series of murders takes place in the plateau where she lives. Under the parable-esque whodunit nature of the novel, Tokarczuk explores the theme of transgressions in the light of animal rights activism. This essay is an investigation into the contrasting ideas highlighted by the authorial voice and the perspective held by the protagonist in the light of affect theory and Tokarczuk's own conception of a tender narrator. I argue that Tokarczuk highlights the ambiguity of borders and boundaries in the narration to explore the implications of Duszejko's transgression of societal law and constructing herself as a tool through which animals enact their vengeance.

Keywords: affective politics, tender narration, animal rights, ambiguity

Olga Tokarczuk is one of the most critically and commercially successful novelists among the post-communist generation of Polish authors for exploring the vacuum of possibility through her narration of everyday life that comments on violence through a distinctly post-secular imagination (Jarzyńska; Tighe 189). Although she has been publishing since 1989, her works were not translated into English until 2002. She has received increased critical attention since then, culminating in her receiving the Nobel Prize in literature in 2018 and the Man Booker International Prize for her book *Flights* in the same year. Despite an interest in Olga Tokarczuk's writing afterward, most of the scholarship on her body of work remains in Polish, Czech, Swedish, and other European languages. *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead* (henceforth *Drive Your Plow*) is Olga Tokarczuk's seventh novel. Written in 2009 and translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones into English in 2018, *Drive Your Plow* follows Janina Duszejko, a mad old woman, who has made a religion out of her observations of nature, astrology, and a selection of William Blake's body of work as she tries to convince her community that the series of murders taking place in their vicinity is a result of animals seeking vengeance. (Duszejko rejects her first name and refuses to answer to it under any circumstances. In the spirit of the tender narration this

essay explores, I will refer to her as Duszejko from hereon.) Staying true to the murder-mystery genre, the ending of the novel reveals Duszejko herself to be the murderer, divulging that all five victims were involved in the murder of Duszejko's little girls, her dogs, who were her only companions. The grief and anger she felt at the tremendous loss created an affect in her that was untranslatable into language (Pawlicki 48). This affect is only communicable by Duszejko's transgression of the laws of society to uphold a law of her own. On the surface, Duszejko's insistence can be dismissed as misdirection. However, her desperation to have the cases open until the authorities recognize animals as the perpetrators is at odds with this reading. This paper investigates Duszejko's claim that she was only the tool with which animals took their revenge. Building off Tokarczuk's conception of a *czułość* or tender narrator, I argue that in Duszejko's worldview, which mimics a form of religion, the murders were indeed nature's revenge enacted through her. Consequently, in *Drive Your Plow*, Janina Duszejko translated the loss of her beloved dogs into a series of murders which she justifies by redrawing the boundaries of her ontological understanding to include herself in the will of nature.

Ambivalence and Borders in the Narration

In her Nobel lecture, Olga Tokarczuk introduces the concept of a *czułość* narrator, translated as tender narrator. Despite the immense popularity and effectiveness of the first person, Tokarczuk finds that the potential of the narrator remains unexplored. Although typically the first-person narrator can offer a very naturalized mode of story-telling, in a way typifying the current climate of the humanities, it also creates "an opposition between the self and the world" ("The Tender Narrator"). She finds that this privileging of the single voice which is, more often than not, the authorial voice, lacks a universality that can be found in the hero of the parable. The hero of such stories could maintain their specificity while also embodying an "everyman everywhere" nature. With the overreach of commercialization, story-telling is in crisis as is the whole world. Tokarczuk believes that now, more than ever, the author's role is to "doggedly [gather] up all the tiny pieces in an attempt to stick them together again to create a universal whole" (17). To do this, she proposes a type of fourth person narration that goes beyond the grammatical.

This is a point of view or a perspective from where everything can be seen. Seeing everything means recognizing the ultimate fact that all things that exist are mutually connected into a single whole, even if the connections between them are not yet known to us. Seeing everything also means a completely different responsibility for the world, because it becomes obvious that every gesture "here" is connected to a gesture "there," that a decision taken in one part

of the world will have an effect in another part of it, and that differentiating between "mine" and "yours" starts to be debatable (21).

The original Polish word Tokarczuk uses to describe this type of narration is "czułość," which Jenifer Croft and Antonia Llyod-Jones translate as "tenderness." But in Tokarczuk's native Polish, it denotes more than what its English translation implies. It can also mean emotionality, cordiality, gentleness, sensitivity regarding a given point, or to stimuli (including words, actions, phenomena, situations), or a technical term that signifies the reaction of film to light (Michna 5). A tender narrator must show a sensitivity to the world and have indents of the world upon her own person. As a result, tender narration is at once rooted in the modality of "the character as narrator," "the author as narrator," and "the parabolic everyman as the narrator."

Janina Duszejko is a terrific example of Tokarczuk practicing what she preaches. *Drive Your Plow* is written in the first person. From the very beginning of the novel, the reader is placed in Duszejko's world. Her voice as a character is imbued with an oozing eccentricity that makes her very distinct. Identifying with Duszejko is not easy, but her distinctiveness is nevertheless endearing. Her initial struggles seem to be with nasty neighbors, uncaring policemen, merciless weather, an old car, and the illnesses that come with age. She is not an everyman character in any shape or form, but she is grounded in the everyday struggles and indignities of life, which make her sympathetic. But Duszejko is also observant. She does not believe in calling people by their given name, so she takes care to find most people she meets a more befitting nickname instead. She sorts all the people of the world into three categories – "skiers, allergy sufferers and drivers" (38). She has "Theories" regarding people that speak to how much loving attention she pays to all near her.

However, Duszejko is the protagonist of this novel because of her connection with nature. *Drive Your Plow* begins with a description of Duszejko describing her ritual of going to bed with clean feet, because at her age she is very aware that she might need to be taken to the hospital at night. Duszejko is deeply aware of her mortality and approaches it with a nonchalance that speaks to her acceptance of it. Instead of seeking to make a mark upon the world, she finds comfort in the immortality of the natural world. She narrates:

> As I wandered across the fields and wilds on my rounds, I liked to imagine how it would all look millions of years from now. Would the same plants be here? And what about the color of the sky? Would it be just the same? Would the tectonic plates have shifted and caused a range of high mountains to pile up here? Or would a sea arise, removing all

> reason to use the word 'place' amid the idle motion of the waves? One thing's for sure – these houses won't be here; my efforts are insignificant, they'd fit on a pinhead, just like my life as well. That should never be forgotten. (46)

The natural world lays claim to Duszejko's sensitivity and gentleness much more frequently than people do. As discussed previously, she does indeed pay attention to other people, but she rarely takes on their perspective in the narration. That is not to say she is detached. She very clearly has a wealth of affection for her former pupil Dizzy, her neighbor Good news, Boros the entomologist, and even for Oddball. But other than the handful of characters Duszejko cares for, most people dismiss her as a crazy old woman. Her complaints against Bigfoot are dismissed by the Commandant, Innerd is condescending to her, and even her grief over the loss of her little girls is dismissed by the Priest. By contrast, nature's indiscriminate indifference becomes a comfort. This is reflected in how frequently Duszejko describes the natural world and the tone of awe she takes on when talking about nature. She notices the changes in the world around her to the point she describes it as sensing it. The shift from winter to spring affects her just as much as it affects the plants and animals around her: "Everything was starting to crackle, I could sense a feverish vibration under the grass, under the layer of earth, as if vast, underground nerves, swollen with effort, were just about to burst" (106-107).

Aside from almost taking on the voice of nature, Duszejko's narration highlights the futility of borders and boundaries quite often. The cellphone network around her plateau bounces from the Polish line to the Czech one with no rhyme or logic except its whim. Deer and other animals show no regard for any nation's borders. Even Duszejko herself illegally crosses the border between the two nations frequently. She also frequently personifies animals and natural events to the point where the line between man, animal, and nature is blurred. Duszejko questions the difference between hunting and poaching, because to her, "Both words mean killing" (185).

Crucially, however, the ambiguity highlighted by narration does not mean that Duszejko is able to embrace this ambiguity. On the contrary, Duszejko is obsessed with creating order in the world using her Theories, astrology, and Blake. True to Tokarczuk's concept of the tender narrator, Duszejko's narration is not only her voice, but it also contains the voice of the author. It is Tokarczuk's authorial voice that showcases the crossing of thresholds, borders, and boundaries through Duszejko so frequently, which is at odds with the way the protagonist insists on new boundaries.

After the description of Duszejko's ritual of washing her feet before bed, the first action of the novel is a hammering at her door, described as "violent, immoderate and thus ill-omened" (8). Duszejko, having taken some sleeping aid, struggles to wake up despite the noise. But when she does, she finds the neighbor, nicknamed Oddball, at the door, calling her because their other neighbor Bigfoot is dead. Duszejko leaves the safety of her room and goes out into the darkness. This crossing can be seen as an analogy to her actions throughout the novel. Before the events of *Drive Your Plow* begin, Duszejko is settled into an uninspiring routine. Her grief and loneliness following the passing of her little girls put her in a depressive trance, not unlike sleep. The shock of finding a picture of the men posing with her girls at their feet, like the hammering at the door, drags her out of the safety of her life before that point and, in both cases, she is compelled to act. At the beginning of the novel, she steps into the darkness, and at the end, she flees to the unknown land of the Czech Republic. In between the first and last action of the novel, Duszejko crosses boundaries by pressing past national borders, transgressing the law, disregarding the boundaries of polite society, ignoring the line between the dead and living through the specters of her mother and grandmother's appearance in her boiler room, saying what is meant to be left unsaid and even by daring to say things that sound insane. Duszejko continuously transgresses every law around her, but curiously, she does this without a strong desire to defy. This does not mean she does not understand that she is breaking the laws of society, but rather, she understands the law of her society as wrong. Her transgressions, including the murders, are only acts meant to restore justice as she understands it.

Janina Duszejko's Religion

To claim that Duszejko does not believe her transgressions to be willful defiance because she is not breaking her code of morality, it becomes necessary to discuss what laws or moral boundaries she upholds. Duszejko's eccentricity makes it absolutely clear that she does not believe in following the rules of a society that marginalizes her as an undesirable. She has her sense of right and wrong, so she acts accordingly without trying to justify herself to anyone. The writer vocalizes this sentiment in Duszejko:

> We're living in a world that we fabricate for ourselves. We decide what's good and what isn't, we draw maps of meanings for ourselves …. And then we spend our whole lives struggling with what we have invented for ourselves. The problem is that each of us has our own version of it, so people find it hard to understand each other. (164)

Duszejko agrees with the writer and adds,

> the human psyche evolved in order to defend us against seeing the truth. … It makes sure we'll never understand what's going on around us. … For it would be impossible to carry the weight of this knowledge. Because every tiny particle of the world is made of suffering. (165)

Duszejko has built a world of meaning for herself, which is something of a religion. She has caught sight of the suffering that she believes is the building block of life, and she uses her firm belief in astrology and a selective portion of Blake to make sense of it.

Duszejko's obsession with astrology is crucial to her as a character. She firmly believes that there is order in the universe, and it can be interpreted with the help of the stars. She relies on her book of Ephemerides to interpret and predict the world around her. To her, the fate of the world and all who inhabit it is already predetermined:

> Down here, in the world of Urizen, the laws apply. From the starry sky down to moral conscience. These are strict laws, without mercy and without exception. As there is an order of Births, why should there not be an order of Deaths? (48)

It is her ambition to prove that astrology can be used to predict one's death as well as one's life. It is a project she takes solitarily, quietly collecting over a thousand dates of birth and nearly as many dates of death. Her conviction in this is so strong that she goes to look for Bigfoot's identity card, despite her contempt towards him and after dealing with the nerve-wracking process of having wrestled his corpse into a position of some kind of dignity. It is this search that leads her to find the fateful photograph that spurs Duszejko into murder. Later, when Duszejko sits with her Ephemerides and looks into Bigfoot's death, she finds the confirmation of what she already suspected. She and Oddball saw deer near Bigfoot's home before they entered. They also found that Bigfoot had choked on deer bone. Duszejko immediately jumps to the conclusion that deer, who she dubs "young ladies," had a role in Bigfoot's death. True to the ambivalent nature of astrology, Duszejko's book of Ephemerides allows her to read the opinion she already held among the stars. Similarly, Duszejko had made it a point to take the Commandant's date and time of birth the first time she met him, and in a letter to the police, she confirms that she also managed to get the birthdate of Innerd. It is not clear if Duszejko might have the birthdates of the President or the Priest, but it is clear through her actions that even if she does not, that uncertainty was not enough to stop her. She read animals as the cause of death for both these characters and was convinced that she knew the exact date of their death. However, Duszejko is also aware of the self-fulfilling nature

of predictions in astrology as is evident in her citing the story of an astrologer who died in fear when a pebble dropped on his head because he had predicted that he would die with a rock falling on his head.

It is also important to note that Duszejko also believes that there is no forgiving God who whittles mortal life down to virtue and sin. She remarks,

> We believe we are free, and that God will forgive us. Personally I think otherwise. Finally, transformed into tiny quivering photons, each of our deeds will set off into Outer Space, where the planets will keep watching it like a film until the end of the World. (38)

So, actions do not amount to just the good or bad, in Duszejko's worldview, rather, it is the entirety of an action that matters. Duszejko kills the four men because, to her, not only were those men supposed to be killed by the animals' revenge at that particular time, but it is something that needed to be done at the hands of animals. Additionally, for her cosmic afterlife, she had to take that action to give form to the anger and sorrow she felt.

Duszejko interprets herself as the force that embodies the revenge of animals because of her Blakian worldview. She and her former pupil, whom she lovingly nicknamed Dizzy, translate William Blake's visionary poetry together on Thursdays at her kitchen table. She also quotes from his body of work on a day-to-day basis, demonstrating how influential his work has been to her. Her tenderness and love towards animals mimic Blake's views on animal suffering very closely. She says:

> "A dog starv'd at his Master's Gate / Predicts the ruin of the State," writes Blake in "Auguries of Innocence". "Are their minds incapable of reaching beyond petty, selfish pleasures? People have a duty towards Animals to lead them – in successive lives – to Liberation. (84)

In an affective reading of the novel, Marek Pawlicki demonstrated how William Blake's prophetic work is of fundamental importance to the structure of the novel and builds the bones of Duszejko's outlook on life. Tokarczuk in chapter titles, epigraphs, and in the dialogics of the text itself through Duszejko and Dizzy's efforts of translation reference Blake's "auguries of innocence," "the marriage of heaven and hell," "Proverbs of hell," and "the book of Urizen." Blake's mystical views of innocence and sin are things that Duszejko clearly echoes, though, more significantly, Duszejko shares Blake's concerns with the treatment of animals. It is her worldview, or her "Theories" as she refers to them, paired with her faith in astrology that invites the reader into her idiosyncratic world and where readers both empathize and disassociate. The same set of beliefs prompts a deep sense of

sorrow within Duszejko because of the world she occupies. The helplessness of this sorrow later transforms into "Wrath" that Duszejko herself cannot control and the four hunters fall victim to. But it is also clear that Duszejko is a victim of her anger. As a result, the affect that drives Duszejko is neither condemned nor validated by the author, and her actions are allowed to occupy an ambivalent state.

On a metatextual level, the title of this novel itself is an inaccurate reference to Blake's "Marriage of heaven and hell." Tokarczuk also quotes from Blake's poetry in the epigraphs that serve as subtitles for each chapter of *Drive Your Plow.* To a degree, Duszejko herself is modeled after Blake's eccentric personality and especially his penchant for rage (Powell 8). In that vein, it is only fitting that Duszejko draws on him to justify her actions. Anger, in Duszejko, leads to absolute clarity of vision. So, she concludes, "The truth is that anyone who feels Anger, and does not take action, merely spreads the infection. So says our Blake" (47).

It is also important to note that Duszejko's interpretation of Blake is limited and intentionally flawed. Duszejko is an English teacher, but she admits that her grasp of English is not as firm as she would like it to be. Many have already pointed out that Duszejko misinterpreted the role of rage in Blake's work (Pawlicki 39; Powell 9; Mcquil). This misunderstanding can be attributed to the language barrier. Translator Antonia Lloyd-Jones did a wonderful job portraying the process of translation in the novel by providing several English rephrasings of Blake's "The Mental Traveller." Further, Duszejko herself admits to finding the "Auguries of Innocence" difficult to understand.

The contrast of the authorial voice in the novel highlights the artifice of borders while the voice of the protagonist insists on new borders and categories based on her conviction in astrology and Blake is the most intriguing factor of the novel. Tokarczuk's tender narration makes room for the interplay of these two opposing ideas to highlight the arbitrary nature of the law, natural, constitutional, or otherwise. But the protagonist Janina Duszejko is not interested in this ambiguity. The next section discusses the process by which Duszejko is thoroughly incapacitated by the affect of her loss, sorrow, and finally anger.

Translating Affect into Transgression

Malek Pawlicki has already discussed the affective nature of Anger and Sorrow in *Drive Your Plow* in his paper "A Tragic Story About Helplessness, Anger and Civil Disobedience." Duszejko's anger, especially, surpasses the state of just an emotion; it compels her into movement. The theme of rage in the service of divine retribution is further explored in Natalia Nielipowicz's "Between

Tenderness and Anger: Oscillation *in Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* by Olga Tokarczuk." Nielipowicz posited that the uncontrollable anger that drives Duszejko to murder is ultimately rooted in the compassion she feels for all living beings. Duszejko is not by nature vengeful or cruel, only eccentric. She repeatedly appeals to the law for justice and even makes a desperate plea at a church gathering for her community to see the cruelty of hunting. It is when she is unheard and left without any other avenues that she turns to crime. The oscillation, Nielipowicz pointed out, between the two seemingly opposite feelings comes from the same strong sense of right and wrong. In a similar vein, Ellen Mortensen argues that there are ecofeminist principles at play in Duszejko's action. These principles are manifested in the fury Duszejko feels and the revenge she enacts. For Mortensen, Duszejko is similar to the role of the Fury in Greek mythology. Her anger is righteous and merciless towards the patriarchal manifestation of the hunters. She hunts down the transgressors of natural law and then flees once again.

Duszejko is not a violent person by nature. She resorts to violence because it is the only path left for her after the police and the law of her land fail her. Her rage and sorrow are two sides of the same coin. Duszejko, after months of grief, was deeply moved by the photograph in Bigfoot's house and she felt that the deer she saw outside entrusted her with revenge, but she still insists that she had not known that she was going to kill the Commandant until she did. She describes it as, "Oh, how wise the body is. I could say it was my body that made the decision, it took the swing and struck the blow" (187). Duszejko claims that she was in a trance-like dissociative state while committing the murder, even as her detailed plans show that she did think about these killings in a rational way. Additionally, it has already been established earlier in the paper that Duszejko had predicted that the death of the Commandant would be at the hands of animals, and she was aware of the self-fulfilling nature of astrological prediction. That certainly lends more credence to why Duszejko did it, but it does not explain why it was so important to her to communicate that this was the animals taking revenge.

Monika Sosnowska asserts that Duszejko defies humanist and anthropocentric ontology by blurring the line between animals and humans. Her "instrumental" function is exposed within the novel's narrative (being an agent of nature) as well as on a metanarrative level (being "a ventriloquist" who expresses Tokarczuk's concerns) uniquely suits her for a reordering of the natural world where human beings, through the patriarchal violence enforced by human beings, are who transgress natural law. Further, through the protagonist's deep emotional connection with animals and the repeated attribution of agency to them,

Tokarczuk compels her readers to

> confront the consequences of prevailing anthropocentrism and speciesism, suffering of non-human animals in the Anthropocene, environmental crisis, anthropogenic climate change, and urgency for action on ecological and environmental matters. (Sosnowska 307)

Tokarczuk portrays Duszejko's hopelessness and desperation in vivid detail. She also highlights how Duszejko has tried to appeal to the police and law quite persistently to no avail. We have also established Duszejko's worldview where human beings have a duty to animals. Her letter to the police shows that she wants animals to be considered to be perpetrators of the murder but then for them to be not punished because the "alleged deed was a reaction to the soulless and cruel conduct of the victims" (141). She also makes it clear that she wants the law itself to change. Her insistence on it being animals taking revenge has a political element where she wants the people around her to stop killing by any means necessary. This is why she tells the Dentist and his patients that she believes that it is animals taking revenge on hunters, why she goes on a tirade at Good News' shop and, lastly, why she cries out during Father Russel's sermon at the church. For Duszejko, the murders are not just revenge, but also a desperate, last attempt to move the people of her society towards what she considers ethical. Duszejko wants to translate her transgression into change. She wants to push the boundaries of the law and what is acceptable to society at large until it expands to include the well-being of animals and nature into its concerns. But until society does that, Duszejko crosses the boundary of humanity and allies herself with the animals. She becomes the voice of mute creatures who cannot speak for themselves and she becomes a tool in their fight for survival. For a person with her unique understanding of the world, the affect of life-shattering loss manifests through a radical reshuffling of the world order where murdering cruel men who would harm innocent animals is not morally wrong.

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Deconstructing Domestic Violence in Bollywood: Feminist Reflections on *Darlings* (2022)

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Abstract

Instances of domestic violence against women persist globally, particularly prevalent in various forms across South Asia. It is a topic that has gained attention in various forms of media, including Bollywood movies. One of the recent Bollywood productions, *Darlings* (2022), directed by Jasmeet K. Reen, addresses this issue differently than its predecessors. A grim subject like domestic violence which is rarely material for humor has been presented through a dark comedic lens while bringing back the Muslim social genre. This paper seeks to assert by referring to western and non-western feminist discourse that, despite successfully subverting the popular representation of women in feminist revenge narratives and emphasizing the perpetuating maltreatment of women in South Asian patriarchal households, the film could not liberate itself from the two oppositional representations of women – "angel" and "madwoman" (in case of *Darlings*, it is murderer), popularized by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Concurrently, while correlating Simone de Beauvoir's positioning of women in her influential text, *The Second Sex* with Chandra Talpade Mohanty's postcolonial alignment in "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," the paper will also argue that, in spite of raising awareness about violence against women and deconstructing the stereotypical portrayal of domestic violence in Bollywood, the film inadvertently normalizes intimate partner violence (IPV) and potentially undermines the seriousness of this critical social issue.

Keywords: domestic violence, Bollywood, patriarchy, feminist criticism, marginalization

Introduction

Gendered violence can be theorized through the lenses of physical and sexual abuse, encompassing more subtle forms that can have significant psychological impacts. While discussing the relation between gender and violence in feminist discourse, two terms – violence against women and gender-based violence – are frequently used interchangeably, reflecting the reality that most violence against women stems from gender-based motivations. Violence within the domestic

sphere has historically permeated human societies across diverse racial, cultural, and ethnic landscapes, with patriarchy serving as a pivotal mechanism for asserting male dominance within households. This violence is deeply embedded in traditional conceptions of masculinity and femininity, and is largely a product of hierarchical gender relations that position men as superior and women as inferior. Patriarchy, as a conceptual framework, undeniably precedes and encompasses domestic abuse, embodying a constellation of ideologies and norms that rationalize and uphold male authority over women. This subordination is primarily established and institutionalized within the family through marriage (Dobash and Dobash 33). Within this spectrum, the discourse of film becomes significant because, as Bernard J. Hibbitts in his investigation of performance culture notes, "We are living at a time when writing is rapidly losing its social and ideological hegemony" (887), and audio-visual media are increasingly shaping the meaning-making process.

Director Jasmeet K. Reen's debut film, *Darlings* is a 2022 Netflix original dark comedy. She has also co-written the story with Parveez Sheikh. In collaboration with her co-writer, Reen scrutinizes the dynamics of patriarchy and domestic abuse through her unconventional presentation of a dark comedic tale by bringing "feminist revenge narrative" (Ajgaonkar 210) within the social-psychological backdrop of a lower middle class Muslim family. The film delves into a pervasive issue observed among South Asian families, where women are often mistreated by their husbands and yet the hope and desperation of having completely changed, responsible counterparts do not end. However, the film advocates for women to transcend the cycle of abuse rather than engaging in negotiations with the oppressor. In this article, I contend that while the film underscores the extinguishing hold of the patriarchal structure and experiments with the cinematic techniques and genres to deconstruct the mainstream representation of domestic violence in Bollywood films, it ultimately fails to move beyond the binary depictions of women as either "angels" or "madwomen" (or murderers, in the context of this film), a concept drawn from Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's seminal work, *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Instead of differentiating between western and non-western feminist ideas, I will correlate them to propose that despite the director's innovative approach to raise awareness among audience regarding violence against women, it culminates in normalizing intimate partner violence (IPV), which consequently decreases the gravity of such a pressing social problem.

Bollywood and Violence against Women

In the 1970s, feminists highlighted that violence against women serves as a crucial mechanism for patriarchal subjugation (Kozol 651), which is reflected in

cinema as well. In the initial chapter of her work *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory*, Anneke Smelik characterizes cinema as a "cultural endeavor wherein narratives pertaining to women, femininity, men, masculinity, and ultimately, narratives concerning sexual differentiation are both formulated and depicted" (7). Certainly, cinema has considerable influence in upholding and perpetuating certain societal ideologies and myths. Smelik's assertion resonates within the realm of Bollywood cinema, which often romanticizes love, objectifies women, and portrays male protagonists as possessing extraordinary valor who rescue and control vulnerable heroines lacking agency in their own defense. Menka Ahlawat, in her analysis of angry young women in 1970s Bollywood films, argues that unlike the "angry young man" whose anger is rooted in societal injustices, the actions and emotions of female protagonists in revenge narratives are delegitimized. Injustices against women are depicted as private issues, personal battles rather than societal problems, isolating them from broader socio-economic contexts (204). Historically, Bollywood has subordinated women's experiences to men; though portrayals began to change from the 1990s, the hierarchical binary between men and women remained largely intact.

During the 1990s, Hindi cinema popularized the family drama genre, which became a significant medium for exploring issues related to the mistreatment of women. Tere, in her examination of gender representations in mainstream Hindi cinema, found that these films often depicted the suffering of women through acts such as sexual harassment, battering, rape, and domestic violence (4). While critiquing domestic violence, they subtly upheld the patriarchal institution of marriage by suggesting that the victimized wife should endure her husband's abuse and only leave the marital home upon her death (Tere 3). Ramasubramanian and Oliver, in their study of sexual violence in Hindi films from 1997 to 1999, found that male aggression towards women was often normalized and legitimized (328). Female characters in these films were typically depicted as powerless, resorting to tears and pleas to seek empathy and respect from their husbands. However, Afreen Khan notes a radical shift in the portrayal of women in Indian cinema during the 1990s, highlighting a departure from traditional roles (51).

Films such as *Yaraana* (Dhawan, 1995), *Daraar* (Abbas and Mastan, 1996), *Raja Ki Aayegi Baraat* (Gaekwad, 1997), *Daman: A Victim of Marital Violence* (Lajmi, 2001), *Lajja* (Santoshi, 2001), and *Koi Mere Dil Se Poochhe* (Shukla, 2002), among many, are centered around the pressing issue of domestic violence. These films challenged the traditional portrayal of marriage in Bollywood as a romantic and idealistic institution by depicting the domestic sphere as abusive

and violent. The female protagonists in these narratives were in stark contrast with Bollywood's usual depiction of women as self-sacrificial, passive victims who were domesticated, obedient, and reverent towards their husbands despite abuse (Moini 1453-54). Instead, they were depicted as "avenging women" (Karki 83) who actively seek retribution against their abusive spouses. Most mainstream Indian films of this era either reinforced the stereotype of the Indian woman as a damsel in distress (Sen 203) or presented her as an independent identity who mostly remains subordinate to men as exemplified by Rajiv Rai's 1994 film *Mohra* (Pawn). Through the regressive narration of domestic violence, women have been shown in a melodramatic or sensationalized manner which trivializes the issue and reinforces harmful stereotypes. Such narratives often depict female victims as forgiving their male abusers, which normalizes such behavior and perpetuates detrimental social messages. Moreover, these films tend to treat violence and coercion as individual stories, instead of conceding them as a systematic social crime rooted in patriarchy.

From the last decade onwards, a visible change is noticeable in the depiction of women in Bollywood. Jasmeet K. Reen's film *Darlings* (2022) stands out by minimizing this gap by its nuanced and modernized portrayal of violent women, offering representations that incorporate multiple intersecting aspects of identity, challenging or expanding previous portrayals. Though *Darlings* falls under the same feminist revenge tradition, its presentation of domestic violence against women through dark humor is where it is unique compared to its predecessors. Though the movie initially upholds the common scenario of a patriarchal society where women are viewed in relation to men – she is a wife, mother, or daughter before being an individual – it also attempts to deconstruct the stereotypical view through subversion. French feminist Simone de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* addresses this notion which is further extended in the postcolonial South Asian context by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and this framework will be used to examine the film.

The Movie *Darlings*

The narrative of *Darlings* unfolds in Mumbai's Byculla district where two women – mother and daughter – endeavor to extinguish the perpetual maltreatment suffered by the latter, Badrunissa Shaikh, Badru in short, at the hands of her spouse, Hamza. The film chronicles the tumultuous relationship between Badru (Alia Bhatt) and Hamza (Vijay Verma), a lower-middle-class Muslim couple. Hamza, depicted as an alcoholic and abusive partner, consistently inflicts physical and emotional abuse on Badru, manipulating her into forgiveness. Their journey from romance to marriage unfolds over three years – love and romance of courtship to sheer terror of domestic violence. The climax occurs when the

suspicious Hamza brutally assaults Badru, causing a miscarriage. Traumatized, Badru initially contemplates suicide but instead seeks revenge. She incapacitates Hamza by drugging and binding him, then mirrors the violent abuse he inflicted on her. Badru's mother, Shamshu (Shefali Shah), an equally important character, and her business partner Zulfi (Roshan Mathew), who secretly loves Shamshu, become entangled in the plot. Although Badru considers killing Hamza by tying him to the train tracks, she ultimately decides against it, fearing the moral consequences. Hamza, realizing Badru's change of heart, threatens her. But in an ironic twist of fate, he is accidentally killed by a passing train. What distinguishes *Darlings* from other feminist revenge narratives is its innovative use of dark humor to address the grave issue of domestic violence. Additionally, it uniquely foregrounds the experiences of economically disadvantaged women from a religious minority in India, who in mainstream representations remain in the periphery as subaltern and marginalized individuals.

Darlings: A Critique of Patriarchy

In a patriarchal culture, both society and women themselves often position women in a secondary status compared to their male counterparts. Those who try to reclaim their agency often go through a phase of transformation. *Darlings*, akin to the archetypal Indian feminist revenge films, is structured with a distinct division between its first and second halves, mirroring Badru's transformation into a violent woman. One of the reasons why, until the end of the first half of the film, Badru could not look past the physical abuse can be what Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* examines as the condition of women within the existentialist framework, contending that femininity is socially constructed. She explains that society conditions a woman to define her worth based on fulfilling a man's needs; thus, determining her "essence" is determined in relation to a man (26, 506). Beauvoir famously states, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (330). Badru's social understanding of her role as a woman leads her to believe that her value lies in fulfilling her duties as a wife, bearing a child to change Hamza's alcoholic nature, and to complete herself. Initially, she embodies this notion by submissively allowing Hamza to vent his frustrations – when stones accidentally get into the rice she has cooked for Hamza, she puts her hand out so that he can spit into it (*Darlings* 4:57-5:55), reflecting the social construct of the "eternal feminine" (Beauvoir 764) that views woman solely as a server to the family. This universality of Beauvoir's positioning surely fits within the South Asian context, but, nonetheless, the approach is extended by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her influential article "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." Mohanty foregrounds women's position in a given structure, but she also affirms that no attempt has been taken "to trace the effect of the marriage practice in constituting women within an obviously changing

network of power relations. Thus, women are assumed to be sexual-political subjects prior to entry into kinship structure" (341-342), which is marriage. Western radical feminists, such as MacKinnon and Millett's views, align with Mohanty. While MacKinnon has strongly argued that the subordination and control of women within domestic spaces are inherently political, rooted in male supremacy ("Difference and Dominance" 40-41), Millett takes it forward by referring to the social order of patriarchy within the private sphere where males rule females as a birthright, and can be seen as a system of "interior colonization" ("Theory of Sexual Politics" 25).

Patriarchy has been differentiated into two distinct categories: social and familial patriarchy (Smith 257). Social patriarchy concerns the overarching male dominance prevalent throughout society where the subordination of women is continued economically, whereas familial patriarchy specifically addresses male authority within the familial context where women's personal space is controlled (Barrett 17and Millett 33). While the structural influence of familial patriarchy may have gradually waned in recent years, its ideological underpinnings persist (Barrett 17). Despite the scholars' views on the decrease in familial patriarchy, in *Darlings* Badru has been entrapped in her private sphere. At the film's outset, Badru is presented as an outgoing woman, but after three years of marriage, her world has significantly shrunk. The visual representation of the narrow, crowded chawl, a common low-quality housing in Mumbai, symbolizes her confined existence post-marriage. Cinematographer Anil Mehta uses this cramped space to underline Badru's entrapment – she is caged within her own home living under Hamza's strict rules. The film's setting within the four walls of the house and the increased animosity and abuse that follows within, predominantly indicates the restricted private sphere of socio-economically disadvantaged working-class housewives. In the present patriarchal world, it is widely believed that asserting control over a woman is sometimes necessary. Typically, such occasions arise "when a woman challenges a man's authority, fails to fulfill his expectations of service, or neglects to stay in 'her place'" (Dobash and Dobash 93). In one instance, against Hamza's objections, Badru attends a societal meeting regarding the chawl's renovation to improve their lower-middle-class status. This choice precipitates another vicious assault, where Hamza smashes her finger in a game of pinfinger using the red stiletto she bought to seduce him along with a fancy red dress (*Darlings* 28:00-28:42). This scene illustrates how her aspiration for a more economically solvent life with modern facilities not only challenges social patriarchy but also results in violent physical harm. On the surface level, it seems that the film centers on a young woman ensnared in a hopeless marriage. However, the narrative extends beyond the domestic sphere, exposing the grim realities of toxic masculinity, gender inequality embedded within the institution

of marriage, and the challenges faced by lower middle-class women when confronted with societal and economic constraints.

Despite experiencing conflicts, uncertainties, and physical abuse, Badru endures silently due to her personal aspirations reflected in the notes beside her dressing table, her longing for a larger home, financial stability, and dream of motherhood – all of which hold greater significance to her than safeguarding herself from her husband's abuse. Like thousands of South Asian women, Badru is a complacent, devoted wife who continues to dream of a changed and responsible partner despite enduring continuous physical and psychological mistreatment. It is essential to note that Badru did not inherit her belief system from her mother, Shamshu, who consistently opposes her violent marriage. To understand this, Beauvoir's critique of Jacques Lacan's theory of the mirror stage can be applied, which proposes that children develop a sense of selfhood upon recognizing their reflection in a mirror (*The Second Sex* 331). Beauvoir challenges this notion, arguing that female children are conditioned from a young age to conform to societal expectations in their appearance and behavior. When a girl looks in the mirror, she does not perceive her true self but rather a reflection shaped by societal norms and ideals. This includes striving to emulate idealized feminine figures – to "resemble an image" by "compar[ing] herself to princesses and fairies from tales" (340). In the film, Badru grew up without a father and was raised by her mother single-handedly. For her the complete mirror image was what her mother lacked – a marriage with a loving partner which from the Freudian psychoanalytic point of view can be regarded as "female castration complex" (Beauvoir 334). Manipulated by Hamza, Badru refuses to file a complaint against him, despite her mother's objections. Badru firmly utters to her mother, "Hamza and I are not like you and dad. Sorry, mom, but Dad didn't love you! That's why he left. Hamza is not like him, he loves me a lot" (*Darlings* 44:05-44:20). She opted for a love marriage because she knew her mother's arranged marriage did not work. After numerous unsuccessful attempts to "cure" Hamza's alcoholism, which she believes is the sole cause of his abuse, Badru concludes that having a child is the only solution. Therefore, there is always an attempt in Badru to fill the void which, from a Freudian interpretation, can be seen as the innate desire for the phallus, and an attempt to compensate for that loss through a child.

Badru's husband, Hamza, is manipulative, abusive, deeply insecure, sadistic, and embodies the stereotypical patriarch. As an alcoholic, he perceives violence as a normalized aspect of marital cohabitation. In one scene, Hamza seeks reconciliation with Badru by rationalizing his abusive behavior, claiming that quarrels are an integral part of any marriage. Verily, this reflects the societal coercion practiced hegemonically to keep women subordinated – a tactic Hamza

practices skillfully. Hamza manipulates Badru through self-condemnation, tears, and promises of an idealized future, including having children and ceasing his drinking habit (*Darlings* 38:34-40:03). These promises function as hegemonic practices to which Badru voluntarily conforms. In families experiencing domestic violence, such patterns of coercive control are often perceived as normal. This attitude reaffirms Fran Hosken's notion of how physical abuse against women is perpetuated "with an astonishing consensus among men in the world" (Hosken, cited in Mohanty 339). Interestingly, the character of Zulfi is presented as a direct foil to Hamza. As Saibal Chatterjee highlights in his review, Zulfi as a character is "diametrically antithetical" to Hamza. Zulfi is well-liked by those around him, including Shamshu and Badru, and does not exhibit toxic masculinity; he remains composed when challenged and, most importantly, pursues his passions. In contrast, Hamza is portrayed as a powerless figure outside his home. Although by profession he is a railway ticket collector, he starts his day by cleaning his boss's toilet, and others perceive him as merely a drunkard. Hamza's bravado is hollow, and Badru serves as his sole outlet for exerting a sense of superiority. This is evident when he shows no remorse after hitting his mother-in-law, Shamshu, when she calls him impotent for physically torturing Badru (*Darlings* 45:35-45:50). He only apologizes to Shamshu days later at Badru's urging, following the confirmation of her pregnancy. Hamza's apology, arguably, lacks genuine remorse and is instead motivated by his desire to refute Shamshu's accusation of impotence, highlighting his ego-driven need to prove his capability of procreation. Therefore, it is not much of a surprise when the dynamic culminates in the most brutal instance of domestic violence depicted in the film – Badru's miscarriage – triggered when Hamza feels utterly powerless, emasculated, and castrated by Zulfi imagining an illicit relationship between him and Badru. Gheetu T. Mohan, in analyzing the recent representations of domestic violence in Bollywood movies, postulates that in South Asian societies, men are expected to embody strength, masculinity, and lead in procreation. Failing to meet these expectations often results in being labeled as unmasculine or unmanly, considered a profound dishonor. To conceal their perceived inadequacies, they resort to demonstrating their masculinity through acts of violence (51). Hamza follows the same pattern of actions and his understanding of being a superior entity compared to Badru and her mother is predominantly because of the hierarchical structure of a society which puts him in higher position only because he is male.

In the first half of the film, Shamshu, Badru's mother, serves as a direct foil to Badru, much like the way Zulfi contrasts with Hamza. Shamshu embodies resilience, independence, and determination, as evidenced by her efforts to establish a food delivery enterprise with Zulfi's assistance. She supports her

daughter wholeheartedly, even advising her to kill her husband to escape his perpetual abuse. While aware of the harsh realities, Shamshu often focuses on possibilities, despite her advice sometimes evoking laughter and lacking practical reasoning. Utilizing Gilbert and Gubar's insights from their book, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Badru initially can be seen as the "Angel in the house" whereas through Hamza'a eyes it is evident that Shamshu is the unrestrained seductive body as she undermines the patriarchal norms and regulations. When Badru asks why Hamza says horrible things about her mother, he replies, "At this age, if she [Shamshu] will run around town chasing butterflies, will people stare at the butterflies or your mother?" (*Darlings* 25:50-25:57) The narrative strengthens the system of honorary value, which links family honor with regulating female sexuality and conforming to social and traditional standards (Gill and Brah 73). There are several instances like this where Hamza's perception regarding Shamshu as a "fallen woman" and his "male anxieties about female autonomy" gets reflected (Gilbert and Gubar 28). In an interview with Film Companion, Reen mentions such projection was "an intentional choice" from her side and mostly from those conversations we get to perceive Hamza's adverse opinion about his mother-in-law. Unlike Badru, Shamshu, understanding Hamza's true nature, repeatedly urges her daughter to depart from the abusive marriage. However, Badru remains adamant in her commitment, unwaveringly believing in Hamza's professed "love" while hoping to rectify his behavior without pursuing legal action against him.

While dealing with cases of domestic violence, it is still predominantly seen in various parts of South Asia that despite the provision of legal assistance, women frequently avoid reporting them to the police or any legal authority due to concerns about eventual isolation and potential humiliation. While analyzing the reasons behind, Ahmed-Ghosh has found out that in India, abused women often do not consider seeking divorce, as their primary interest lies in preserving their marriage, which grants them social status and economic security (114). The depiction of marriage in *Darlings* offers an explicit critique of the challenges inherent in escaping this social institution. When the police officer (Vijay Maurya) inquires why Badru is not opting for a divorce, Shamshu responds, "'Divorced' tag is the worst, sir!" Lamenting, she expresses concern that if Badru were to get divorced, there will be no prospect of getting her married again (*Darlings* 40:15-40:22). Victims of domestic violence and their families refrain from filing divorce mostly due to concerns about social stigma and the fear of the victim being left alone for a lifetime. This uncertainty compels them to remain in abusive relationships. Such fears are perpetuated within the broad structure of patriarchy, where women internalize their subordinate status as the Other. As Beauvoir contends the inability of women to organize themselves

as a collective force, she rightly claims that "a woman could not even dream of exterminating males. The tie that binds her to her oppressors is unlike any other" (28). Such perpetuation of solidarity with the oppressor is one of the key reasons why social and familial patriarchy remains dominant in South Asia despite its decline in other parts of the world. In that scene, Shamshu also adds, "The world's changed for people on Twitter, not for the likes of us" (*Darlings* 40:23-40:27). The dialogue, expression, and delivery accentuate laughter, but this scene is poignant as it underscores that, although divorce is often promoted as a solution for women to escape abusive marriages, the screenplay writers minutely shed light not only on the growing disparity in the living condition and ideological differences across socio-economic strata of a highly capitalist society, but also highlights the reality of those who exist in the margin, for whom distancing oneself from an abusive marriage is not even an option, and who are underrepresented in media (lower-middle class Muslims of India) and remain outside of the mainstream narratives. Noteworthily, both Shamshu and Badru dismiss divorce, perceiving the act of murdering the spouse as a more feasible alternative. The rationale is that murder is often committed under cover of night and carries a lower risk of detection unless an official complaint is filed, as was the case with Shamshu. Conversely, divorce remains highly stigmatized in many South Asian societies, where women alone bear the burden of this stigma, which is one of the main causes of their reluctance in not availing the existing legal procedures. In a satirical manner, it subtly critiques the existing patriarchal structure where a divorced woman faces more difficulty and struggle to be socially accepted than a murderer, and hence, becomes a mouthpiece of the South Asian belief system where marriage is regarded not just as a sacred social institution, but as a pure and unbreakable vow.

***Darlings*: Subversion of the Popular Portrayal of Domestic Violence**

Undoubtedly, *Darlings* addresses the problem of female subjugation, but so does its predecessors by following the genre of feminist revenge narrative. The space where it renounces the earlier narration is through subverting the notion of voyeurism and the spectator's scopophilic instinct. These terms have been popularized by British film theorist Laura Mulvey in her widely accepted article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Using a psychoanalytic approach, Mulvey views cinema as an "advanced representation system" that manipulates the human unconscious, shapes "ways of seeing," and exploits "pleasure in looking" (712). Mulvey believes that being unchallenged in the dominant patriarchal discourse, eroticism has been integrated into the language and narrative of the mainstream movies (713). This phenomenon is particularly prominent in Bollywood films, where the female body is typically presented as a means to elicit voyeuristic and scopophilic pleasure, not only for the male

characters within the film but also for the male spectators.

Earlier films featuring narratives of avenging women often depicted violated female bodies on screen subjected to domestic violence for the sake of "voyeuristic fantasy" (Mulvey 714) to satisfy the audience. In Mulvey's words, "In their traditionalist exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact" (715). Historically, the portrayal of women on screen is dictated by the male gaze, rendering women objects of "to-be-looked-at-ness" (715). Additionally, in Mulvey's theorization, a woman, as the object of both the spectators' and male characters' gaze in film, is shown as "isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualized" (718). Reen successfully critiques these stereotypical portrayals that have been prevalent and glorified in Bollywood for decades, by deconstructing the male gaze, subverting sensual pleasure, and disrupting any idealized or cathartic image of the vengeful "good" woman. *Darlings* subtly reverses the male gaze by shifting the focus back to the violence inflicted on the female body, rather than arousing sensuality. For instance, following her transformation in an intense scene while getting prepared to avenge against Hamza, there are close up shots of Badru wearing red lipstick and nail polish, adorning herself with the very same red dress and red high heels with which she was previously abused (*Darlings* 1:17:18-1:17:43). Throughout the film, Badru envisions herself in red, a color symbolizing blood, revenge, and sexuality. Initially, Badru's attire is intended for sexual expression within her conventional heteronormative relationship with Hamza, and for visual and voyeuristic pleasure of the audience. Reen deconstructs Badru's initial embodiment of sexual exhibitionism, by focusing on the clotted blood and bruises of her body through Hamza's gaze (*Darlings* 1:18:09-1:18:16). The camera's attention to these injuries prevents spectators from indulging in erotic pleasure, as the ghastly bruises serve as a stark reminder of Hamza's abuse and the fatal miscarriage it caused. Mulvey also claims that visual media, in the name of pleasure, often perpetuates sexual inequality through the binary opposition of "active/male and passive/female" (715). This dynamic has been reversed in that scene, as the tied up Hamza from his "passive" positioning gazes at the sensually dressed "active" Badru. The camera aligns with Hamza's perspective, making him the "bearer of the look," while it gradually pans over Badru's bare legs, arms, and shoulders, marking her as the "spectacle" (715). Apart from effectively subverting the cinematic representation and traditional heteronormative active/passive binary, Reen plays with the background score too. Instead of featuring romantic or sensual music, the emphasis is placed on the sound of Badru's red stiletto stomping. This auditory focus serves as a reminder to the audience that the scene will reenact violence, subverting the general expectation of sensuality or romance. Hence, unlike mainstream Bollywood films that depict the female

body as an object of desire, manipulating spectators' unconscious perceptions and historically painting women as the Other and men as the One, *Darlings* employs conventional cinematic techniques to offer a new understanding of the female body as more than a mere spectacle.

Alternatively, *Darlings* deviates from previous depictions of violence against women by highlighting its pervasive nature – demonstrating that it is not merely an isolated incident but a widespread societal issue. In his analysis of mainstream American media's portrayals of domestic abuse, Kozol notes that media tends to individualize the societal problem of domestic violence by portraying abusers as exceptional cases of psychopaths, rather than addressing the systemic issues (648). This pattern is evident in Bollywood as well, where feminist revenge narratives often depict abusers as monstrous outliers. In several Indian films, husbands who cause domestic violence are portrayed as either doing it for dowry as seen in the movie *Mehndi* (Khan, 1998) or for having cruel, excessively possessive, and psychopathic traits as portrayed in *Daman: A Victim of Marital Violence* (Lajmi, 2001), *Agni Sakshi* (Ghosh, 1996), etc. Commonly, therefore, domestic abuse has been depicted in two main ways: either as an issue linked to a psychopathic husband or as a sociological problem associated with the malpractice of dowry. Both views present domestic violence as a private matter, isolated incidents carried out by individuals with psychopathic tendencies, which contradicts the perspective advocated by feminists. Janice Haaken argues that identifying the abuser as a psychopath, or in this case, Hamza, who is also a drunkard, is problematic because it increases the risk for women and vindicates men instead of addressing issues of male power and control ("Too Close for Comfort" 77). Initially in the film, Badru attributes Hamza's abuse solely to his alcoholism. However, the film effectively disentangles alcohol from the root cause of domestic violence, as Hamza's brutal actions occur regardless of his sobriety, resulting in Badru's miscarriage. In addition, though it highlights one single family from a marginalized social milieu, *Darlings* makes a conscious attempt to contradict the representation of violence against women as a private or family matter as it also navigates the cruel existence of such abuse in every sphere of the society. While suggesting to report a complaint against Hamza, it is confirmed as the police officer utters, "We get such cases everyday, but no one takes action" (*Darlings* 37:02-37:05). Also, mentioning the sudden death of Mrs. Ameena, the rich and affluent Mr. Khan's second wife, and juxtaposing the scenes of violence towards Badru while the parlor lady downstairs adorns brides with henna and other accessories, either ignoring Badru's screams or commenting on the vulnerable state of women in marriage, accentuates the massive scale of domestic violence in India. *Darlings*, thus, adeptly elucidates that domestic violence transcends class and caste, equally prevalent in upper-class and economically disadvantaged

households. It challenges the simplistic association between alcohol and domestic violence, subverting the popular portrayal of abuse as isolated, exceptional instances and attesting that such violence is widespread and systemic, not isolated incidents that exempt perpetrators from accountability.

Another way *Darlings* showcases how domestic violence has penetrated every layer of society is by marking a return of the popular Muslim social genre of Hindi cinema of the 1970s-80s. To find the reasons why there is a scarcity of such productions in today's mainstream Bollywood, Lata Jha, in her article "The Rise and Fall of Muslim Social Drama," points out Bollywood's need to cater to the dominant audience preferences to maximize commercial success and therefore, the industry faces limitations in its ability to depict diverse religious or ethnic narratives because of the high influence of the Hindu, particularly Punjabi, cultural framework. Focusing on a specific cultural universe restricts filmmakers from exploring other religious or ethnic identities in their narratives, which, in turn, perpetuates a narrow portrayal of India's diverse cultural landscape. *Darlings* revives the lost tradition of Muslim socials to position pertinent social issues embedded within patriarchy, and the obstacles encountered by lower middle-class women through a marginalized social community in South Asia. Badru represents more than just an individual belonging to a minority religion in a conservative, traditionalist society; as a woman who is financially dependent yet consistently yearning for economic advancement, she personifies the broader struggles faced by her community. This permits the director to showcase the state of double marginalization of the women specifically in India society – first, as Muslim minority and second, as women. Similarly, Hamza, as a Muslim man, is almost unseen within the societal structure. His boss subjects him to demeaning tasks, such as cleaning toilets, although the film does not explicitly address whether this treatment is due to religious discrimination by his Hindu superior. Although this does not excuse Hamza's abuse of Badru, the portrayal of a Muslim man grappling with the challenges of a rapidly changing world is compelling, forcing the audience to engage with the complexities of his experience.

One of the concerns of Muslim social drama is to process weighty subjects like generational trauma and *Darlings* captures it effectively through Badru and Shamshu's stories. While investigating one of the prominent second wave Muslim socials, Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen found that, in such films, women, generationally, "represent the past, the tortured present and perhaps, a still-born future" (286). In the final scenes, the narrative discloses Shamshu's previously concealed history, revealing her own struggles with domestic abuse. Her experience closely parallels Badru's, highlighting a cycle of violence that both

women endured. Badru's still-born child, who dies because of its father's vicious abuse, was also a girl, which reestablishes the prominence of such violence across generations. However, Shamshu's decision to kill her husband and to escape the consequences serves as a reflection of her ultimate refusal to remain a victim. This revelation adds to her existing trauma as she relives it through Badru's journey towards self-empowerment and resistance.

At this point it is important to note that the representation of women who are self-sufficient, independent, who attempt to redefine their position in society and subvert the traditional patriarchy inculcates the age-old narration of the "madwoman." Even women writers of the literary canon, which has invariably been promoted in media too, especially Bollywood, often confine female characters to dichotomous portrayals: either angelic figures like Snow White or madwomen like Bertha Mason from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (Gilbert and Gubar 28) – in this case rendered as a murderer. Reen too, despite having directorial and co-authorial contributions and narrating the film from the South Asian perspective, could not separate herself from the tradition, presenting women as the "archetypal victims," "objects-who-defend-themselves," and men as "subject-who-perpetuate violence" (Mohanty 339) where "the monster [Badru after her miscarriage] may not only be concealed *behind* the angel [Badru in the first half], she may actually turn out to reside *within* the angel" (Gilbert and Gubar 29). Therefore, despite multiple waves of feminism and debates on postcolonial and intersectional issues, the film ultimately reaffirms archetypal representations through the docile Badru in the first half, and the vengeful Shamshu and her daughter in the second half. Shamshu's act of retribution by killing her abusive husband manifests what has been happening so far in female revenge narratives. This cross-generational abuse and its aftermath somehow promote violence as the only means of liberation for women. This argument can be refuted as in the end, unlike her mother, Badru decides not to take the murderous vengeance into her own hands as murdering Hamza cannot be the solution. In an epiphany, she realizes that her sought-after honor will not be achieved through the repetition of the abuses enacted upon her, and she will ultimately be haunted by her conscience. Nonetheless, it cannot be ignored that her realization comes only after subjecting Hamza to intense violence which, in a way, normalizes intimate partner violence (IPV).

Reen employs dark comedy to deconstruct the conventional portrayal of domestic violence. There is a paucity of productions within this genre in Bollywood, and *Darlings* effectively fills this void with its comic timing, language usage, and characters who unintentionally speak grammatically incorrect English to assimilate with the "modern" couples. Typically, films addressing domestic

abuse are saturated with graphic depictions of sexual violence that can be deeply disturbing and repulsive for audiences. Reen's innovative approach skillfully balances these violent scenes with humorous dialogues, comic expressions, and puns, providing comic relief akin to that found in a tragedy. Bollywood films often restrict directors from expressing their unique voices, as producers prioritize presenting films that ensure profitability. One of the reasons that enabled Reen to experiment with a sensitive issue like domestic violence within a comedic framework without compromising the fundamental stream of thought was the OTT (Over-The-Top) platform, Netflix, on which it was released. Technological advancements have shifted entertainment towards OTT platforms, which cater to a diverse audience, including urban, educated, and younger viewers who are more receptive to unconventional narratives. In contrast, traditional cinemas often prioritize blockbuster films with mass appeal to maximize ticket sales. This changed space allows filmmakers like Reen to be experimental with their craft, targeting niche audiences interested in social issues. It also provides a space for innovation and experimentation for films like *Darlings*, which, despite its unconventional amalgamation of violence and comedy, has been appreciated by critics and a broad audience. Nevertheless, despite its innovative approach to addressing violence against women, the film arguably glorifies domestic violence by using theatrical appeal. For instance, the initial violent scene involving stones in the rice is dramatized with a chair falling in slow-motion (*Darlings* 6:00:18-6:10). In another scene, Hamza forces Badru to play pinfinger while the background score intensifies with the continuous stomping of the stiletto heel, keeping the audience in suspense at the expense of Badru's suffering (*Darlings* 28:00-28:42). These scenes emphasize dramatic effect over the gravity of the actions, potentially desensitizing viewers to the real-world consequences of violence against women. Noteworthily, it cannot be denied that, due to the reason the film caused a stir, that is, presenting domestic violence as an idiosyncratic comic tale, can also be the reason to raise concerns against it. Sensible viewers may find the use of violence as a comedic device, particularly in Hamza's case, troubling. To this end, I contend that *Darlings* inadvertently endorses violence against men as a solution, thereby normalizing intimate partner violence (IPV).

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is characterized by a repetitive pattern of abusive conduct within a relationship, used by one partner to dominate or retain power and control over the other. While IPV is commonly linked to male perpetrators and female victims, it is crucial to recognize that men can also be victims, often in response to violence inflicted by female partners (Johnson 51, Stark 1021). While the perpetration of IPV by men is documented, there is limited understanding of how men perceive and experience IPV, and the feminization

of intimate partner abuse in societal norms, media portrayals, and political discourse undermines the severity of this issue (Corbally 3). *Darlings* perfectly exemplifies this phenomenon. Throughout the film, Shamshu casually advises her daughter to murder Hamza as the sole solution to the continuous abuse. While the extreme violence against Hamza in the film's second half is arguably justified, it is depicted comically through music and humorous dialogues, diminishing the seriousness of violence against men. This portrayal trivializes the film's objective, reducing the gravity of its primary aim to raise awareness about domestic violence against women. Consequently, the film prompts critical examination of the justification for substituting violence against one gender with violence against the other as the ultimate solution. It eventually fails to acknowledge that if unauthorized abuse against women is condemned, then enacting similar violence against men is equally problematic. While Badru ultimately recognizes the importance of self-respect over forcefully seeking it from her spouse, the film's questionable depiction of IPV without seeking legal recourse remains ambiguous, undermining its intended message.

Additionally, it has been discussed through Gilbert and Gubar's postulation that the characterizations of Badru and Shamshu embody two opposing representations of women. The inter-generational connection between the mother and daughter, which reinforces similar patterns in their unhealthy marriages, further complicates feminist concerns by portraying them as either extremely naïve and docile or harboring murderous vengeance. This conventional portrayal prompts viewers to question the film's area of exploration and grapple with moral dilemmas: must the women adopt the traits of their oppressors to overcome them? Is vengeance the sole means of achieving female redemption? These rhetorical questions, coupled with the comedic portrayal of vengeance against the male partner, add complexity to the film's message. Consequently, through these two female characters, the film suggests the impossibility for a woman to claim her rightful status while being a "good" woman, implying she must engage in criminal activities to achieve her legitimate position in a patriarchal society. Thus, in the final scene depicting Badru as joyous and free outside her restricted private sphere, raises a critical question: is the film promoting leaving or killing the patriarch as the solution to domestic violence? If not, then the film's aim to raise awareness against patriarchy on a mass level through dark comedy remains equivocal.

The film, notwithstanding, does not present all males as villainous. Despite Badru's father and husband being painted in the same light as using violence to maintain their dominance, the film does not force a monolithic view of men as inherently violent, sexist, and abusive in the narrative. This is exemplified through

Zulfi, whose involvement in the story illustrates that not all men are monstrous. Also, the character of the police officer is portrayed as a conscientious individual who earnestly encourages Badru to file a complaint against Hamza, ruing that many women often hesitate to assert their rights. The audience at times may feel sympathy for Hamza, as Reen in her narrative grants some humanizing aspects to a violent abuser like him by subtly bringing forward his invisibility as a minority. However, the film concurrently underscores his atrocious traits and firmly conveys that such abusive behaviors are not to be glorified, in contrast to certain blockbuster productions like *Kabir Singh* (2019) and *Animal* (2023) – which require separate examination.

Conclusion

As Akhter states, "cinema plays a significant role in … perpetuating some of the flawed ideologies and myths of society" (40). The female revenge narratives of 1990s Bollywood films also showcased prejudiced beliefs by preserving male dominance and patriarchal norms, often depicting women as lacking agency. However, over the last few decades such depictions have substantially evolved. Contemporary portrayals have begun to incorporate emotional and psychological dimensions and emphasize the struggles of women confined within domestic settings. From a feminist perspective, *Darlings* unambiguously addresses these notions, highlighting the concept of toxic masculinity, gender disparities within marital relationships, and the experiences of domestic violence encountered by lower middle-class housewives in South Asian patriarchal societies, by deconstructing the previous representations and adding a touch of humor. This approach permits the film to confront these complex issues in a nuanced manner, prompting the audience to engage more deeply with the subtleties of the narrative. While acknowledging the film's praiseworthy distinction from its predecessors, this analysis highlights the unescapable grip of patriarchy, which perpetuates binary portrayal of women in media even in the 21st century. The film encourages the audience to critically examine the inherent challenges women face in attaining respect and honor in a male-dominated society – whether in their roles as mothers, wives, daughters, or simply as individuals – without resorting to violence or revenge. The paper advocates for realistic depictions of women in mainstream cinema – women who are neither angelic nor murderous, yet deserve to hold dignified positions without avenging themselves against men. Despite feminist interventions, the paper stresses not only on the need of protection for women, but for men too. To mitigate violence against women, exterminating men or creating a "Ladyland" is not the solution. Feminism does not advocate for a complete reversal of the existing patriarchal structure but seeks an equitable balance between the genders. In any society, to ensure the rights of women, one needs to be a human before being a feminist.

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Language and Applied Linguistics

Conceptual Understanding of Translanguaging: Perspective of Higher Secondary Level English Teachers in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Following a qualitative approach and a "critical postpositivistic" paradigm, this study attempted to explore the conceptual familiarity of translanguaging among five English teachers (female 2, male 3) of higher secondary level (grade 11 and 12) coming from five different demographic backgrounds in Bangladesh. Research data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and was processed later by following the "general inductive approach" to develop some themes. Narrative analysis of the themes was presented to show the insights or the findings, revealing that none of the teachers had any conceptual clarity on translanguaging – only one among the five participants had heard about the term "translanguaging" before they had been approached for the interviews. However, during the interviews, all the participants gradually opined that, though they had been unaware about the conceptual technicalities of translanguaging, they had always been practicing and using it in their classrooms considering it mostly beneficial for the students.

Keywords: translanguaging, concept, clarity, unawareness, beneficial

Introduction

In this article I am reporting a fragment of findings from a larger study. I conducted the original study on exploring Bangladeshi higher secondary level English teachers' perception on practicing translanguaging in their classrooms; their opinions on the use of translanguaging regarding whether it is a problem or rather a possibility; and on incorporating translanguaging in the national curriculum of higher secondary level. However, this article focuses only on the teachers' conceptual understanding of translanguaging.

I chose to use the qualitative research design. My personal experience both as a student and later as a teacher played significant roles in creating the background of this study. To emphasize and to reflect on my biographical experience I have to some extent, while reporting this study, opted for a storytelling approach which is often considered as one of the strongholds of qualitative research.

Tenny et al. (2023) suggest that the success of a qualitative study often lies in the ability of the researcher to tell the stories of the involved ones. In fact, in qualitative research a researcher's self-knowledge and sensitivity is always considered important for creating new knowledge (Berger, 2015). Accordingly, my self-knowledge and sensitivity of this research context threaded together the background, the rationale, and the ensuing findings of this study. This entire process of acknowledging the self-sensitivity falls in conformity with the biographical model in the Rafi (2023) study where the researcher has shown how he had brought in his personal experience both as a student and as a teacher of English literature and language to explore the efficacy of translanguaging in the Bangladeshi context.

I started my career as an English teacher in 2011, worked in three institutions before joining the civil services as a member of the education cadre in 2016, and since then have also worked in some government colleges and in the offices of the Ministry of Education. My father was also a civil servant and because of his job postings to different places I had to move a lot. In fact, I attended eight schools between standard 1 and standard 12. As a student, in most places I saw that my friends were not quite comfortable in English especially while speaking the language. Even most of my teachers did not speak much English in the classrooms. But it did not mean they were not good teachers. They were good at what they were doing. Years later, when I started my career as a teacher, I saw that the scenario had not quite changed. In fact, it has remained almost identical to what I had observed in the classrooms as a student. My students, especially in the small towns or rural areas, do not consider welcoming English. An experience of mine will help to relate to what I am saying here. I was posted to a girls' college in one of the smallest districts in Bangladesh. One day after discussing a lesson, I asked one of my students to read a few sentences aloud from the text. The girl stood up as our students normally do in the classrooms. She was holding her book in her hand but suddenly she fainted. What happened was that she was so afraid to read or speak in English in front of the whole class that she could not hold on. Since then it has always been my urge to discover solutions to this problem where not only the students but the teachers also would feel free to use the language in the classrooms. I found translanguaging could be the answer.

Literature Review

In the educational institutions of Bangladesh, English is taught as a compulsory subject for twelve years starting from grade 1 to grade 12 (Hamid, 2010; Kabir, 2023). As a result, Bangladeshi students comprise one of the highest of populations learning English mandatorily in academic institutions (Hamid &

Erling, 2016). When students are learning English continuously for so many years, it is generally expected that their proficiency level should be high. Studies have, however, indicated an opposite scenario and it has been mostly found that even the students of grade 9 to grade 12 have significantly low proficiency in English (Kabir, 2012; Quadir, 2017). Many reasons behind this have been identified but one of the biggest issues found was a faulty English language education policy (Hamid, 2011). A major change in the policy came with the introduction of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the curriculum in 1995. It was then re-emphasized in the curriculum of 2012 (NCTB, 2012). But teachers did not seem to appreciate the change (Ansary, 2012; Farooqui, 2014). One of the main reasons for this lukewarm reception is identified as lack of proficiency in English for both students and teachers (Farooqui, 2014; Hamid, 2010). However, to make matters more complicated, an order was issued from the Secondary and Higher Education Division, Ministry of Education (MoEDU) Bangladesh, instructing teachers to conduct English classes entirely in English (Billah, 2017). But questions arise regarding the teachers' desire to use the language or whether students really benefit from this practice or even want to. This is where the idea of promoting L1 to teach L2 comes in, leading to the idea of using translanguaging in classrooms.

Translanguaging is an empowerment of language users as it offers a certain freedom to them to use all their known lexical and structural resources of language(s). It allows the user to defy any social and political dogmas of languagings (Otheguy et al., 2015). It is also an agency for the users to go beyond traditional principles of language-communications and to use language as a dynamic and functionally integrated system to construct knowledges (Wei, 2018). Simply put, translanguaging means the exposure to bringing together all the known linguistic resources such as words, some grammars, and paralinguistic features by a user to make communication maximum and effective (Canagarajah 2011; García, 2009, cited in Anderson, 2023). It has also been observed that translanguaging, as one of the most recent phenomena in sociolinguistics, has demonstrated itself as a very effective pedagogical approach for learning the target language in bilingual contexts where, through translanguaging, students have excelled in multiple aspects such as enhancing language learning ability and content acquisition (García, 2011).

Rafi and Morgan (2022a) conducted a study to find out the possibilities of translanguaging pedagogies at four Bangladeshi universities (two public and two private) and, through their findings, recommended promoting translingual pedagogies in tertiary level education suggesting that it increases languages and content learning ability among the students. Another study that was also

conducted on university teachers and students by Rahman and Singh (2022) reflected that using only English in the classrooms hindered the content learning and learning outcomes of the students. So, the teachers usually preferred using both Bangla and English in the classrooms. It has also been observed that many year-one university students in Bangladesh faced difficulties to cope with the English only environment and scored very poorly in the courses that required reading and writing in English (Sultana, 2014). Another case study revealed that a teacher could both convey the meaning of a complicated text and extract good responses from the students by using and allowing translanguaging, thus creating an ease in a pedagogical discourse between the teacher and the students in her classroom (Rafi & Morgan, 2022b).

From the recent studies conducted on translanguaging in the Bangladeshi context, it seems that most of the studies have been conducted on the tertiary level. So, the aspects of the higher secondary level (grade 11 and 12) seem to remain quite unexplored. Naturally, there also remains a gap in discovering higher secondary teachers' perception on practicing translanguaging in their classrooms. But even before exploring their perception, it is important to know how far the teachers are aware about the concept of translanguaging. This study has explored the issue by addressing the following questions:

1. To what extent are the Bangladeshi higher secondary level English teachers familiar with the concept of translanguaging?
2. How do they perceive this specific practice according to their level of familiarity with translanguaging?

Methodology

From the paradigmatic position, I proposed and used a new lens termed "critical post-positivism" to look into my research setting and context. This study is particularly important because besides reporting the findings, it also embarks on the journey of making the methodology of "critical post-positivism" sustainable. A brief rationale for choosing "critical post-positivism" is provided below.

There have always been claims of some bias against researchers conducting qualitative studies and often the subjectivity of a researcher has been misunderstood as bias. These misconceptualizations in many cases create obstacles to the credibility of the study (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Given the account of my biographical experience and taken into consideration the issues of bias and subjectivity, I was looking for something novel as a research paradigm. My own understanding of the teaching learning context of the higher secondary level mattered obviously, but at the same time I wanted the study to be completely free from personal intervention in the data. I prioritized solely on the process and

presented participants' opinions, as describing the social phenomenon from the participants' perspectives was my overarching goal. Riazi (2016) suggests that a constructivist approach is the usual choice in such a situation. The participants in a similar situation have the liberty to construct their own meaning of a particular phenomenon on how they have experienced it and how they have become involved in the social practice. But constructivism does not always keep the researcher at bay from becoming involved in the process of meaning-making (Mruck & Breuer, 2003). Moreover, the researcher in a qualitative research has often been labelled as the main measurement device in the study (Dörnyei & Griffee, 2010; Haverkamp, 2005; Huberman & Miles, 2002). Thus, the issue of subjectivity both from the participants and from the researchers in qualitative research is somewhat inevitable. This is where I wanted my research paradigm to be different. It was, of course, my participants' subjective opinions but for me, it was the objective truth. So, I needed to figure a way out that involves constructivism but goes beyond positivism, because the positivists believe that research must venture to determine a singular, universal truth based on only one fixed and agreed upon reality (Heigham & Croker, 2009).

Standing at a crossroads, I searched for a path that could lead me to accommodate multiple realities in my research context. But can reality be multiple? According to Riazi (2016), it can. "Post-positivism" and "Critical realism" are the options in this case. According to Riazi (2016), post-positivism liberates the truth from "only a single fact" to multiple facts and critical realism opens an independent world of social reality for a researcher. He famously puts them together by stating what it is "to work in an open system rather than a closed system, which is usually used in *(post)positivist* approaches" (p. 72). Two most influential proponents of qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest that qualitative research does not have any distinctive theory and paradigm of its own, and neither does it have a distinct set of methods and practices. That means the researcher has the liberty to decide a paradigm of his own. So, I have termed it "critical post-positivism," blending critical realism and post-positivism. Thus, through the "critical post-positivistic" lens I have tried to explore the reality" of translanguaging in the setting of higher secondary level classrooms by discovering teachers' subjective understanding of it. This pursuit of reality is thus the greater objectivity of my research.

Data Collection and Analysis

According to my research design, semi-structured interviews seemed to be the most useful method for collecting data because I needed to go deeper into the participants' own understanding about the concept of translanguaging and, according to Willis (2008), semi-structured interviews can give greater agency

to both the participants and the researcher(s) by allowing flexibility of decision making and exploring different perspectives within the research setting. At the same time, open-ended questions included in the interview protocol in a semi-structured interview gave me the opportunity to be better prepared to follow interviewees' interest and concerns to probe more into emerging areas of interest (Smith, 1995). Designing a semi-structured interview protocol also enabled me to handle any such situation if it turned out that the participants did not have clear understanding of my research interest (Heigham & Croker, 2009; Jones, 1985). So, considering all these aspects, I designed the interview protocol that could make my participants relaxed and flexible during the interview but could also allow me to keep control to properly guide the participants to elicit spontaneous opinions. Four types of questions for a well-designed semi-structured interview guide or protocol were carefully included (See Dörnyei, 2007). Dörnyei (2007) also urged that a well-designed semi-structured interview protocol must be finalized through rigorous trials and piloting. I finalized the interview schedule/protocol after three drafts and some piloting. The piloting process, most importantly, helped me to deal with "the greatest challenge in an interview – getting the interaction right; maintaining control while allowing the interview to develop as naturally as possible" (Heigham & Croker, 2009, p. 189).

After finalizing the interview protocol, it was time to choose appropriate participants. Based on the idea of purposive and convenience sampling, I chose five respondents who could allow me to incorporate diversity and inclusiveness within the very smallest set of participants. The set of participants were gender-balanced (two female, three male). It was demographically inclusive too – (a) one from a renowned English version non-government/private institution (male), (b) one from a government institution in a remote upazila (female), (c) one from an urban non-government/private college (Bangla Medium) (male), (d) one from a girls' college (female), and (e) one from a government madrasa (male). The reason behind choosing these participants from such different backgrounds was to identify if the conceptual understanding of translanguaging could vary according to their teaching contexts and their professional exposures. All the participants were interviewed online. One participant was interviewed once, and the average duration of an interview was around 60 minutes.

Regarding data analysis, thematic analysis was used. First, I transcribed the recorded data manually because this could make me better connected to the data. When the transcriptions were done, I followed the general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) to extract themes from the initially created codes. Thomas (2006) also considered this approach highly effective to extract core meanings from the

data and to establish relevance of the extractions to the research objectives. As my research objectives were to look into teachers' conceptual understanding of translanguaging, it was necessary to be open to the responses emerging from the teachers' and authentically report their opinions in my findings, so the general inductive approach was complementary to my critical post-positivistic research design where my intention was to work as an objective observer to the subjective opinions from my participants. However, while creating the themes I relied completely on the prominence and importance of ideas emerging from my data and trusted my conscious human judgement (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings and Discussion

Terminological unfamiliarity of translanguaging

Participants were asked about their conceptual understanding of translanguaging at the middle of the interview schedule. All the participants (presented here with pseudonyms) reported that they have all been practicing translanguaging in their classrooms – mixing languages in their classrooms to make the lessons more interactive and effective for the students, but the term translanguaging is quite new to them.

One of the participants Rifa, has been teaching for seven years at her present institution, a government women's college in a divisional city. Before coming here, she had worked at three other institutions in the same city for six more years. According to her, "I didn't have any idea about translanguaging before. Now I know that it's something like that switching to other words or other language or thinking that it's your own and I try to make it my own" [08:17]. Shaina is another female participant. She teaches at an upazila (sub-district) government co-education college. Before moving to this institution, she also had worked in different institutions in different places of Bangladesh. She has the experience of teaching English for nearly ten years. According to her:

> I would like to say that this word and this concept is very much new to me. The term was never used before. I have never heard of it. The term itself is new. But the idea was already there. The concept was already there. We have been using translanguaging for a long time now. But the term was never quoted before [46:50].

An almost similar opinion was found in the interview with Rifa who, when asked at one point, "Is it something like that they are practicing it but they conceptually don't know it?" replied:

> It's true. Now, I have understood that. I have discovered that actually I was practicing that in my classroom, but actually I didn't know that this term is like that translanguaging. And I think all my

> teachers especially who I know, who are very close to me, I have seen their teaching techniques and they use this type of techniques in their classroom so that the students feel comfortable with them. So maybe they know. Obviously they know what they are teaching. But we actually do it just subconsciously, never consciously. That is the essence of translanguaging, I think. Though we really don't know the term maybe, but we use that in our everyday teaching activities [20:11].

Ahmed, another participant, currently posted at a government madrasa and who had worked at both private and government colleges prior, also brought in similar opinions during the discussion. An extract from his interview follows [20:26]:

> Researcher: But is the term or the concept of translanguaging somewhat new to the teachers of Bangladesh?
>
> Ahmed: Yeah, of course. Actually, I think as a teacher of Bangladesh, we were using this translanguaging but not knowingly. But I think the teachers of Bangladesh have already used this practice.

Andrew is a teacher in an urban private college. This institution is considered as one of the best institutions in the country. Andrew had worked in two other institutions before joining his present one. His teaching career spans over thirteen years. When asked about his familiarity with the concept of translanguaging, he also had the same answer as the other participants. Andrew said, "Of course new, not new as a practice but new to me as a concept" [42:30].

Among the five participants, only one reported that he had heard about the term "translanguaging" before. This participant, Bishal, works in a renowned English medium (International Curriculum) and English version (National curriculum) school in Dhaka. He started his teaching career in 2010 and has been working at his present institution since 2016. According to him, though he had known about the term, he had never discussed this as a teaching practice with any of his colleagues before. It is only because of this interview that he was participating in an extensive discussion on translanguaging. He reiterated that the practice is not new and in his teaching career of thirteen years at different institutions, he has also been practicing translanguaging according to the context and necessity.

All the participants, at different points of their individual interviews, were more or less highlighting that they have been mixing languages in their classrooms to make the lessons more interactive and effective with the students but technically they were not quite aware that what they have been doing is indeed

a practice of translanguaging. Their opinions, in fact, reiterate the historical existence of translanguaging in social practices in the life of the people of the Indian subcontinent as Canagarajah (2011) says that there is evidence that translanguaging has been a precolonial phenomenon in this part of the world. Moreover, what the participants reflected in their opinions is actually the process of naturally occurring translanguaging where they have created the space for incorporating students' known languages together to make their classrooms more effective and participatory. As they have little or no conceptual clarity about translanguaging, they are, of course, far from any understanding of pedagogical translanguaging. This is, however, not the case for Bangladesh only but in many places across the world where a methodical approach to translanguaging in schools is yet to be developed and applied (Canagarajah, 2011).

Misrelating translanguaging to existing teaching-learning practices

Participants often called translanguaging as "a natural subconscious process of communication." What they mean is that it is quite a common and natural instinct among users to bring in different known languages together while communicating with others, and as English teachers, they have often been doing this in their classrooms. Their opinion is quite consistent with García's (2012) opinion on translanguaging being an effective and comfortable approach of bringing all known languages together as a unified linguistic repertoire in order to make communication easier. However, the lack of technical or proper conceptual knowledge of translanguaging often led the participants to believe translanguaging is similar to translating texts and/or the grammar translation method. On being asked about his own idea of translanguaging, Andrew said, "Translation is one of my favourite subjects. I did one course also in translation studies. There we see that when we go for translation, our language actually improves" [9:42]. Shaina said, "I translated the passages for them and instructed them to do the tasks that were already in the textbook" [7:51]. She did this especially when the lessons in the textbook were set in foreign contexts and students found it difficult to understand. She again said, "I've never heard of it (translanguaging) before. But I knew about the grammar translation method. That is, I think, more or less very much the same as translanguaging" [47:09]. Kabir (2019) sums up this misconception perfectly by saying that preference to translation has been found as a common practice among teachers and has been recorded as a potential way of translanguaging practices. However, what both Andrew and Shaina reflected is actually identical to the teaching-learning practice of "text interpretation" mentioned in the Indian context (See Anderson, 2020). Furthermore, none of the participants have attended any conference, seminar, or symposium on translanguaging in Bangladesh, and neither, to their

knowledge, had any of their colleagues. From a sample size of only five it is not possible to make a general statement but from the participants' teaching experiences and from their exposure to the English teaching community of Bangladesh, it would not seem quite an exaggeration to say that there has been very little to no discussion at all on the concept of translanguaging among the Bangladeshi higher secondary English teaching community.

Conclusion

The original study was about exploring teachers' perception on the practice of translanguaging in Bangladeshi higher secondary English classrooms. However, as a fragment of the original one, this study focused on the conceptual familiarity of translanguaging among the participants. The gap in understanding gap of the concept of translanguaging among the participants helped to report and refocus on the greater misconception that teachers do have the tendency to consider GTM and translanguaging as similar. Often, translation has been considered synonymous to translanguaging by the teachers. However, considering the underrepresentation of translanguaging in the global south, these misconceptions perceived by Bangladeshi pre-tertiary English teachers are not unusual. But the issue surely needs to be addressed so that the teachers do not just confine themselves to thinking of translanguaging as a mere act of using the mother language or the known language(s) together in the classrooms. Rather, they become conscious of the greater sociopolitical realities of language education. This study, thus, clearly reveals the urgency of conducting further investigations on translanguaging approaches, especially pedagogical translanguaging, in the higher secondary or the pre-tertiary level.

The biggest limitation of the study is the number of the participants as the sample size. With a sample size of five, the findings can never be generalized. However, as a qualitative research where generalizing a finding is not the sole intention, the data collection method using in-depth interviews with a sample size of five seems to be fair (Dworkin, 2012).

Based on the findings of the study, the first recommendation would be to the policymakers (in the Ministry of Education, directorate, training academies, and to institution heads) to arrange trainings, workshops, seminars, and symposiums for the teachers. If done, then the teachers can become better acquainted with the technical and conceptual knowhows of translanguaging, which can ultimately help them to improve and effectively use a teaching-learning practice that has been existent in the classroom context for years. The second recommendation is to be open and liberal in adopting translanguaging pedagogies in the national curriculum of the higher secondary level, acknowledging the southern sociopolitical realities of language education. Incorporating translanguaging

pedagogies in the curriculum would be an acknowledgement to the national identity and, at the same time, a strong statement against language weaponization and language eliticization as well (Rafi, 2023).

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Blended Supervision of Theses: Lessons and Future Directions from COVID-19 and Post-Pandemic Situation

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected the education sector in Bangladesh. Consequently, completing a successful thesis has become a great challenge for university students. As a result, the supervisors in Bangladesh are incorporating both online and face-to-face supervision sessions to help the supervisees conduct successful research. This study aims to determine the challenges, prospects, and future directions of blended supervision for students pursuing Masters degrees in English. We conducted this qualitative research using the narrative method and a purposive sampling technique. We collected the blended thesis supervision experiences of six supervisees who completed their theses during the COVID-19 pandemic and the post-pandemic situation as the primary data. The results indicated their optimism about blended supervision, as it enabled them to complete their graduation on time, save money and energy, and ensure research quality through immediate feedback. Moreover, students who hold jobs and are mothers of toddlers can benefit from blended supervision, as it alleviates their tension and passivity. However, the supervisees pointed out that Internet and electricity issues, financial problems, controlled access to the Internet, and time management can create challenges in conducting successful research. This research can be helpful for policymakers and educational bodies.

Keywords: Blended Learning (BL), blended supervision, challenges, effectiveness, COVID-19 pandemic, post-pandemic situation

Introduction

Universities have always acknowledged research supervision as a multifaceted and complicated responsibility, but the COVID-19 pandemic has made it even more complex (Singh et al., 2021). This sudden setback of regular learning forced the institutions to immediately adapt blended learning (BL), which is a combination of traditional face-to-face and online learning, to continue their students' learning progress (Shah, 2020). However, this has highlighted a real need for novel ways of conducting research supervision, especially in a post-pandemic world. Grasping this need, the concept of blended supervision, including traditional face-to-face meetings as well as online communications, provided an alternative source in response to the changing demands related to research students (Karunaratne, 2018). However, in practice, blended supervision has not been implemented much within Bangladesh (Erichsen et al., 2014) since its prospects and challenges are not defined yet.

The literature has a significant gap, necessitating urgent empirical research on integrating blended supervision into universities, particularly in the English department. Contrary to the BL experience, blended supervision is a new term in the educational field (Perez-Cabañero et al., 2021). The pandemic crisis that has led to the abrupt introduction of online or hybrid teaching and learning reflects how critically technology can be employed in pedagogical systems (Singh et al., 2021). Similarly, the absence of empirical studies on blended supervision in Bangladesh raises questions about its effectiveness and limitations (Heinze & Heinze, 2009). Hence, there is a current demand for empirical inquiry in determining the future directions of blended supervision within the Bangladeshi higher education context.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the challenges, prospects, and future directions, of blended supervision in Bangladeshi universities, particularly in the English departments, and to address the gap in the literature. The study also assesses students' perceptions of the future directions of blended supervision while working on their theses in the Master's in English program. This research makes a valuable contribution to the field of research supervision and also has practical implications in terms of improving the quality of supervision practices in the post-pandemic period. The outcome of the study informs policy, practice, and relevant stakeholders and empowers supervisors and supervisees to address the challenges associated with conducting their research effectively.

Literature Review

The literature on blended learning and blended thesis supervision acknowledges the importance of combining traditional, in-person components with online features to create an enriching educational process. Blended Learning (BL) is defined as "a mixture of both online and face-to-face learning" (Rahim, 2019, p. 1167). This approach combines elements of both traditional learning and e-learning, a variety of theories and learning styles, as well as different pedagogical strategies (Johnson, 2010; Oliver & Trigwell, 2005, p. 19). Likewise, blended supervision is also "centered on online and face-to-face sessions" that may guide students throughout the writing of their thesis manuscript (Perez-Cabañero et al., 2021, p. 9249). A common feature of a blended supervision model, although it can take many forms, is the use of face-to-face supervisory methods in combination with peer or group supervision to increase communication and collaboration (Åkesson & Thomsen, 2016).

The positive feedback from students and teachers in the studies suggests that there may be promising prospects for blended supervision. BL has positive effects in terms of motivation, flexibility, and academic achievements for students. BL delivers a wide range of benefits to students, including ways of improving their motivational ability, providing flexible learning environments, and helping boost their academic performance (Rahim, 2019). It encourages collaborative and interactive learning to develop soft skills among students and apply theoretical content to practical, real-life projects (Hasan & Ibrahim, 2017; Namyssova et al., 2019). Furthermore, BL promotes engagement, personalization, and relevance in learning, which are highly effective yet "low-risk strategies" for both teachers and learners (Kaur, 2013, p. 615). Blended supervision has similar advantages as it enables the gaining of direct experience with all the benefits (skill improvement, self-assured students, low cost) without having to work on-the-ground full-time (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2013, Hasan et al., 2018). Nonetheless, with these opportunities come challenges that must be met. There are substantial barriers to the implementation of BL, such as no proper facility or access to the required technology and resources, diversified collective interests of students, and inadequacy in teacher training (Shah, 2020). There are similar obstacles to blended supervision, like the hesitance of supervisors towards change, communication challenges, and data collection problems (Djatmika et al., 2022; Miheso-O'Connor et al., 2020). In addition, these constraints are further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed increased restrictions on some schools and limited fieldwork due to the lockdown (Dewi, 2022).

Blended supervision can be beneficial, but it necessitates considering the

aforementioned challenges, addressing them appropriately, and adapting to changes in the delivery of education. Ma and Lee (2021) found that BL also enhances student satisfaction, confidence, attention, and the development of independent as well as cooperative learning career habits (Yoon & Lee, 2010). Likewise, blended supervision improves research output, cultivates the most essential skills, and lessens the burden on supervisors (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2013). Despite the benefits of a blended approach, it is necessary to consider the logistical obstacles and constraints such a teaching approach may present.

Given the lack of active application of blended supervision in Bangladesh, it is necessary to conduct research to determine its potential effectiveness and methods. As identified in the literature review, there have been no studies conducted on blended supervision in the context of Bangladesh, which shows a gap regarding knowledge and understanding of the possibilities incorporating this method while mentoring research. This gap needs to be addressed, especially with the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, making it more imperative at a time when there is increasing demand for flexible and innovative educational alternatives. Empirical research on blended supervision in the universities of Bangladesh will provide policymakers, teachers, and supervisors with insights regarding the possible challenges hindering their operation as well as opportunities through which better outcomes can be achieved. These findings will be integrated to influence how decisions are made, institutional practices evolve, and stakeholders better understand the intricacies of academic research mentoring. Evidently, addressing this theory-practice gap within blended supervision will improve the quality of research supervision in the pursuit and fulfillment of student success across the world.

The study is based on Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Theory (1978), which vitalizes learning as a social phenomenon and an interaction with other people and the environment. Particularly for blended supervision, this theory indicates that activating prospects of collaborative engagement between supervisors and students is central to scaffolding thesis work (as cited in Åkesson & Thomsen, 2016). This is consistent with Vygotsky's ZPD, which emphasizes the importance of learning taking place under the tutelage of a more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86), which is supported within an interactive blended supervision model including online interaction as well as face-to-face interaction. Blended supervision allows collaborative learning experiences, peer interaction, and knowledge construction by combining online platforms with traditional supervisory methods (Perez-Cabañero et al., 2021, Uddin et al., 2022). Using this theory as a base, the paper looks at how Vygotsky's social constructivism theory fits in with blended supervision in Bangladesh and how that affects the

effectiveness of research mentoring.

Methodology

Student narrative as methodology

This qualitative research is accomplished using the narrative method. Moen (2006) defined narrative as a set of "significant events between the narrator and their audience" (p. 58), and if we look at narrative from the perspective of sociocultural theory, we can find a link between the context and the individual. According to Moen (2006), a dialogue shapes the stories in narrative research as they discuss the research topic. In their book, Holloway and Freshwater (2009) talked about narrative research, and they said that narrative research is a frequently used approach for conducting qualitative research and has recently become popular. They also said that adding aesthetics, creativity, and craft elements is an artistic goal of narrative research. Furthermore, Carless and Douglas (2017) defined narrative as both research and "a way of theorizing social and psychological phenomena" (p. 307). They added that the term has been used for the past two decades.

Furthermore, Aktar et al. (2022, p. 233) and Overcash (2003, p. 179) stated that "researchers use narrative research to gather and interpret people's personal experiences." Moreover, they added that narrative research does not have a questionnaire boundary, and the participants can share their own personal experiences freely. Greenhalgh and Hurwitz (1998) talked about some common features of narratives. For instance, narrative writing has a proper sequence of time (a beginning, middle, and ending) and is connected to individuals. The narrative is totally based on the personal experience and feelings of the narrator. Moreover, it can capture the interest and focus of the listeners. They added that the stories told by the narrator are somehow connected to the sociocultural atmosphere. Narrative research often depends on prevailing texts, e.g., diaries, personal letters, or autobiographies, to investigate and analyze personal experiences. As per the statement by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), "narrative inquiry involves the study of experiences as stories" (p. 20). This emphasizes that narratives themselves can be used as primary data sources, permitting investigators to draw conclusions or generalizations without the necessity of using interviews.

Squire (2008) talked about the increase in the rate of narrative research over the last two decades due to its popularity and shared some of its challenges. Squire (2008) added that narrative research does not start or end in an automatic way, and it does not have any rules, modes, or material for investigation. Moreover, it is mentioned that we are confused about certain facts: we are not sure whether to choose objectivity or the involvement of participants, whether we should

look for the stories in everyday speech, or whether we should use diaries, interviews, newspapers, or TV programs. Squire (2008) found that although narrative research can be challenging sometimes, people use it to get different layers of meaning. In this study, the theses supervisees were guided to write their narratives mainly in three areas: perceptions of blended thesis supervision, prospects of blended supervision and challenges related to blended supervision of thesis.

Sample and sampling technique

This study tried to figure out the challenges, prospects, and effectiveness of blended supervision during the post-pandemic situation from the university students (who have completed their Master's degree) of Bangladesh. This research employed a purposive sampling technique. The study was conducted on six students from three private universities who completed their Master's degree in the English department. In the post-pandemic situation, the students have completed their research by using blended supervision between 2022 and 2023. They were requested to share their ideas, and they have agreed to join in this research by sharing a written narrative about their experience of blended supervision. They were requested to share their narrative experience in around 300 words. The participants enthusiastically shared their story of blended supervision.

Data analysis

In this study, six supervisees' narratives are used. The supervisees are named Anika, Sumaiya, Maisha, Rafiz, Tahmida, and Nihan (pseudonyms).

Table 1. Demographic profile of the participants

Supervisees	Number of Face-to-Face Meetings	Number of Online Meetings	Given Time to Complete the Thesis (in Months)	Actual Time taken to Complete Research (in Months)	Number of Publications/ Conference Presentations on the Thesis
Anika	4	18	8	8	1 Publication
Sumaiya	4	8	8	8	0
Maisha	4	15	8	8	1 Publication
Rafiz	3	9	8	10	1 Presentation
Tahmida	4	9	8	9	0
Nihan	4	10	8	8	1 Publication

Table 1 shows that four out of the six supervisees could complete their theses through blended supervision within the given time frame of the institutions. Two supervisees took a little more time. Four supervisees have published or

presented at least one paper from their theses by the time this research paper was completed. Data analysis guidelines of Uddin et al. (2022) is followed to some extent.

Findings

In this study, participants were six university students who have completed their Master's in English from three private universities. All of them shared their personal experiences about their journey with blended supervision during the COVID-19 and post-pandemic situation. They talked about the challenges and prospects of blended supervision. The narratives are provided verbatim, with some editing for grammar and syntax.

Narrative by Anika

To be honest, I didn't have many difficulties with blended supervision. However, managing dates on my end was not easy at first. My supervisor was dissatisfied because he thought I had taken my research for granted, but later I managed it because of blended supervision. I found our supervisor extremely focused on his work, and he was very concerned about upholding the standard of work provided by the supervisees. He was quite strict about deadlines. As a result, I rewrote the draft several times before online submission. On-campus supervision was better for me than Internet supervision. I was able to write down and discuss important points in my notebook. My supervisor could quickly verify those points and then provide feedback.

I believe that online supervision is inferior to offline supervision. Because so many other windows remained open on both sides of Google Meet, attention was naturally distracted. The prospect of BL seems bright, especially during the pandemic. Two years of lockdown enabled students and teachers to practice and become competent at virtual learning. During my supervision in 2022, I took full advantage of blended supervision. As a service holder, I was even supervised, focusing on my flexible schedule. For me, blended supervision is a blessing; I could log in from anywhere. I could share drafts and ideas at any moment using Messenger and Gmail. I took on campus supervision, especially when I began a new chapter following corrections because not every issue can be resolved online. You must also interact with the supervisor in person. During my supervision, I took offline constructive criticism more seriously than virtual feedback.

As previously said, blended supervision is a blessing. It allows you to do whatever you want. It saves you both time and money. It is more useful for those who live far from campus or are in unavoidable situations such as a strike or pandemic. Although there are certain difficulties that should be mentioned here, our country's infrastructure may not be able to handle full-fledged blended learning.

The primary causes of this issue include power cuts, high Internet costs, a lack of computing skills, and the high cost of devices such as laptops and computers. Inaccuracy or a lack of understanding can be a problem for weak students. I would rather receive criticism in person than online. My dedication from the beginning allowed me to graduate on time. It relies on each individual's hard work and dedication. Those who help themselves will benefit through blended supervision.

Narrative by Sumaiya

Throughout the period of my research, I faced a couple of problems, and Internet access was one of them. Due to the slow Internet speed at the time, I occasionally experienced disruptions during online classes and struggled to understand my supervisor's instructions. Moreover, I was not able to access and read through some research papers related to my topic. Those papers were private and controlled by an institution or organization. Access to those articles required permission from gatekeepers. We can save time through blended thesis supervision. It also helps us avoid traffic jams and saves on transportation costs. A supervisor, on the other hand, does not need to visit the university frequently. Furthermore, in mixed thesis supervision, supervisees can develop their confidence and motivation, as well as their interactive skills. Furthermore, they also get opportunities like engagement, instant feedback, etc. A mixture of both in-person and online was very effective for me. It helped me complete my research successfully on time, even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whenever I encountered errors or encountered difficulties in my research, I promptly reached out to my supervisor, who assisted me in resolving the issues. Apart from that, I provided my supervisor with my updated work. Having reviewed it, he gave me feedback and corrected it if necessary.

Narrative by Maisha

I did not face any difficulties that are mentioned by my peers, except for the controlled access to the research field. On the Internet, even on Google Scholar, there are many articles available that need to be paid for to read further. So, I faced difficulties collecting data from past research while working on the literature review. I believe there are many opportunities for blended thesis supervision. During the pandemic, it helped a lot since blended supervision includes online sessions. It helped in distance learning by avoiding traffic jams, which ultimately saved our time. Furthermore, face-to-face supervision significantly aided us in receiving immediate feedback. In face-to-face supervision, our teacher could motivate us more, and it also increased our interactive skills. So, I think I benefited from blended thesis supervision. In my opinion, blended thesis supervision is very effective and the best way to supervise. The quality of supervision increases

with blended supervision. Teachers can give direct feedback to the students, which helps them understand better. It also helps the students graduate on time since it includes online sessions. So, if there is any emergency situation, students can easily attend the class from their home and finish their thesis on time.

Narrative by Rafiz

The first challenge I have experienced is the "lack of positive attitude" from my peers. Initially, their demotivation from the blended thesis supervision stemmed from Internet issues and the limitations of their living area. They did prefer the offline classes more than the online classes because they did not have the required devices or Internet due to financial challenges. The second problem that I have faced is a lack of electricity. Blended supervision is very convenient for both teachers and students. To get general or instant feedback, online supervision saves time, money, and energy. It will also increase the technology skills of the students. Blended supervision is an easier and more time-saving process. Online supervision also removes the tension between teacher and student communication. Sometimes students feel trouble expressing their problems to their teachers. I also felt the same way, but online supervision removes that passivity. Also, online classes can be held at any time, which would be preferable for both students and teachers, and practical work can be left for on campus. Therefore, I believe that blended learning (BL) is an essential component of thesis supervision. Blended thesis supervision is a very effective learning process. The BL process saves time. When I used to inform my supervisor that I needed some guidance, he could easily arrange an online class to guide me and give me effective feedback. If there were no BL process, I would have had to wait a week or a month to complete my thesis. This learning process also maintains the quality of learning very well. So, I think this learning process also needs to be applied to undergraduates to make their learning process better.

Narrative by Tahmida

In online classrooms, eye contact between teacher and students does not happen, and, in some cases, I had to ask the same question repeatedly as I couldn't see my supervisor's expression. A technical issue is a major fact that has happened several times to me. Moreover, I saw that some of my friends faced huge difficulties due to the technical errors, especially those who were staying out of Dhaka during the COVID-19 pandemic and in post-pandemic situations. Moreover, I was a big victim due to the electricity issue. I was preparing my assignments, and I was almost about to finish, but the electricity went off. I lost my whole effort. I was blessed to have online courses, as I am the mother of a toddler. It would be really tough if I had to go to the campus regularly. I am extremely grateful to all of my mentors; they never made me feel that I lacked anything through the

online course. I always got the chance to talk to my teacher any time I needed to.

Overall, it is a great opportunity for new mothers like me. I think blended thesis supervision is definitely a great concept. It surely makes the job easier for both the student and the supervisor. It exemplifies the beneficial use of technology. It can mend the shortcomings I faced in individual online and offline courses. The thesis work can be more convenient, as both the student and the teacher can arrange meetings according to their schedules. Overall, I must say that I would like to have this experience.

Narrative by Nihan

While I was in Dhaka, the Wi-Fi connection was available, and I didn't face many problems. But when I moved back to my hometown, I faced problems because the cellular network was not that strong. Sometimes getting a proper network and being able to attend classes was hard. I had to go to specific places to get full network access. It was particularly challenging during the monsoon season. The places that had a proper network were sometimes pooled with water, and it was hard to stay dry while using electronics. The electricity shortage was a problem as well. The electronic devices being used sometimes did not have charge and I had to borrow someone else's device.

Nonetheless, the supervisor was so helpful and gave us instant feedback online. He did his utmost to make sure we were doing well and staying up-to-date with the feedback. He was understanding of the late submission and helped us through any turbulence. I think both physical and virtual classes have their pros and cons. But in my opinion, face-to-face supervision is far better than online supervision. Of course, we had the privilege of taking supervision online. Physical classes, however, have rules and regulations. To make sure we are getting to class on time, we must be disciplined. We should consult our teachers if we encounter any issues. The humane touch of the regular classes was missing from the virtual ones. So, a blend of physical and virtual supervisions will be effective.

Discussions

Students' perceptions of the effectiveness of blended supervision

From the responses of the participants, it is clearly visible that they are optimistic about blended supervision, and according to their views, it is effective. By going through the past studies of blended learning, we can see that all the researchers have found the effectiveness of BL (Yoon and Lee, 2010; Ma and Lee, 2021; Eryilmaz, 2015; Alijani et al., 2014; Sankar et al., 2022). With the help of blended supervision, students can complete their research within the given time (Sumaiya, Maisha) and "graduate on time" (Maisha). Yoon and Lee (2010) found that BL is time-saving and useful. Maisha added that "in any emergency

situation, students can easily attend the class from their home and finish their thesis on time." Besides, the students can get the chance to correct their mistakes and clear up confusion by getting an immediate response from their supervisors (Sumaiya, Maisha, Rafij). Maisha said that by using the blended supervision technique, "teachers can give direct feedback to the students, which helps the students understand better." Sankar et al. (2022) also said that BL can be effective for getting teachers' attention and having successful interactions with teachers and peers. Moreover, Yoon and Lee (2010) mentioned that BL can help learners to be independent and help them engage in interactive learning activities. In addition, blended supervision "increases the quality of supervision" (Maisha). Similarly, Alijani et al. (2014) found that BL can increase the success rate of students.

Moreover, blended supervision can save time (Anika, Rafiz), and the supervisor can also "give different examples from online articles to make things clear" (Rafiz). In addition, "Blended supervision is a blessing, and it can save money as well" (Anika). Besides, Tahmida added that blended supervision is "a great concept, and it can make the job easier for both the student and the supervisor." Additionally, blended supervision is convenient because the teacher and the students can "arrange meetings according to their convenience" (Tahmida). Moreover, Nihan stated that "face-to-face supervision is far better than online supervision" due to the rules and regulations, "determination of doing good," time-bound classes, teacher-student interaction, and "humane touch," but there is also the privilege of doing online classes. Overall, the participants agreed that blended supervision was helpful for them to complete their research effectively. However, a student should be dedicated and hardworking, and only then can blended supervision help them to complete their research properly (Anika).

Prospects of blended supervision

All six participants were positive about the blended way of supervision while doing their research in a post-pandemic situation. Among all the participants, four of them said that blended supervision can save time (Anika, Sumaiya, Maisha, Rafiz). According to Anika, blended supervision can be beneficial for working people because of the "flexible schedule" which match Kaur (2013) and Rahim (2019). Rahim (2019) also stated how the blended way of learning can be flexible, and Kaur (2013) discussed how blended supervision can ensure flexibility for both teachers and supervisees. Moreover, Rafiz responded that "blended supervision is an easier and more time-saving process." Rafiz also added that "online supervision saved not just time, but also fuel cost." Additionally, Tahmida stated that blended supervision is helpful for the "mother of a toddler" and that "it would be really tough if I had to go to the campus

regularly." Similarly, Anika added that "blended supervision is a blessing" for a service holder student as it gives flexibility in choosing the time and place for supervision (online or face-to-face), and online supervision can save time and face-to-face supervision can help in correcting mistakes.

In addition, some of the participants responded that they got instant feedback from their supervisor by using the blended method of supervision (Sumaiya, Maisha, Tahmida, Nihan). Sumaiya also said that "the supervisor does not need to go to the university frequently" to give instant feedback through blended supervision. Similarly, it is found that face-to-face supervision is "more engaging" (Sumaiya), and the students feel motivated and their interactive skills get upgraded (Maisha). It also matches the previous study of Rahim (2019) and Rahman et al. (2020), who discovered that blended supervision can be motivating and can develop students' skills. Moreover, "online supervision removes passivity as well as tension between teacher and students' communication" and helps the students express themselves freely (Rafiz). On the other hand, online supervision can "help a student in distance learning" (Maisha), "save transportation costs" (Sumaiya) and energy, and "increase the skill of technology in the students" (Rafiz). Similarly, Donnelly and Fitzmaurice (2013) added that blended supervision is more cost-effective, which matches our research outcome. Supervisees can work independently when they are supported in blended supervision approach which reflects Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). It can also be interpreted that the supervisees co-constructed research skills and knowledge when learning took place both online and offline mode, in a blended learning approach.

However, outcomes of some research do not align with our findings. For example, Emelyanova and Voronina (2017) and Hasan and Ibrahim (2017) argue that online learning is more convenient because of the rich, accessible contents and because it makes the students more engaged, self-directed, and independent. Similarly, Donnelly and Fitzmaurice (2013) noted that in face-to-face supervision, students feel anxious to show their unfinished work, and the academic schedule deprives the supervisor of time to provide for the supervisees. Besides, Mali and Lim (2021) found that students prefer face-to-face learning to blended learning. The students only accepted blended learning during the COVID-19 and post-pandemic periods. The results of these researchers differed because their area of work did not concern the Bangladeshi context, having done their research based on different situations.

Challenges of blended supervision

Although blended supervision has received positive responses from the participants, there are some challenges as well. Most of the participants mentioned

that they have faced Internet issues during the online sessions (Sumaiya, Rafiz, Nihan). Nihan mentioned that when she moved back to her hometown, she faced problems due to the "poor cellular network." The result matched with Shah (2020) and Djatmika et al. (2022). Shah (2020) also mentioned lack of Internet access as a challenge in incorporating blended learning. Similarly, Djatmika et al. (2022) found that poor Internet signal can create problems in conducting online classes. Additionally, the participants encountered issues with the electricity (Nihan, Tahmida, Rafiz). Nihan narrated that sometimes the electronic devices used to be out of charge and she "had to borrow someone else's device." Moreover, Sumaiya and Maisha responded that they faced problems due to the "controlled access of research fields." Sumaiya added that "the related articles were private and was asking for the gatekeeper's permission." Hasan et al. (2018) and Pardede and Purnamasari (2021) also pointed out that controlled access of research fields presented a great challenge to research. Besides, Djatmika et al. (2022) mentioned that the data collection process is challenging for the students and, as a result, they lose motivation.

The participants also mentioned other challenges. Anika said that "managing dates was not that easy at first, and my supervisor was dissatisfied because he thought I had taken my research for granted." Anika also added that "online supervision is inferior to offline supervision" and that online classes can be distracting because "other windows can remain open on both sides along with Google Meet." Additionally, Rafiz added that there was a lack of positive attitude among peers, and "they did prefer the offline classes more than the online classes because of not having the applicable devices and Internet due to financial challenges." Shah (2020) also mentioned how a lack of positive attitude can be a hurdle for blended learning. Besides, in online supervision, "eye contact between teacher and students does not happen," and the students cannot see the expression of the supervisor (Tahmida). A similar result was found by Djatmika et al. (2022) and Pardede and Purnamasari (2021). They pointed out that effective communication does not happen on an online platform.

By going through the previous research, we can see that the findings of this study match some of the previous research on similar topics. However, our research failed to uncover some other challenges that other researchers encountered during their research. For example, Shah (2020) found that blended learning can be challenging if there is a lack of access to an e-library, free Internet and e-materials, well-trained teachers, and policies and supervision. Similarly, Bwire and Mwangis (2020) observed that the supervisors were reluctant to use blended supervision due to a lack of self-efficacy. Pardede and Purnamasari (2021) pointed out that supervisors' work load and unspecified roles can create

issues in conducting research. Moreover, Djatmika et al. (2022) and Hasan et al. (2020) pointed out that the transition from offline to online platforms can be challenging to adopt.

Future directions

This study found out the prospects, challenges, and effectiveness of blended supervision from the personal experiences of some university students who have completed their theses during the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic situations. Blended supervision is helpful for the supervisors and supervisees because it saves time, money, and energy. Moreover, due to the flexible time schedule, mothers of toddlers, working people, supervisees, and supervisors greatly benefit. Additionally, supervisors can give instant feedback to the students, and the students can get the opportunity to work on it immediately and address their errors. Besides, BL is engaging, students feel greatly motivated, and it removes passivity and tension between teachers and students. In addition, students can express themselves freely during blended supervision as well as save time by avoiding traffic jams during commutes.

However, blended supervision can be challenging. Poor cellular networks, controlled access to research fields or materials, electricity problems, a lack of positive attitude among peers due to poor Internet and financial issues, and so on can create problems for the supervisees. Additionally, students who work and study simultaneously can face problems managing dates due to their busy schedules. Moreover, in online supervision, students can be distracted because of the multiple tabs open on their computers, unlike in offline classes. Besides, in online sessions, eye contact does not occur, which can create issues.

Blended supervision is effective for students as it helps them complete their research on time by incorporating both offline and online platforms, and allowing flexibility with time. Additionally, it improves the quality of the research and helps the students graduate on time. Besides, blended supervision helps the students receive immediate responses from their teachers, clears their confusion, and helps them improve their writing. Moreover, it can save money and energy, and improves the quality of supervision. Thus, blended supervision is a great concept that can make the job easier for both supervisors and supervisees. This study will be helpful for supervisors, students, and policymakers. As it is a unique research topic, it can add great value to the education system. Policymakers can learn about the effectiveness of blended supervision, and incorporate it by addressing the challenges that have emerged from this study.

Limitations of the study

Firstly, there is a need to conduct research on different private and public

universities for better understanding. Secondly, the participants were chosen by personal network, and there were only six participants in this research. Due to the small sample size, the information was limited. As a result, there is a need to conduct research on a larger scale. Thirdly, there was limited access to online articles. As it is a new topic in the Bangladeshi context, materials are not available based on Bangladesh, and supporting material had to be taken from the contexts of other countries. Finally, contextual factors need to be considered while applying the findings to any other context.

Conclusion

The study showed that blended supervision of theses is effective for university students in Bangladesh. It is useful as it integrates the positive aspects of both online and face-to-face supervision. It can be convenient for saving time, money, and energy. Moreover, working people and mothers of toddlers can continue their studies with the help of blended supervision. Additionally, it can be advantageous for the supervisors and supervisees because the supervisors have the opportunity to give instant feedback, and the supervisees can correct their mistakes immediately. Moreover, the supervisees feel more engaged, expressive, and motivated, and their passivity and tension are reduced because of blended supervision. In addition, blended supervision offers flexibility of time, helps to complete research and graduation on time, increases the quality of supervision, and so on. However, blended supervision can be staggering in consequence of a poor network, controlled access to the research field, lack of electricity, paucity of positive attitudes among peers, financial issues, etc. Moreover, supervisees can face trouble managing dates and get distracted during online supervision because of other tabs on the window.

Although blended supervision has its pros and cons, it has received positive feedback from the supervisees, and it should be implemented officially in Bangladesh. This research will be a pioneer for researchers who want to explore blended supervision in Bangladesh. In the future, research can be conducted on blended supervision more elaborately by including students of both private and public universities. Other researchers can also conduct comparative studies between face-to-face supervision and blended supervision. A methodological change in the design can also give new insights about blended thesis supervision. Thus, this study will be beneficial for policymakers, educational bodies, supervisors, and supervisees.

Ethical Statement

All participants gave their consent and were assured about the ethical considerations such as confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation, which were all maintained throughout the study.

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Cross-linguistic Phonological Transfer: The Influence of L1 Vowel Contrasts on L2 Tense-lax Vowel Acquisition

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Abstract

The perception and acquisition of non-native tense and lax vowel contrasts have been the subject of extensive research (Bustos et al., 2023; Chang, 2023; Fabra & Romero, 2012; Lai, 2010). Previous studies have highlighted various factors influencing the perception of these contrasts, such as linguistic background, exposure to the target language, and individual phonetic training (Casillas, 2015; Souza et al., 2017; Chang & Weng, 2012). However, there has been limited investigation into whether speakers can transfer discrimination abilities from the vowel contrasts in their first language (L1) to novel contrasts in a second language (L2) that differ in specific phonetic features. Focusing on this inquiry, the present research examines whether native speakers of Bangla, a language with tense/lax contrasts limited to mid vowels, can extrapolate this ability to discriminate tense/lax contrasts among high vowels in English, a language with tense/lax contrasts among both mid and high vowels. Through a forced-choice identification task involving English minimal pairs, data were collected from 43 adult Bangla speakers who had learned L2 English. Contrary to expectations, results indicated that these speakers were unable to effectively distinguish between tense and lax high vowels in English, suggesting that the presence of a similar contrast in L1 does not necessarily facilitate the acquisition of comparable distinctions in L2 across different vowel groups. Implications of the results for non-native vowel acquisition and the pedagogy of English language teaching to Bangla speakers are discussed.

Keywords: vowel acquisition, phonology, tense-lax vowel contrasts

Introduction

The ability to perceive and produce tense-lax vowel contrasts in a non-native language (L2) has been a matter of significant interest among linguists in recent years. Numerous studies (Bustos et al., 2023; Casillas, 2015; Chang, 2023; Chang & Weng, 2012; Fabra & Romero, 2012; Lai, 2010) have investigated the influence of the factors on the successful perception of these contrasts. Some of these factors include the size of the first language (L1) vowel inventory (Souza et al., 2017), the age at which L2 learning begins (Casillas, 2015; Chang & Weng, 2012), the extent of exposure to the relevant L2 contrasts, and the reliance on temporal versus spectral features for vowel discrimination (Gao et al., 2019). Additionally, the clarity of speech has been shown to impact learners' ability to differentiate between tense and lax vowels (Redmon et al., 2020).

The challenges L2 learners face when learning non-native vowel contrasts have been explained using many different models of L2 sound perception and production in the past few decades, particularly with the seminal works by Best (1993, 1995), Flege (1995, 2002), Kuhl (1991, 1992), Tyler et al. (2014), and so on. A prevailing assertion across these studies is the challenge language speakers face in perceiving or producing non-native speech sounds that lack acoustic similarity to any segment within their native language repertoire. For instance, Best's Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM) (1993, 1995) suggests that non-native sounds closely resembling native linguistic sounds are likely to be assimilated and mapped onto existing native language categories. Conversely, non-native sounds with no clear native counterparts might be deemed "uncategorized," perceived as non-linguistic noises. Similarly, Flege's Speech Learning Model (SLM) (1995, 2002) argues that the acquisition of a non-native sound is particularly challenging when it does not resemble any existing native sound category.

Many theories and models of second language (L2) acquisition focus on how knowledge of individual sound categories from a first language (L1) transfers to and facilitates the acquisition of L2 sounds. However, a less explored dimension of this transfer is the extent to which specific phonological contrasts in L1, such as tense-lax vowel contrasts, aid in acquiring comparable contrasts in L2. The pertinent question is whether familiarity with tense-lax vowel contrasts in one's native language supports the learning of similar or different tense-lax contrasts in L2 vowels. Theoretically, understanding tense-lax contrasts among high vowels in L1 should promote the successful perception and acquisition of analogous tense-lax contrasts in L2 high vowels. This premise is expected to hold true for contrasts across other regions of the vowel space as well (cf. Casillas, 2015; Souza et al. 2017).

A more nuanced question concerns how speakers manage L2 tense-lax contrasts located in a different area of the vowel space compared to those in their L1. Specifically, does an L1 tense-lax contrast among mid vowels aid in perceiving tense-lax contrasts among high vowels in L2, or the reverse? Here, speakers possessing phonological knowledge of a tense-lax contrast are faced with the challenge of applying this knowledge to learn tense-lax contrasts in a new vowel space area in L2. If this phonological knowledge of the tense-lax contrast is transferable, one would expect speakers to exhibit high success in distinguishing tense-lax vowels in the targeted L2. Conversely, if this knowledge proves difficult to transfer, or if speakers typically favor phonetic knowledge transfer over phonological, a lower discrimination success rate may be observed. In other words, a high rate of success in discriminating novel L2 tense-lax contrasts in such contexts could signify that phonological knowledge of L1 tense-lax contrasts is a readily transferable linguistic construct, whereas low discrimination success may be interpreted as evidence of low transferability of such phonological constructs in L2 learning context.

With the above theoretical underpinnings under consideration, this study investigated the transferability of the phonological knowledge of L1 tense-lax vowel contrasts in novel L2 tense-lax contrasts. More specifically, we tested how transferable knowledge of L1 tense-lax contrast in mid vowels is transferable to an L2 tense-lax contrast in high vowels. As a test case, we obtained data from native speakers of Bangla, a language characterized by tense-lax contrasts among mid vowels (/e-ɛ/ and /o-ɔ/) but not high vowels. For the L2, we chose to use American English, which features tense-lax contrasts across both mid and high vowels (/i-ɪ/, /u-ʊ/, /e-ɛ/, and /o-ɔ/). Bangla speakers, therefore, possess phonological knowledge of tense-lax contrasts limited to mid vowels without analogous experience for high vowels within their L1. When confronted with American English's tense-lax distinctions among high vowels (/i-ɪ/ and /u-ʊ/), two outcomes emerge as possibilities. The first is that existing phonological knowledge of mid vowel contrasts may aid the perception of tense-lax distinctions in English high vowels. Alternatively, the specific phonological understanding of tense-lax contrasts in L1 may not extend to non-native vowel contrasts, leading to diminished performance by Bangla speakers in tasks requiring discrimination between English high tense and lax vowels.

Background

Tense-lax contrasts in Bangla

The vowel system in Bangla consists of seven vowels that are symmetrically distributed across categories of height: two high vowels, four mid-vowels, and one low vowel. Phonetically, these vowels are classified into four height

categories: High, High-mid, Low-mid, and Low. A visual representation of this vowel distribution, based on the phonetic features described by Morshed (1972) and Thompson (2012), is provided in Figure 1. Additionally, certain vowels in the Bangla language have nasalized forms, which introduce phonological contrasts, a phenomenon documented by researchers including Islam (2018), Islam and Ahmed (2020), and Shamim (2011). Interestingly, while Bangla orthography distinguishes vowel symbols based on length, such as short-i versus long-i (which often happens to be associated with tense-lax contrasts as well), no such evidence of these length contrasts affect the spoken language has been reported (cf. Hai, 1985; Kostic & Das, 1972; Thompson, 2012).

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
High-mid	e		o
Low-mid	æ		ɔ

(a) Morshed 1972, p. 24

	front		mid			back	
high	i						u
high mid		e				o	
low mid			æ		ɔ		
low				a			

(b) Thompson 2012, p. 23

Figure 1: Bangla vowel inventory

It can be noted that /æ/ has been described as a "low-mid" vowel in the literature and not as a low vowel, as it is traditionally described in many phonetics and phonology literature in other languages. This description is actually consistent with the reported acoustic features of the vowels as well. Acoustic descriptions of Bangla vowels have shown that [æ] tends to behave F1 (first formant frequency) values similar to [ɔ] and a lower F1 value than the low vowel [a] (cf. Alam et al., 2008; Islam & Ahmed, 2020). Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the vowel positions in an acoustic space.

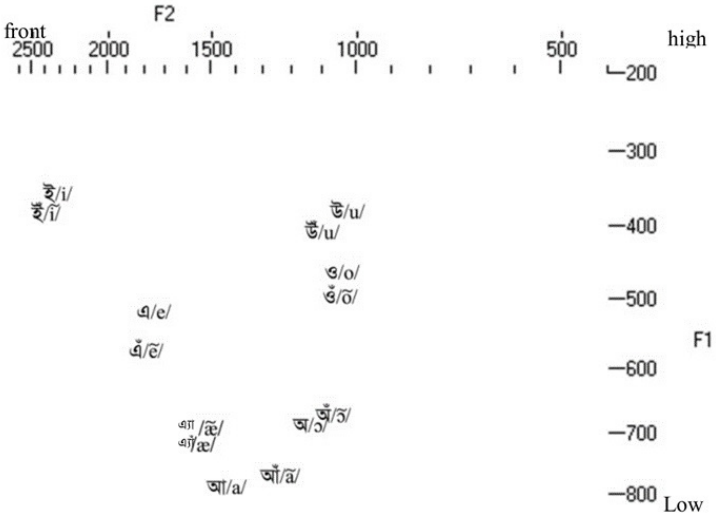

Figure 2: Bangla vowel acoustics (Alam et al., 2008, p. 9)

In the study of Bangla phonology, distinctions between the pairs of front and back mid vowels have been analyzed using [±ATR] feature (cf. Islam et al. 2023; Islam et al., 2023; Shamim 2011). This approach differentiates vowels based on their tongue root position, with the [+ATR] feature denoting tense vowels and the [-ATR] feature indicating lax vowels, following traditional phonological frameworks (Zsiga, 2013). Table 1 presents a feature chart for Bangla vowels, after Shamim (2011). It is to be noted that Shamim (2011) uses /ɛ/, instead of /æ/ to describe the low-mid front vowel in the inventory. This choice aligns with the phonetic descriptions of similar vowels in other languages, favoring /ɛ/ for its widespread usage in denoting a lax counterpart to the vowel /e/ (cf. Zsiga, 2013). Consequently, in Bangla, the mid vowels /e/ and /o/ are categorized as [+ATR] (tense), whereas /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ serve as their [-ATR] (lax) counterparts, ensuring a coherent classification consistent with conventional phonological practices. Note that the parenthesis around some signs have been added by the current authors to indicate those features are redundant to the concerned vowel. Besides distinguishing the mid vowels from each other, the tense-lax features have been described to actively participate in phonological processes, including metaphony, in Bangla (Shamim, 2011).

Table 1. Phonological features of Bangla vowels (Shamim, 2011: 8)

	i	e	ɛ	u	o	ɔ	a
high	+	-	-	+	-	-	-
low	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
ATR	(+)	+	-	(+)	+	-	(-)
round	-	-	-	+	+	+	-
back	-	-	-	+	+	+	+

Tense-lax contrasts in American English

The vowel inventory of American English is commonly identified to encompass 11 distinct vowels (excluding phonological diphthongs and schwa), as illustrated in Figure 3. Phonetically, these vowels are categorized based on height, backness, and rounding. However, from a phonological standpoint, they are delineated through five primary distinctive features. Table 2 outlines these features, offering a comprehensive representation of the vowels in terms of their phonological attributes. Notably, the Advanced Tongue Root (ATR), or tenseness feature, is not uniformly applicable across all 11 vowels. Specifically, only 8 vowels necessitate the ATR feature for accurate classification (instances marked by a minus sign within parentheses in the feature table indicate cases where this feature is deemed unnecessary or redundant). Therefore, the phonological contrasts significantly influenced by the [ATR] feature are /i-ɪ/, /u-ʊ/, /e-ɛ/, and /o-ɔ/. Among these, the high vowel contrasts of /i-ɪ/ and /u-ʊ/ are absent in the L1 vowel inventory of Bangla speakers, highlighting a gap in their native phonological system. Conversely, the mid-vowel contrasts of /e-ɛ/ and /o-ɔ/ bear a closer resemblance to the tense and lax distinctions present in Bangla, suggesting a parallel in the distribution of mid-vowel contrasts between the two languages.

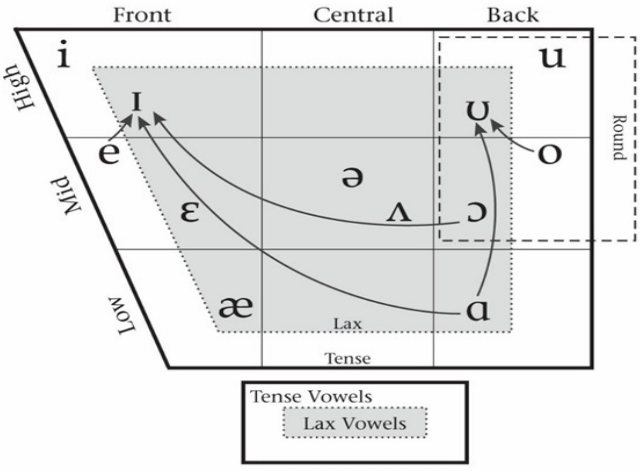

Figure 3: Vowels in General American English (Dawson et al., 2016, p. 57)

Table 2. Distinctive features of American English vowels (after, Zsiga, 2013 and Hayes, 2009)

	i	ɪ	e	ɛ	æ	u	ʊ	o	ɔ	ʌ	ɑ
high	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-
low	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+
ATR	+	-	+	-	(-)	+	-	+	-	(-)	(-)
round	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	-
back	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+

The following summary table provides a comparison between the tense-lax contrasts available in Bangla and American English.

Table 3. Tense-lax contrasts available in Bangla and American English

Contrast	American English	Bangla
/i/ vs /ɪ/	yes	no
/e/ vs /ɛ/	yes	yes
/o/ vs /ɔ/	yes	yes
/u/ vs /ʊ/	yes	no

Perception of non-native tense/lax contrasts

Numerous studies have examined how non-native speakers perceive tense and lax vowel contrasts, focusing primarily on English as the target language, including its British, American, and Australian varieties. The range of first languages (L1) studied is relatively limited; most research has involved Mandarin speakers, followed by Spanish, with fewer studies including speakers of Italian, Polish, Danish, and Russian. This section evaluates the outcomes of these studies, specifically assessing whether participants can successfully discriminate between English tense and lax vowels and whether their native language includes a similar tense/lax contrast.

Numerous studies have documented the challenges Mandarin speakers face in distinguishing between English tense and lax vowel contrasts. This difficulty is potentially attributed to the fact that Mandarin does not include a tense/lax distinction in its vowel inventory. Gao et al. (2019) specifically explored how native Mandarin speakers perceived tense and lax vowels in German as their second language (L2). The results indicated that these learners struggled to differentiate these vowel contrasts. Similarly, Lai (2010) investigated Mandarin speakers' ability to discern English tense/lax sounds using a perception task, finding that participants were generally unsuccessful in distinguishing between English vowel pairs.

Redmon et al. (2020) analyzed the impact of clear speech on the ability of Mandarin speakers to integrate auditory and visual cues for English tense-lax distinctions. They found that clear speech improved the recognition of tense vowels (/i, ɑ, u/) across different modalities. However, lax vowels (/ɪ, ʌ, ʊ/) presented a disadvantage in visual-only settings, and this disadvantage was

more pronounced in audio-visual presentations for Mandarin speakers, with no significant differences noted in purely auditory presentations. Chang and Weng (2012) also studied Mandarin speakers learning the tense/lax distinction in Canadian English, focusing on vowel production. Their findings also indicated difficulties in accurately producing these contrasts.

Not all studies report difficulties in distinguishing non-native tense/lax vowel distinctions. Zaorska (2015) investigated speakers of Polish, Italian, and Spanish—languages without a tense/lax contrast—on their ability to distinguish Australian English tense/lax distinctions. Participants, all residing in Australia, were tested on three contrasts: /oː/ vs. /ɔ/ (caught - cot), /iː/ vs. /ɪ/ (leave – live), and /ɐː/ vs. /ɐ/ (Bart - but). The findings showed they were successful in distinguishing these contrasts, and participants employed different strategies based on their language backgrounds. The study also found that higher education levels enhanced the ability to discriminate these sounds, while the duration of residence in Australia did not have a significant impact.

Beyond Mandarin and Spanish, Kim (2012) studied Korean speakers, whose native language lacks tense/lax vowel distinctions. He investigated whether Korean learners could discriminate American English tense/lax vowel contrasts using the Categorical Discrimination Test. The findings revealed that Korean learners scored below 0.5 for both /i/-/ɪ/ and /u/-/ʊ/ distinctions, indicating a significant deficiency in their sensitivity to these contrasts. This suggests perceptual insensitivity to English tense/lax differences, as the learners struggled to recognize essential qualities in vowel formants.

Souza et al. (2017) conducted a broader study involving Danish, Portuguese, Catalan, and Russian speakers to determine whether the size of the L1 vowel inventory affects L2 vowel perception. Their results support the hypothesis that similarities between the L1 and L2 vowel inventories facilitate L2 learning. The study, which focused on American English, a language with distinct tense/lax features, found that among the participants, only those from Danish backgrounds showed native-like vowel perception in a forced-choice identification task. This success is attributed to the presence of tense/lax distinctions in Danish vowel space, a feature absent in the other three languages, leading to their participants' difficulties with tense/lax vowel distinctions.

As seen in the review above, the ability of non-native speakers to discern tense and lax vowel contrasts in a second language (L2) can be significantly influenced by the phonological features of their first language (L1). Studies reveal that when the L1 includes similar phonetic distinctions, as seen with Danish speakers, learners are better able to identify these contrasts in English, underscoring the

advantage of having a phonologically aligned L1 inventory. Conversely, speakers of Mandarin and Korean, languages that lack tense/lax distinctions, encounter greater challenges in discriminating these contrasts in English. Interestingly, despite the absence of these distinctions in Spanish, Spanish speakers show a relatively higher success rate, suggesting that factors beyond direct phonological correspondence, such as broader phonological awareness or intensive language exposure, play a critical role in L2 phonetic learning. This highlights the complexity of language acquisition and suggests that successful discrimination of L2 sounds is not solely dependent on L1 inventory similarities but also on the extent of exposure to the target language and potentially other linguistic or cognitive factors. Therefore, understanding the specific phonological background of learners can help tailor language instruction to better meet their learning needs.

The synthesis of findings on the perception of tense and lax vowel contrasts among various first language (L1) backgrounds highlights the need to expand research to encompass a more diverse range of L1 contexts. Presently, the majority of studies concentrate on a limited selection of languages, which may not fully represent the vast diversity of global phonological systems. By incorporating data from a wider array of L1 backgrounds, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how specific phonological features impact second language (L2) acquisition. To further explore this area, the current study focuses on Bangla speakers, whose language features tense-lax contrasts among mid vowels but not high vowels. This research aims to determine if having an L1 background that includes certain tense-lax contrasts aids in the acquisition of English tense and lax vowels among high vowels, thus contributing to broader insights into how L1 characteristics facilitate L2 vowel learning.

Method

The ability to perceive the differences between tense and lax vowels in American English by native speakers of Bangla was tested via a 2-alternative forced choice (2AFC) task. This section provides the details of the data collection method.

Participants

Perception data were gathered from 43 adult Bangla native speakers (the Bangladeshi dialect), comprising 15 women and 28 men. The participants were recruited through convenience sampling, utilizing social networks and personal contacts. All had learned English in academic settings and spoke it as a second language. None of the participants reported impaired hearing abilities. Participation was entirely voluntary, with no monetary compensation provided.

Stimuli

The experiment utilized 18 minimal pairs as stimuli, specifically focusing on the /i/ vs. /ɪ/ contrast through 12 pairs (e.g., "Beat" vs. "Bit") and the /u/ vs. /ʊ/ contrast with 6 pairs (e.g., "Pool" vs. "Pull"). All stimuli were monosyllabic cVc words, with the target vowel flanked by consonants, ensuring they were real English words. An adult female native speaker of American English from Minnesota, USA, recorded these words. The recordings were made as isolated words using a Zoom H4n Pro recorder, capturing the audio at a 44.1 kHz sampling rate and 16-bit quantization. The audio clips were then intensity-normalized utilizing Praat software (Boersma & Weenink, 2024).

Procedure

The experiment commenced with verbal instructions provided to the participants, who then gave their explicit consent to take part in the study. Following this, they received an online link to the experiment that was written and administered using PsyToolkit (Stoet, 2010; Stoet, 2017). The initial phase involved collecting basic demographic information, such as age, gender, and the region of Bangladesh where the participant was raised. Subsequently, participants were briefed on the experiment's expectations and procedures. They initiated the main experiment by pressing the space bar on their keyboard, beginning with a practice session of 10 trials to familiarize themselves with the task. Participants were restricted to completing the experiment only on a computer with a physical keyboard (with no option to run the experiment on tablets or phones).

During each trial, participants were presented with an auditory stimulus (a single word containing either a tense or lax vowel) while two written options were displayed on the computer screen. For instance, upon hearing "Beat," the screen would show the options "Beat" and "Bit" as two separate buttons on the screen, accompanied by the question "Which word did you hear?" Participants responded by pressing "A" for the option on the left or "L" for the right. Figure 4 illustrates a sample trial screen.

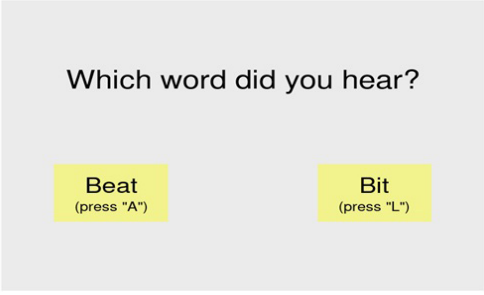

Figure 4: An example screen during a trial

Thus, in each trial, participants encountered an auditory stimulus consisting of a single word, alongside two visually presented words that constituted a minimal pair. To mitigate any biases stemming from the spatial arrangement of these options, the positioning of each word within the minimal pair was systematically alternated across trials. For instance, if in one trial the word "Beat" was heard and displayed on the left side of the screen (with "Bit" on the right), in a subsequent trial the arrangement would be switched, even if "Beat" was the auditory stimulus again. Participants had a 5000 millisecond (ms) window to respond to each trial, after which the experiment automatically advanced to the next trial.

Data processing

From the initial 43 participants, data from 7 were excluded due to their incomplete participation in the experiment. This led to the inclusion of responses from 36 participants (23 men and 13 women) in the analysis. For each of these participants, the ratio of correct responses to the total number of trials was calculated. This served as an indicator of their proficiency in accurately distinguishing between tense and lax vowel sounds. These ratios were then analyzed to uncover any significant trends.

Results

This section reports the results of the 2AFC perception experiment run in this study. We report the results of the high front and high back vowels separately as they are distinct pairs with tense and lax vowel pairs.

Front vowels

Figure 5 displays the distribution of correct response ratios for the 36 participants involved in the study. Responses are categorized on the X-axis as either pertaining to a tense or lax vowel within the auditory stimulus, with the Y-axis representing the proportion of accurate identifications. The notches around the median signify the 95% confidence interval for the median.

As indicated by Figure 5, the medians for both tense and lax vowel groups slightly exceeded the 50% mark (0.50 on the Y-axis). However, the spread between the first and third quartiles for both groups did not surpass the chance level, which is 0.50 in this case. Given that participants had a binary choice, a response rate aligning with chance would not significantly deviate from a ratio of 0.50 (or 50%). This suggests that, should participants be merely guessing, the central tendency of the distribution would consistently align near the 0.50 mark, implying an absence of significant underlying linguistic (perceptual) knowledge driving their responses. To statistically assess whether the mean values for either group (tense or lax) significantly differed from chance level performance, two

separate one-sample independent samples t-tests (two-tailed) were conducted, setting the mean (*mu*) at 0.50.

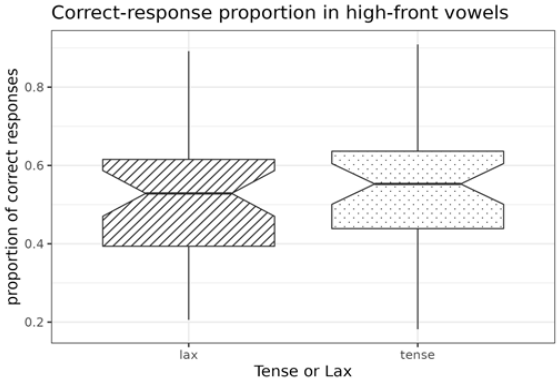

Figure 5: Distribution of correct-response ratio for all the participants (front vowels)

The One-sample t-tests showed that the mean values did not significantly deviate from 0.50, the level of chance. For the tense vowel group [Mean = 0.53, St. dev. = 0.17], the p-value was 0.217 (t(35) = 1.26), and for the lax vowel group [Mean = 0.52, St. dev. = 0.18], the p-value was 0.541 (t(35) = 0.62). These findings suggest that there is not sufficient evidence to assert that participants could discern the tense vowels from the lax vowels in the identification task. Consequently, it appears that participants were not consistently successful in distinguishing between tense and lax front vowels in English. These findings were consistent with both genders, as shown in Figure 6. We also investigated whether speakers tend to be better at identifying one of these two categories over the other. Since the data samples are paired per subject, we ran a two-samples paired t-test to examine whether the means of the tense and lax categories were significantly different. Results revealed no significant difference (t = 0.46, df = 35, p-value = 0.650) in the ratio of correct responses.

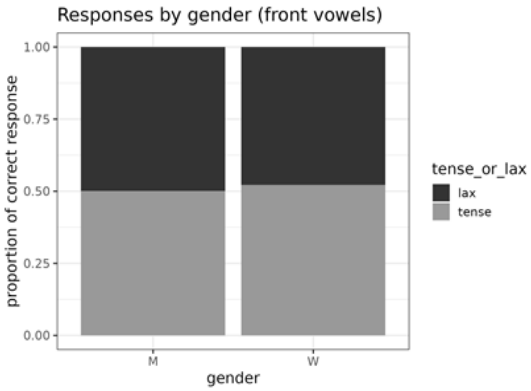

Figure 6: Ratio of correct responses for high vowels across men and women

Back vowels

The analysis of back vowels, employing the same methods as those used for the front vowels, produced analogous results; participants were not reliably able to distinguish between tense and lax vowels audibly. Figure 7 showcases the data distribution and summary. The figure reveals significant overlap in the interquartile ranges for both tense and lax vowel categories. The median and mean for the lax category closely approached the 0.50 chance level, with the confidence interval for the median encompassing this chance level. Conversely, the tense category's median notably differed from the chance level, as the 95% confidence interval for the median did not encompass 0.50, suggesting a potential distinction from the chance level. However, the mean for the tense category was nearer to the chance level than its median.

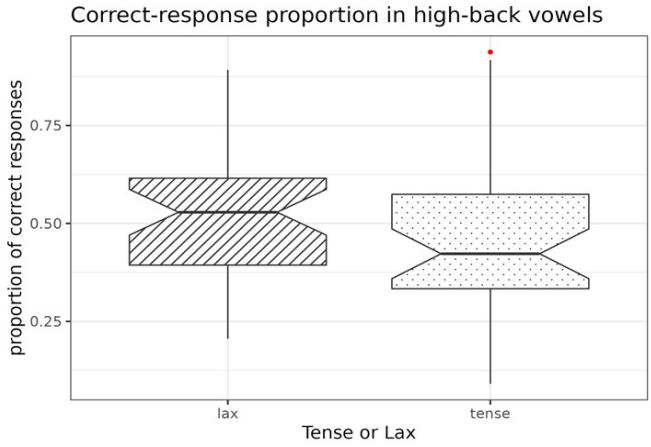

Figure 7: Distribution of correct-response ratio for all the participants (back vowels)

One-sample t-tests showed that the mean values did not significantly deviate from 0.50, the level of chance. For the tense vowel group [Mean = 0.45, St. dev. = 0.20], the p-value was 0.173 (t(35) = -1.39), and for the lax vowel group [Mean = 0.52, St. dev. = 0.18], the p-value was 0.541 (t(35) = 0.62). These findings, again, were consistent with both genders, as shown in Figure 8. As for front vowels, we also investigated whether speakers tend to be better at identifying one of these two categories. To test this, we ran a two-samples paired t-test to examine whether the means of the tense and lax categories were significantly different. Results revealed no significant difference (t = -1.74, df = 35, p-value = 0.091) in ratio of correct responses.

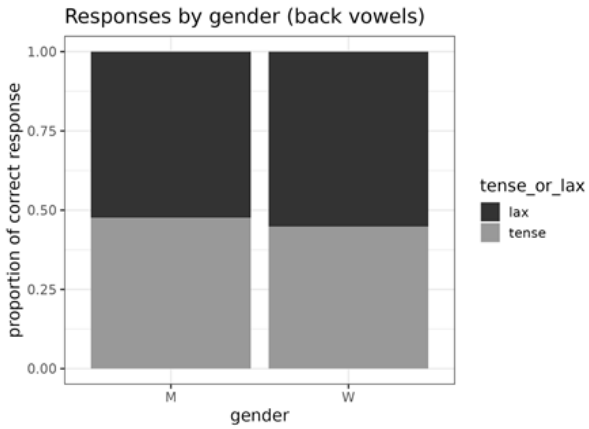

Figure 8: Ratio of correct responses for back vowels across men and women

Inter-speaker variation

In addition to the general patterns in the data, we also investigated variations among participants regarding their response accuracy for tense versus lax vowels, aiming to discern if participants generally exhibited better performance for one class of sounds over the other. Figures 9 and 10 display the accuracy scores of individual participants for both tense and lax vowels, concerning high and back vowel contrasts, respectively. In these figures, the X-axis lists the participants, while the Y-axis denotes their accuracy scores as ratio values, with tense and lax categories distinguished by black and grey colors, respectively. These visualizations reveal notable interspeaker differences in accuracy scores. A small subset of participants achieved significantly higher accuracy compared to others; however, the majority demonstrated scores hovering around or below the chance level, indicating near-chance or below-chance accuracy.

To quantitatively evaluate the differences in accuracy between tense and lax vowels, we conducted two-samples paired t-tests, separately for both front and back vowels. These analyses did not uncover any significant differences in accuracy scores for tense versus lax vowels, either for front vowels ($t = -0.46$, $df = 35$, $p = 0.650$) or for back vowels ($t = 1.74$, $df = 35$, $p = 0.090$), suggesting no prevalent bias or superior identification ability for either vowel class among the participants.

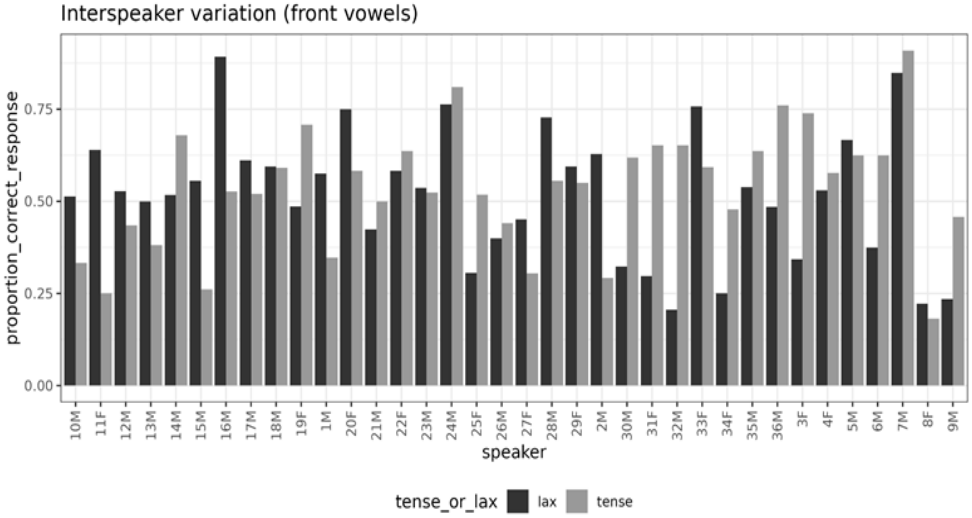

Figure 9: Interspeaker variation in accuracy scores in front vowels

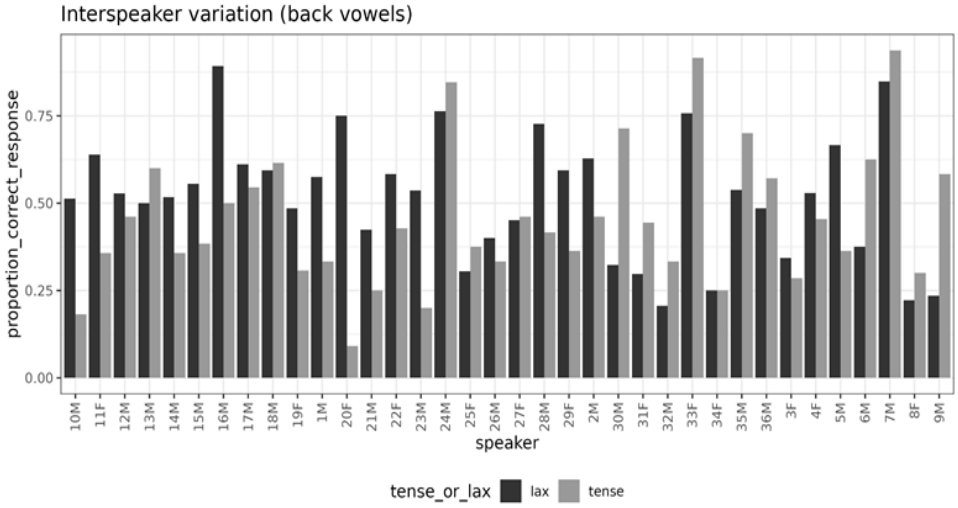

Figure 10: Interspeaker variation in accuracy scores in back vowels

Reaction times

In addition to measuring the accuracy of vowel identification, we also analyzed the reaction times (RT) associated with responses to stimuli featuring tense versus lax vowels. Figure 11 presents these findings, categorizing responses by accuracy (X-axis) and the time taken to reach a decision (Y-axis), with different patterns indicating the tense and lax categories. The data shows that participants

responded faster when they correctly identified back lax vowels compared to back tense vowels. Conversely, the reaction times for incorrect answers showed the opposite pattern. This trend was not observed among front vowels. To statistically examine the differences in RT for correct identifications of tense and lax vowels (incorrect responses were not analyzed), we employed a linear mixed-effects model. This model included a fixed effect for the vowel category (tense or lax) and random intercepts for each participant. The analysis revealed a highly significant effect of the vowel category, with lax vowels eliciting significantly faster responses than tense vowels when correctly identified (β = 319.800, $t(456.34) = 4.96$, $p = .007$). The complete coefficients for the fixed effects can be found in Table 4.

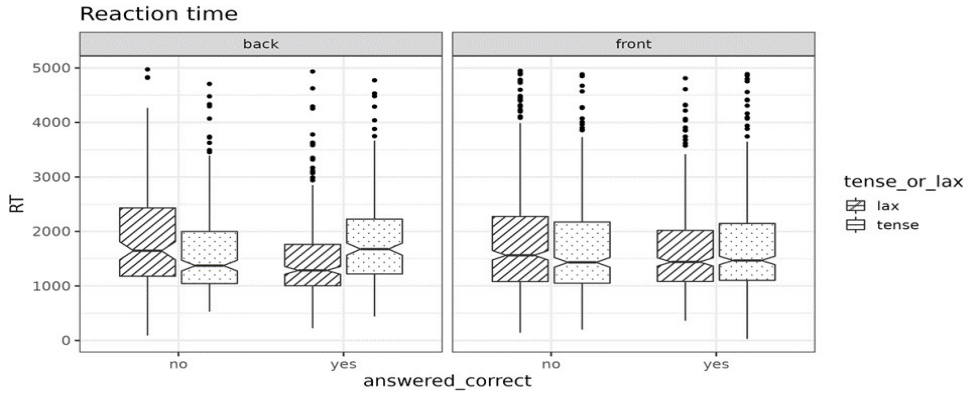

Figure 11: Reaction time for correct and incorrect responses

Table 4. Coefficients for fixed effects on Reaction Time

Fixed-effects:	Estimate	Std-Error	df	t-value	Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)	1553.04	84.24	41.73	18.436	< .001
tense_or_lax-tense	319.80	64.49	456.34	4.96	.007

Discussion

This study highlights that Bangla speakers exhibit limited sensitivity to the tense and lax vowel distinctions present in English, despite Bangla itself having phonological contrasts among mid vowels based on this distinction. This observation underscores that possessing phonological knowledge of a tense-lax contrast in a first language (L1) does not automatically translate into an ability to recognize similar contrasts in a second language (L2). One possible explanation for this phenomenon is the variation in how tense and lax contrasts are phonetically implemented across languages. In English, tense vowels are not only more peripheral in their articulation but also longer in duration compared to their lax counterparts. In contrast, while Bangla tense vowels differ spectrally from their lax counterparts, they do not exhibit this duration difference (Islam

et al., 2023).

Further complicating this scenario is the phonetic similarity between specific vowels across the two languages. For instance, the Bangla vowel /ɛ/ closely mirrors the English /æ/ vowel in terms of their first (F1) and second formants (F2), despite being phonologically categorized as lax. This similarity, as outlined in the research by Islam et al. (2023) and earlier findings by Alam et al. (2008), could hinder Bangla speakers' ability to accurately perceive and produce the English /ɛ/, attributing to the challenges in transferring tense-lax phonological knowledge from Bangla to English. These phonetic disparities offer a plausible explanation for the difficulties Bangla speakers face in adapting their L1 phonological knowledge to the nuances of tense-lax contrasts in an L2 context.

The analyses revealed no significant differences in accuracy scores between tense and lax vowels, regardless of whether they were front or back vowels in English. This outcome indicates that Bangla speakers did not display any advantage in distinguishing the tense-lax contrast for back vowels over front vowels in English. Given that the Bangla /ɛ/ is significantly different in vowel height (F1) compared to the English /ɛ/ (Alam et al., 2008; Islam et al., 2023), and the Bangla /o/-/ɔ/ distinction being spectrally similar to the English /o/-/ɔ/ distinction (Islam et al., 2023), it was expected that Bangla speakers would achieve higher accuracy in identifying tense and lax vowels among back vowels. However, this assumption was not supported by the data. Consequently, it appears that Bangla speakers do not have an advantage in discriminating tense-lax contrasts between front and back vowels.

The results of the reaction time analysis that the back lax vowel is recognized correctly faster than its tense counterpart can be an indication that the identification of back tense vowel involves more cognitive load to Bangla speakers, making the processing of tense vowels a more difficult task for them. Since Bangla inventory has a single vowel in the high back region while English has two (/u/ and /ʊ/), Bangla speakers are very likely to categorize both /u/ and /ʊ/ as a single vowel category, leading to a single category assimilation (see Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM) (Best et al., 1993; 1995). However, the authors think that this single-category assimilation should be an instance of a category-goodness assimilation where the lax /ʊ/ is considered a better exemplar than /u/ (cf. Tyler et al., 2014). Therefore, when faced with the bad exemplar like the English /u/, bangla speakers should find it less straightforward than /ʊ/ in a categorization task, leading to a longer reaction time.

The observation that the back lax vowel is recognized more swiftly than its tense counterpart suggests that identifying back tense vowels poses a greater

cognitive challenge for Bangla speakers. This increased difficulty is likely due to the richer vowel inventory in English compared to Bangla, particularly in the high back region where English distinguishes between /u/ and /ʊ/, whereas Bangla has only one corresponding vowel. Consequently, Bangla speakers might assimilate both English vowels into a single category, a phenomenon supported by the Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM) proposed by Best and colleagues (1993; 1995). More specifically, we propose that this assimilation falls under what might be termed category-goodness assimilation, wherein the lax /ʊ/ is perceived as a more accurate representation of the Bangla equivalent than /u/ (in line with findings by Tyler et al., 2014). Thus, when Bangla speakers encounter the less familiar /u/ vowel, categorization becomes less straightforward, resulting in prolonged reaction times.

Conclusion

This study underscores the challenges that Bangla speakers face in distinguishing between tense and lax vowel distinctions in English, a difficulty that persists despite the presence of similar phonological contrasts in Bangla. The findings highlight a critical aspect of second language (L2) acquisition: having a phonological contrast in a first language (L1) does not guarantee the ability to recognize and use comparable distinctions in an L2. This limitation may be attributed to the different phonetic implementations of these contrasts across languages. For instance, while English tense vowels are characterized by more peripheral articulation and longer durations, Bangla tense vowels do not share these temporal characteristics, instead differing primarily in spectral properties. Such phonetic discrepancies complicate the transfer of phonological knowledge from L1 to L2.

One important factor to consider is the varying relationship between the phonology and phonetics of vowels across languages. Although both English and Bangla feature tense-lax contrasts among mid vowels, the actual phonetic realization of these vowels differs significantly between the two languages. Consequently, the way speakers perceive the connection between the abstract, phonological concept of tense-lax contrasts and their concrete phonetic implementation can vary markedly from one language to another. Therefore, even when a phonological contrast is transferred from a first language (L1) to a second language (L2), learners must still contend with the challenge of mastering its phonetic expression in the new language.

These observations suggest that effective L2 vowel training should consider these specific phonetic and perceptual challenges. Educators and curriculum developers need to focus on enhancing the perceptual sensitivity of L2 learners to these distinctions, perhaps by emphasizing the phonetic cues that are absent in

the learners' L1. This approach could help mitigate the difficulties posed by L1-L2 phonetic and phonological discrepancies, thereby improving the acquisition of complex vowel systems in a new language.

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Appendix

Word lists used in the stimuli:

No.	Tense vowel	Lax vowel
1	bead	bid
2	beat	bit
3	deed	did
4	feat	fit
5	green	grin
6	keep	kip
7	leak	lick
8	mead	mid
9	neat	knit
10	peak	pick
11	teak	tick
12	seat	sit
13	shooed	should
14	suit	soot
15	wooed	wood
16	cooed	could
17	Luke	look
18	pool	pull

Writing Instruction in Large Secondary School EFL Classes: A Qualitative Pilot Study

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Abstract

English language teachers in countries around the world teach large classes of 35 or more students. While many English language teaching methods since the 18th century have emphasized speaking skills, with globalization has come an increased need for L2 learners in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts to develop writing skills. However, to date, little research has focused on understanding how writing instruction is carried out in large secondary school EFL classes. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory study was to provide an overview of writing instruction in large secondary school EFL classes. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 participants with experience as secondary school English language instructors in EFL contexts across continents. Data was analyzed through thematic analysis. Major findings revealed that writing instruction in large EFL secondary school classes is largely dominated by national exams. Additionally, participants indicated a lack of training for teaching writing. However, there was some indication that participants would welcome training. While study participants believed that writing is an important skill, 60 percent were not confident that their secondary school curriculums adequately prepares students for writing beyond secondary school. Implications suggest there is a need to better understand the phenomenon of writing instruction in large secondary school classes through further research. Implications further suggest a need for more training in writing instruction for secondary school teachers working in large EFL contexts.

Keywords: large classes, secondary school, writing instruction, second-language writing, English as a foreign language (EFL)

According to Kremer and Holla (2009), 85 percent of the world's children reside in the Global South. While large classes of 35 or more students are the reality for many secondary school English language educators in countries around the world, especially in state schools (Copland & Garton, 2018; Shamim & Kuchah, 2020), little research has examined large English language classes (Coleman, 2006), and even less research has focused specifically on writing instruction in

large secondary school English as a foreign language[1] (EFL) classes (Lee, 2016; Matsuda & DePew, 2002; Ortega, 2009). While the large-class phenomenon is not new, recent initiatives might have exacerbated the problem (Benbow et al., 2007). Although these policies stipulate that governments provide free, basic education, in some low-income countries, governments do not have adequate funding to support these initiatives (Hillman & Jenkner, 2004). Since large classes will likely continue to be a pressing concern in many countries, it is important to find the best pedagogies for large-class instruction (Bamba, 2012; Benbow et al., 2007; Ndethiu et al., 2017). Finding the best pedagogies for writing instruction in large English language classes in EFL secondary school contexts starts with understanding writing instruction in such contexts. The purpose of this exploratory pilot study was to provide some insight into writing instruction in large, secondary school English language classes in EFL contexts Specifically, this study focused on garnering an understanding of the training, beliefs, and practices of secondary school English language teachers working in large secondary school classes in EFL contexts.

Literature Review

Writing instruction in EFL secondary school contexts is often important in preparing students for school-leaving national examinations in addition to the writing students will need in personal, academic, and professional contexts beyond secondary school (Graham, 2019; Lee, 2010, 2018). In spite of the critical nature of writing instruction in secondary school EFL contexts, a number of scholars have pointed out that there is little research on how teachers in EFL secondary school contexts teach writing (e.g., Geng et al., 2022; Lee, 2010, 2016, 2018; Ortega, 2009), and less research has focused on understanding the nature of writing instruction in large secondary school EFL classes. Studies that have been carried out in large secondary school English language classes had other foci, such as the results of training intervention on teachers' error correction practices (Lee, 2008, 2016) and preservice English language teachers' beliefs about writing (Nguyen & Hudson, 2010). To date, there is no body of literature that provides an overarching idea of how English language teachers teach writing in large EFL secondary school classes. This study focused on understanding the nature of writing instruction in large secondary school English language classes through the domains of training, beliefs, and practices. This literature review starts with a definition of large class and then explores these domains.

1 EFL is used to signify that the instruction and learning of English takes places in a country or location that does not use English as a first or official language. This is differentiated from English as a second language (ESL). In an ESL context, the instruction of English is carried out in a context where English is the first or official language.

What is a large English language class?

In many EFL contexts, secondary school English language classes in state schools are large. There is no exact definition of a large class as the concept varies according to country and context (Coleman, 2006; Hess, 2001; Shamim et al., 2007). In a North American context, a class of 20 might be considered large (Hess, 2001). In the Global South, however, it is not uncommon for English language teachers to have 150 or more students (Locastro, 2001). Some scholars have suggested definitive numbers at which a class can be considered large. According to Benbow et al. (2007), a class becomes large at a 40:1 student-teacher ratio. Renaud et al. (2007) suggest that a large class has 50-80 students. Ur (2012) believes a large class is determined by the individual teacher's perceptions of class size along with the availability of tools and resources or lack thereof. Asodike and Onyeike (2015) assert that the concept of large class relates to educational policy – a large class is one that exceeds the recommended student-teacher ratio of the given country. For this study, I define large class as one with 35 or more students.

Training

Training on L2 writing pedagogy

According to previous literature, training in L2 writing pedagogy is minimal or non-existent in EFL contexts. For instance, all English language teachers in Jordan in Al-Jarrah and Al-Ahmad's (2013) study involving 26 K-12 instructors reported that they had not received any formal training for writing instruction. Studies on university course offerings for English language instructors indicate a lack of availability of training in writing instruction. In an analysis of university courses in Brazil, Arhana and Oliviera (2020) found that only one offered a course on L2 writing pedagogy, but only to MA and PhD students. One writing course was offered at the undergraduate level, but this was a writing course rather than an L2 writing pedagogy course. Similarly, in an informal review of course offerings for master's programs for English language teachers in Hong Kong, Lee (2010) found that three out of the ten programs offered courses in L2 writing pedagogy; however, these courses were only offered as electives. These studies suggest that in many EFL contexts, training in L2 writing pedagogy for secondary school teachers has been largely ignored. The current study seeks to gain an understanding of EFL secondary school teachers of large classes experience with L2 writing pedagogy training.

Beliefs

Beliefs about the importance of developing writing skills in English

Previous literature on writing in EFL contexts has shown that writing may not be valued as highly as other language skills in EFL contexts. For instance, in

a study of 41 K-12 English language teachers in Romania, the majority (66 percent) indicated a belief that speaking is the most important skill to teach (Ene & Mitrea, 2013). In a study of 32 primary and secondary school English language teachers in Thailand, Saenkhum (2020) found that teachers prioritized speaking skills and gave writing the least amount of attention. Similarly, when asked to rank and order the importance of language skills, participants in Ene and Hryniuk's (2018) study placed speaking first and writing last. Jashari and Fohkar's (2019) survey study of 85 K-12 English language teachers in Slovenia revealed that while they felt writing is important, it was the skill they spent the least amount of time on. Since beliefs about the importance of writing impact how much attention teachers devote to writing instruction (De Smedt et al., 2016; Hsiang & Graham, 2016; Troia & Graham, 2016), it is important to understand the beliefs that secondary school EFL teachers of large classes have about teaching writing in their classes. This study sought to gain an understanding of the beliefs of EFL teachers of large classes regarding the importance of writing instruction in addition to understanding whether these teachers believe that the writing required in their current curriculum prepares students for the writing needed beyond secondary school.

Practices

Writing instruction in secondary school EFL classes is often largely determined by writing tasks on national exams (Casanave, 2009; Ene & Hryniuk, 2018; Khoja et al., 2018; Reichelt, 2020) and their evaluation criteria. Thus, many practices of writing instruction in EFL secondary school contexts, including general approaches to instruction, selection of assignments, and feedback practices are geared toward exam preparation. For both teachers and students, the goal of writing in EFL secondary school classes is primarily aimed at obtaining good scores on the national exam (Abdel Latif & Al Haridy, 2018; Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018; Chabaan, 2018; Darwish, 2016; Khoja et al, 2018; Rajab, 2013) rather than developing writing skills. The focus on exams scores is understandable given that scores on national exams determine a student's future, and teacher and institutional success are often measured by exams scores.

General approaches to writing instruction

In the literature on writing in secondary school EFL contexts, general approaches to writing instruction are typically described as traditional, which is equated with the product approach, or new, which refers to the process approach. While definitions of traditional methods of writing instruction in EFL contexts might vary according to instructor and context, for the purpose of this paper, traditional writing instruction is understood as product-oriented with no attention to multiple drafts and a focus on accuracy of micro-level features of language (e.g.,

grammar, punctuation, and spelling). Several recent studies (e.g., Abdel Latif & Al Haridy, 2018 [Egypt]; Al-Jarrah & Al-Ahmad, 2013 [Jordan]; Cando-Guanoluisa et al., 2017 [Ecuador]; Darwish, 2016 [Egypt]; Ene & Hryniuk, 2018 [China, Mexico, and Poland]; Lee, 2008 [Hong Kong]; Rajab, 2013 [Syria]) have shown that secondary school teachers in EFL contexts generally teach writing through a product approach.

Memorization and reproduction of texts

In EFL secondary school contexts, writing task types generally mirror writing tasks on national exams (Abdel Latif & Haridy, 2018; Al-Jarrah & Al-Ahmad, 2013; Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018). In some EFL contexts, writing instruction focuses on memorization. Al Amin and Greenwood (2018) reported that in Bangladesh, national exams can be prepared for through memorization of model compositions and other writing tasks, such as dialogues. Similarly, Darwish (2016) stated that it is common for students in Egyptian secondary schools to memorize main parts of essays for later use on exams. Likewise, Khoja et al. (2018) reported that writing in Syrian secondary schools is often taught through sample compositions that students can memorize and later reproduce on exams. In some EFL contexts, accuracy of micro-level features (often grammar) is the main criteria for evaluation, and reproduction of memorized texts may not be considered problematic, but expected.

Methods

To gain insight into the phenomenon of writing instruction in large secondary school EFL classes, the study was guided by the following research question: What is the state of writing in large classes at the secondary school level in EFL contexts? The following sub-questions underpinned the main research question: (a) What training specifically focused on writing instruction have EFL secondary school teachers of large classes had? (b) What beliefs do secondary school EFL teachers of large classes have about teaching writing? (c) What instructional practices do EFL teachers of large secondary school classes engage in when carrying out writing instruction? Before collecting data, I obtained approval from my home institution's Institutional Review Board.

Research design

This qualitative study followed an exploratory design. Exploratory research is appropriate when there is little data on a topic, and the aim of the research is to gain a broad understanding of the topic (Gozdziak & Chantavanich, 2022; Swedberg, 2020). To date, little research has been carried out to understand how secondary school English language teachers teach writing in large English language classes. An exploratory design was suitable for this pilot study because it allowed the researcher to explore the research topic, gather preliminary data,

and gain insights to guide future research.

Research context / Research site

The research context for this study was a shared context of instruction carried out in large secondary school English language classes (of 35 or more students per class) in state schools in EFL contexts. The research was not "site-specific (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 104), as the participants were located in different countries and data collection took place virtually.

Participants

Participant eligibility

To be eligible for this study, participants were required to have experience teaching English in a K-12 state school in a country outside BANA (Britian, Australia, North America, and Australia) within the last five years. Participants had to have experience teaching classes of 35 or more students in one class and were required to teach or have taught writing as a stand-alone class or as part of an English language class. Participants were not required to be professionally engaged as teachers at the time of the interview.

Participant recruitment

A number of researchers (e.g., Cresswell & Cresswell, 2022; Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall et al., 2022; Negrin et al., 2022) have pointed out the importance of recruiting research participants who fit the needs of the given study. Participants were recruited from my professional network and a social media site. Recruitment from one's professional network is valid when the specific characteristics, experiences, and expertise of relevant participants meet the needs of the particular study. Recruitment from one's network is particularly beneficial in small-scale pilot studies when cost-effectiveness and feedback time are relevant considerations for the feasibility of a study (Joseph et al., 2016). My professional network was appropriate for recruitment because I have worked in several EFL contexts and have contact with many EFL professionals through my professional and academic activities.

Recruitment was announced on a social media post on a site for professional development for English language teachers from June 18 to June 21, 2021. Interested participants contacted me through email. I explained the study and provided potential participants with an IRB approved consent form. The first ten potential research participants who contacted me and met eligibility requirements were invited to take part in the study. Potential participants who signed the consent form and agreed to the study were contacted for an interview.

Participants received no compensation for taking part in the study and pseudonyms are used in this article to protect their identities.

Data collection

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews from June 10-July 11, 2021. The researcher had a set of predetermined questions (See Appendix A) but was free to digress beyond the prepared questions to clarify responses or probe more deeply to participant responses (Perry, 2017). Interviews were conducted via Zoom with a mobile recorder application as a backup. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Transcriptions of the interviews were edited for accuracy prior to analysis.

Table 1. Study Participants

	Pseudonym	Country	Teaching Status	Average Number of Students in a Class
1	Antero	The Philippines	Former primary school (sixth grade) teacher	Approximately 40 students
2	Asif	Pakistan	Former middle school and former high school teacher	Approximately 50-60 students
3	El Sami	Morocco	High school teacher	Approximately 40 students
4	Reham	Pakistan	Middle school and high school teacher	Approximately 35-40 students
5	Nancy	Israel	Former high school teacher	Approximately 35-40 students
6	Majda	Morocco	High school teacher	Approximately 48
7	Hari	Nepal	Former middle school and high school teacher	Approximately 35-50 students
8	Adama	Côte d'Ivoire	High school teacher	70 – 100 students
9	Fatima	Bangladesh	High school teacher	Approximately 40-45 students
10	Saatvik	India	Former middle school and high school teacher	Approximately 35-40 students

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data through thematic analysis, which focuses on deriving and detailing themes from the data, both explicit and implicitly occurring (Van Manen, 2018). Braun and Clark (2022) have defined thematic analysis as "a method for developing, analyzing, and interpreting patterns across a qualitative data set, which involves systematic process of data coding to develop themes" (p. 4).

The first step in the data analysis process was to edit the transcripts with the voice recordings for accuracy. After editing the transcripts, I did an initial review of the corpus to get a general understanding of the data. I then conducted a

selective reading approach, identifying recurrent themes and salient responses that aligned with the research questions (Hancock et al., 2021; Van Manen, 2018), highlighting relevant sections and responses. This was in iterative process in which I read and reread participants' transcripts several times to ensure that selected excerpts related to the research questions. This process is referred to by Miles et al. (2020) as data condensation, which is "the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and/or transforming the data that appear in the full corpus (body) of written-up field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other empirical materials" (p. 8). I then used the condensed data set to develop initial codes. I highlighted key concepts and ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Codes were then developed from relevant text extracts. From codes, I developed themes. Each theme represented groups of codes with similar meanings (Braun & Clark, 2022). For a sample of a theme, codes, and text extracts, see Appendix B.

Results

Training

Limited training on writing pedagogy

For all study participants, the training they had received on L2 writing pedagogy was minimal or non-existent. Nine participants said that they had not received any pre-service training in L2 writing pedagogy. Adama in Côte d'Ivoire, the one participant who indicated he had received pre-service training, mentioned the genres of formal and informal letters and newspaper articles, but did not mention anything else about pre-service training. Six participants had taken part in some sort of in-service training. However, none of the in-service training mentioned was systematically provided by a particular institution or agency nor required for all teachers in any given context. Among the participants who had received some in-service training, two participants, Adama in Côte d'Ivoire and Majda in Morocco, mentioned receiving some training on L2 writing pedagogy from their advisors. Other mentions of in-service training related to voluntary participation. Two participants took part in trainings provided to select teachers in their region. Three participants had attended sessions provided by organizations outside their home institution, such as the British Council and local English teaching associations.

A need for training

Although not asked, some participants mentioned that teachers in their contexts need more training related to writing. Four participants pointed out that teachers themselves need more opportunities to develop writing skills in English. Hari in Nepal said that he did not learn some basic aspects of writing until he was in a graduate program: "When I started a master's level in Kathmandu University, my

tutor taught something about writing essays, paragraph like that – main ideas, statement, and supporting details." Three participants mentioned that teachers need more training in L2 writing pedagogy. Saatvik in India said: "Teachers must be provided sufficient exposure in writing when they are in teacher training colleges or professional colleges, but it's just not happening like that." Nancy in Israel pointed out that the main issue in her context was the lack of clear expectations for writing: "I think the change needs to come first of all from the Education Ministry where they need to provide professional development courses to inform teachers of the requirements for writing to make it very clear to everyone, and not only that, but I think every couple of years, there needs to be some sort of professional development training for teachers in the field."

Beliefs

The importance of developing writing skills in English

When asked about beliefs regarding the importance of developing writing skills in English, nine participants indicated that it is very important; one participant regarded it as necessary. The most frequently mentioned reason was job-related. Five participants mentioned that writing is important for getting a job following secondary school and the writing needed in chosen careers. Saatvik in India stressed the importance of basic writing skills for high school graduates: "Whenever they want to apply any job application, and whenever they want to communicate with others, minimum writing skills are very important." Four participants mentioned that developing writing skills in secondary school is important for higher education. Three participants predicated the importance of good writing skills to outside perceptions with the explanation that writing reflects one's intellect. Despite teachers' beliefs about the importance of writing instruction, in secondary schools, writing might not be given much attention. Of her context, Fatima in Bangladesh explained: "So, you see, the writing is so important to communicate everything – to know and to learn, but these writings … though is very important, but it is the one most neglected skills … no one, no, no, neither teacher neither nor the curriculum designer … they can never give up a space on these particulars."

Student preparedness for writing beyond secondary school

When asked whether their secondary school curriculum prepared students for the writing needed beyond secondary school, three participants felt that it did not. Nancy in Israel and Fatima in Bangladesh, who had both recently left secondary education for positions in higher education, mentioned that lack of preparedness was evidenced in their current students' writing. Nancy said: "When our students – those who are coming to study to be English teachers – … we give them an argument – that task exactly like they did in high school,

and most of them, really, really do terribly on it. There's no structure there. No division, no, no thesis statement, no topic sentences." As a result of the lack of development of writing skills in secondary school, Fatima lamented that some students were not getting opportunities to study abroad because they were not getting high enough scores on the reading and writing sections of standardized exams, such as TOEFL and IELTS.

Three participants were somewhat confident about students' preparedness for writing beyond secondary school. El Sami from Morocco believes that the issue is not the curriculum, but the methods teachers use to teach writing. Majda in Morocco and Adama in Côte d'Ivoire believe the curriculum may not be the most important factor in student preparedness for writing and indicated that student achievement is the responsibility of both teachers and students. Four participants felt that writing instruction in their secondary school curriculum was adequate. For Hari in Nepal, the curriculum is good; the problem is that teachers are not well trained in writing.

Practices

Assignments

When asked about the writing assignments they give their students, seven participants said that writing assignments are aimed at helping students prepare for the national exam. Hari in Nepal explained: "They [the assignments] are mostly exam-oriented, and they [the students] have to complete the course that way." The types of assignments participants most frequently mentioned were essays (6 participants) and letters (5 participants), followed by paragraphs (4 participants), stories (4 participants), dialogues (4 participants), and emails (3 participants). Nancy in Israel explained that in her context there is only one writing task in English on the national exam: an argumentative essay of approximately 150 words that students spend three years preparing for in high school. Nancy believes that while a single writing task for the national exam helps students get good scores, this limited focus does not provide students sufficient practice for the variety of genres needed beyond secondary school.

Writing instruction based on memorization

Four participants mentioned that writing instruction in their contexts was based primarily on memorization and reproduction. Reham in Pakistan explained what this instruction might look like: "Teacher will orally dictate them [the students] any essay; now, it's the students' responsibility to learn it by heart and reproduce it whenever there is a test of that essay." Reham explained the factors that created and sustained a system of memorization: "You know, teachers are not trained. Students are not given the space to think out of the box – examination hurdle … and your limitation of textbook." Reham further explained that in the evaluation

of writing, students are rewarded for imitation: "Most of the time it happens that students who are creative writers are graded just like other students who only know how to reproduce." Fatima in Bangladesh explained that having students memorize helped streamline writing instruction in a large class: "Because of the large class, so, fortunately or unfortunately, you can say that I'm following the traditional system of teaching. … I just asked my students, that this is your syllabus. You have to write a paragraph for ten marks; you have to write an essay for ten marks; you have to write a letter for ten marks … so just memorize those things and apply your memorizing on your answer script, and I will give you a wholistic, overall mark." Similarly, when asked why he thought there was a lot of copying of writing, Hari in Nepal explained that copying, in part, was a way for teachers to survive teaching writing in large classes "because large number of students create the problem, and teacher cannot pay attention to all the students and by teaching five, six periods and checking homeworks, and that's why teacher also has to choose the shortcut way." Saatvik in India explained that national exams in his context are no longer memory-based. Saatvik explained that a movement away from memory-based national exams was part of a recent curriculum reform that had taken place within the last five years in his region.

Discussion and Implications

Beliefs and practices

In line with previous literature (e.g., Casanave, 2009; Ene & Hryniuk, 2018; Khoja et al., 2018; Reichelt, 2020), participants in this study indicated that practices for writing instruction were largely dominated by national exams. Also, as with previous studies (Abdel Latif & Haridy, 2018; Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018; Darwish, 2016: Khoja et al., 2018), some participants described systems of writing instruction based on memorization. Although writing as memorization was mentioned by 40 percent of participants in this study, it is possible that other participants also work in such systems but did not provide this information since they were not directly asked about writing as memorization. Saatvik in India mentioned that a change from memory-based exams in his region had only taken place within the last five years; other districts in his country might still follow memory-based exam systems. Nonetheless, the reform in Saatvik's context is encouraging because it demonstrates that movement away from memory-based exams is possible.

Overall, study participants indicated a belief that writing is an important skill. In spite of this belief, three participants felt that their school's curriculum does not prepare students for the writing needed beyond secondary school, and three participants were only somewhat confident of their curriculum's capacity to adequately prepare students. In some EFL contexts, a lack of preparedness

might relate to the limited number of genres practiced in secondary school. In other contexts, memorization might be the problem. In systems that reward memorization and reproduction, students are unlikely to be prepared for writing beyond secondary school (Chabaan, 2010; Khoja et al., 2018). When faced with writing tasks in professional or academic contexts, these students might find it difficult to respond since their previous writing instruction focused on writing as memorization for a test score (Chabaan, 2010; Khoja et al., 2018). Such memorization methodology can have harmful effects. Khoja et al. (2018) pointed out that undergraduate students at a university in Syria viewed grammar as the main focus of writing and did not know how to apply writing strategies. Sadi and Othman's (2012) study revealed that undergraduate students in an Iranian university sometimes submitted writing assignments with chunks of previously memorized texts from secondary school.

The need to reconsider assessment practices

Although this study did not focus on evaluation of writing on national exams, there was some indication in this study that teachers assess students on the ability to memorize and reproduce writing. In EFL contexts, criteria for writing on national exams often has a washback effect to writing instruction as memorization (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018; Khoja et al., 2018; Abdel Latif & Haridy, 2018). In contexts where assessment of written work on exams is only focused on micro-level features and memorized content is rewarded, there is a clear need for reform of assessment practices on national exams. As long as students are rewarded for memorization and reproduction of written texts, teachers will continue to teach writing as memorization. Several researchers (Abdel Latif & Haridy, 2018; Darwish, 2016; Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018) have noted that teachers do not adopt curricular changes when they do not align with exam expectations. Abdel Latif and Haridy and Darwish found that in Egypt a shift from the product to the process approach in a recent edition of the secondary school English language textbook did not change teachers' instructional practices because assessment on exams did not change. Of course, there is a need not only for reconceptualization of assessment of writing on exams but also assessment training for examiners as well as teachers and teacher trainers.

Training

As with previous studies (Al-Jarrah & Al-Ahmad, 2013; Arhana & Oliviera, 2020; Lee, 2010), teachers in this study had received little to no training on L2 writing pedagogy. The minimal training participants did mention was generally carried out on a voluntary basis sought by the participants themselves. Training in and of itself may not be enough. Short-term training with no follow-up

that is not provided for all teachers in an institution might have little effect (Darwish, 2016). On a positive note, teachers in this study generally believe that writing is an important skill to develop, and as with previous studies (e.g., Ene & Mitrea, 2013; Ene & Hryniuk, 2018; Henderson-Lee & Pandey, 2020; Jashari & Fohkar, 2019), several teachers in this study indicated a need for more training in writing, for both L2 writing pedagogy and teachers' own writing development.

Given the findings of this study, I propose the following suggestions for carrying out training on L2 writing instruction for teachers of large secondary school EFL classes. While it is understood that reform on national exams might be needed in some contexts and that training and reform need to be coordinated, my suggestions in this paper relate only to training since it is one of the main foci of the study.

A two-dimensional model for training. To improve theoretical and pedagogic knowledge and skills in writing instruction, I suggest that effective training would incorporate both knowledge-enriched input and bottom-up processes. In this model, training starts with knowledge-enriched input and then progresses to bottom-up processes.

Knowledge-enriched training. Teachers in contexts with little or no training in the teaching of writing might learn to teach writing through what Lortie (1975) has termed *apprenticeship of observation*, which essentially means that teachers develop their knowledge and practice of teaching through teaching along with prior experiences in and knowledge about the context within which they work. When teachers rely on apprenticeship of observation as the main driver of their pedagogical practices, they tend to implement pedagogy without critical reflection or a full understanding of the theories, approaches, techniques, and tools available to them and knowledge of research-based practices (Lee, 2020).

Knowledge-enriched training provides teachers' input on theories, techniques, and tools along with evidence-based practices. Training in writing pedagogies that moves teachers from traditional methods to other methods might require some adjustment in perception on the part of the trainees. For instance, Lee's (2020) study on the feedback literacy development of two graduate students and in-service English language teachers revealed that these teachers began to question their beliefs about conventional feedback practices following training. Teachers should not be expected to apply input from training uncritically. However, without any training input, teachers lack the opportunity to develop appropriate pedagogies for writing instruction in large secondary school EFL classes.

Bottom-up training. In addition to knowledge-enriched input, training needs to incorporate bottom-up processes that seek and honor the input of local teachers in developing appropriate instruction for writing (Kuchah, 2013; Shamim & Coleman, 2018; Shamin & Kuchah, 2020). Bottom-up processes would allow instructors the opportunity to share ideas on how to best implement knowledge-enriched input and would, furthermore, provide a space for teachers to share practical strategies and techniques they already carry out in their practice.

Guiding pedagogy

Although writing pedagogies in EFL contexts have generally been described as product or process, relevant pedagogies for writing instruction in large classes might lie outside the boundaries of a dualistic perspective of product and process approaches. While "so-called Western methods of English language teaching (communicative, task-based, student-centered, process-oriented) cannot be applied wholesale to EFL contexts where traditions of large, teacher-fronted, exam-oriented classes persist" (Casanave, 2009, p. 262), wholesale rejection might also be flawed. All methods need to be examined critically for their appropriateness in any context (Casanave, 2009). As several scholars in EFL contexts (e.g., Al-Jarrah and Al-Ahmad, 2013; Darwish 2016; Khoja et al., 2018) have pointed out, with some modification, imported models of writing instruction (e.g., the process approach) can be applicable in large-class situations. For instance, when Tsui and Ng (2010) found that exam scores dropped following the adoption of the process approach in their context, they created a hybrid approach that implemented product writing for less-intensive writing tasks and a process approach for more intensive ones. Some aspects of teaching practices associated with process pedagogy, such as student-teacher conferences and multiple drafts might be unrealistic in some large-class settings (Casanave, 2009), but other aspects, such as pre-writing before drafting and peer-editing might be suitable.

Conclusion

This study has offered a glimpse into teaching writing in large secondary school EFL classes. Major findings have shown that writing instruction in large EFL secondary school classes is generally focused on preparing students for national exams. Furthermore, this study revealed that most secondary school EFL teachers have received little to no explicit training on L2 writing pedagogy though there is some indication that they would like to receive more explicit training on writing and teaching writing. Additionally, the majority of participants in the study were not sure that the writing instruction enforced by their secondary school curriculums adequately prepares students for writing beyond secondary school. In spite of the importance of writing in preparing students for the

writing needed in academic, personal, and professional contexts beyond secondary school, writing instruction in large EFL secondary school classes has received little attention in the research literature to date. More research is needed to understand how writing is carried out in large EFL secondary school classes. Studies that include more EFL instructor participants across more contexts would provide stronger evidence. Additionally, observation data can provide information on how EFL instructors teach writing that might not be evident from self-reports. Observational data could also potentially provide good examples of writing instruction in large classes that could later be used for training purposes. Furthermore, bottom-up research that incorporates EFL secondary school teachers of large classes own ideas, beliefs, techniques, and strategies on teaching in large classes needs to be conducted. Since large classes in EFL contexts will likely persist, it is important to have a better understanding of writing instruction in EFL secondary school contexts in order to develop effective pedagogies.

Limitations of the study

This study sought to find out about the teaching of writing in large classes through self-reports, which may not entirely represent study participants' realities. Although this study was originally designed to investigate writing instruction in K-12 contexts, only one participant (a sixth-grade teacher) recruited for this study was working in a primary school setting. Other participants were secondary school teachers or had recently worked as secondary school teachers. Through this study, I decided to focus only on secondary school instructors in subsequent studies, rather than the K-12 population, since writing instruction might be given more attention in secondary school contexts than primary school contexts.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Tell me about the school your work in and the classes you teach.
2. How many students are in a typical class that you teach? If you teach multiple classes, please describe them.
3. How does the number of students impact what you can teach?
4. Does class size have an impact on your ability to teach writing? What is the impact?
5. Do you feel prepared to teach large classes? Why or why not?
6. What kind of training focused specifically on writing instruction have you received? / Do you feel prepared to teach writing? Why or why not?
7. What sorts of writing activities or genres do your students do (can include any kind of writing that happens in the classroom—worksheets, diaries, writing words or sentences, paragraphs, essays, copying notes into a notebook, stories, etc.)
8. How does the writing in the English language curriculum in your school prepare your students for future writing needs?
9. How important do you think it is for students to develop writing skills in English?
10. What challenges do you face in teaching writing in English lessons?
11. How do you meet these challenges?
12. What else would you like me to understand about teaching writing in a large class?

Appendix B: Sample Coding Document
Theme: Systems of Writing Instruction Based on Memorization

Codes 1: Memorization because of lack of training for teaching writing
Code 2: Memorization because of large classes
Code 3: Assessments value memorized texts
Code 4: Moving away from memorization-based learning

Participant	Code(s)	Excerpts from Interviews
Reham	**1, 3**	"You know teachers are not trained. Students are not given the space to think out of the box--examination hurdle […] and your limitation of textbook—this is the thing, you know from the primary section, even from primary level, this is going to middle level and then going to secondary and college level as well." "They're actually… they're actually highly appreciated if they reproduce whatever they have learned." "…usually, we go for memorization, for rote learning for certain typical standards which are set writing. For instance, teacher will orally dictate them any essay; now, it's students' responsibility to learn it by heart and reproduce whenever there is test of that essay."

Fatima	**2, 3**	"…because of the large class, so, fortunately or unfortunately, you can say that I'm following the traditional system of teaching. What is that? […] I just asked my students, that this is your syllabus. You have to write a paragraph for ten marks; you have to write an essay for ten marks; you have to write a letter for ten marks. …so just memorize those, those things and apply you're memorizing on your answer script, and I will give you a wholistic, overall mark." So, whenever you can memorize something and put those memorization on this script, and then I will get A plus." "…so in a large class particularly, I could not apply all my learnings—all my ideas, because of the large class."
Hari	**2**	"…because large number of students create the problem, and teacher cannot pay attention to all the students and by teaching five, six periods and checking homeworks, and that's why teacher also has to choose the shortcut way
Saatvik	**4**	"the final examination—the final exam is text independent… they have to apply whatever they have to display their knowledge in the germination to produce their knowledge in the form of writing, journal writing, and reading comprehension." "At my state is that one of the progress in the changing the examination in the reforms in the examination of the last five years."

Book Reviews

William Wordsworth, Second-Generation Romantic: Contesting Poetry after Waterloo

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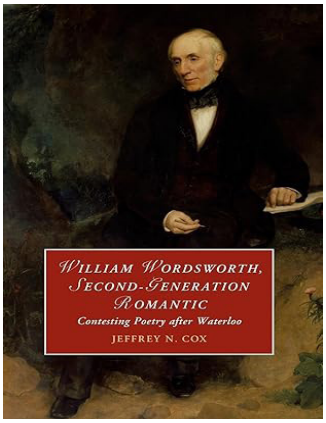

William Wordsworth, Second-Generation Romantic: Contesting Poetry After Waterloo
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In his Introductory chapter, Cox begins by questioning Harold Bloom's methodology in *The Anxiety of Influence*, which patents its own, psychoanalytic brand in Romantic literary studies by utilizing "poetic oedipal anxiety" (2) for studying strong poets across canons. Cox argues that this theoretical approach both "distorts" and "forgets" (ibid.) the contemporaneity between the two generations of Romantic poets, and the function of "noncanonical figures" (ibid.) in empowering the interrelationship between them. Citing earlier research conducted by Tim Fulford, Jeffrey C. Robinson, and others in recent years, one could assert that Wordsworth and his poetic contemporaries were dynamically associated through eventful episodes, such as the "immortal dinner," (7), where Haydon was gradually assigned the task of the mediator, a go-between the "Lakers and the Cockneys" (11). To dismiss the dynamic entanglement between contemporaries, young and old, would lead to an unjust, gendered discrimination between the strong and the weak poets, or the masculine and the "effeminate" (21), as Bloom would like us to believe. Instead, Hunt, Hazlitt, Byron, Shelley and Keats were re-arranging poetical strengths on both aesthetic and political grounds by attacking the (creative) conservatism of Southey, Coleridge and Wordsworth in important texts, renegading by travestying them, by generating a democratic "vision" (30) against their autocratic, poetic tyranny. This creates the foundation for Cox's counter-psychoanalytic framework in his book.

In 'Cockney Excursions', Cox elaborates on his earlier argument by drawing a discriminatory line between the egotism of the Lakers, especially Wordsworth, and the careful deconstruction of such egotism amongst the Cockneys, vis-à-vis Hazlitt's criticism of *The Excursion*, in Shelley's "Alastor", Byron's *Manfred*

and Keats's "Ode to Melancholy". Wordsworth's egotistical universe is construed as "the great flaw in Wordsworth's poem," (Cox 44), a universe without other egos (and subsequently, other men) – reminiscent of an anti-social apocalypse.[1] The "eroticizing turn" (Cox 48) in Keats's *Endymion* is read as an anti-egotistic resistance against Wordsworthian celibacy, the reinforcement of a deliberate paganization/humanization upon poetic self-complacency. Similarly, the third canto of Byron's *Childe Harold* resists the excesses of Revolutionary utopianism and the "cynical despair" (Cox 56) of the Pietists, restoring earthly virtues over either political, or graphological totalitarianism. Wordsworthian experiments in Christianizing Romantic thought are substituted by "Eastern exoticism" (Cox 64), Oriental religiosity and incestuous undercurrents by Shelley in *Laon and Cythna*, where the false consciousness surrounding imaginative domesticity is revealed and undone. Wordsworth's "Laodamia" overturns Cockney rhetoric by instituting culture above nature, re-organizing and de-eroticizing poetry of its sensualities, with its preference for a "restrained, rational, and chaste love" (Cox 68). Martial masculinity, witnessed in Protesilaus's character in "Laodamia", contrasts and overturns the promiscuous masculinity of Keats's Lorenzo in "The Pot of Basil". Wordsworth's role, as a "religious poet," (Cox 73), becomes even more pronounced in his later poetry in order to counteract the influence of his so-called poetic successors. The "secret springs" in Shelley's "Mont Blanc" is reconstituted under the "secret springs" in Wordsworth's "Dion", subjugating his imaginative abyss under the Christian faith, out of a fear for another "licentious" (Cox 75) outbreak of the second-generation Romantics.

Chapter Two commences with the reception of Wordsworth's "Thanksgiving Ode", published after the Battle of Waterloo had permanently deferred the anxiety behind a Napoleonic invasion. Cox refers to pantomimes performed in honour of the British generals at Covent Garden, including *Harlequin and Fancy*, or *The Poet's Last Shilling* by Thomas John Dibdin who incorporated within it a parody of *Hamlet*. More interesting is the familiarity between Wordsworth's "Ode" and Hunt's *Descent of Liberty, A Mask* (1815), which, as he acknowledged, was a family favourite during that time. Hunt is right in critiquing his "Ode" upon publication, for its "affectation" (Cox 90) and verbosities. Cox testifies to further similarities with Hunt's *Descent* in Wordsworth's "Ode, Composed in January, 1816." In both his odes, Wordsworth maintains his martial code of masculinity, in constant opposition against Hunt's pacifying (read effeminate) instincts. This, however, is carefully underscored with the typical anxiety of

1 Wordsworth is certainly culpable for compartmentalizing weaker egos as non-egos, arranging them at the periphery of his own poetic egocentrism, by presenting himself as the perpetual, poetic/political state. See Shouvik Narayan Hore, "The 'Moral Flaw' and Wordsworthian Imagination in "The Old Cumberland Beggar"" *The Atlantic Critical Review* 20.1-20.4 (2021): 116-26.

a canonical strong poet; Wordsworth is systematically concerned with the "horrifying sublimity" (Cox 97) of war, and attempts its substitution with "God's sublimity" (ibid.) as an acceptable form of martial masculinity. Through a close reading of the "Ode", one gathers how Byron, in his *Childe Harold*, fights to keep the revolutionary spirit alive, despite Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, in his bid to desist Conservative complacency by shifting the agency of victory to a perennialized moral victory for the radicals, instead of a battleground victory for the English war criminals.[1] Nevertheless, both poets, if not both schools, despite their disagreements, cooperated in assigning poetry its public responsibilities – in assigning its rightful opinion to "contemporary events," (Cox 109).

Chapter Three suggests that we, the readers, approach Wordsworth's *Peter Bell* through Hunt's *Hero and Leander*, Shelley's *Rosalind and Helen*, Byron's *Don Juan* and Hans Busk's *The Vestriad*, amongst other poems by the above-mentioned authors. Cox's central argument rests on the proposition that Wordsworth's protagonist, Peter Bell, is an "anti-Byronic hero" (Cox 113), divested of the Byronic villain's charms. Wordsworth contends that religious intervention often redirects the sinner into repentance, which does not *need* to be the extravagant Byronic hell, but *can* be the "supernatural interpretation" (Cox 118) of an earthly event, such as a controlled mine blast, or a surfacing corpse in his poem – a fact emphasized by Wordsworth in his letter to Benjamin Robert Haydon in April, 1820. Hunt's insistence on the unnecessary excesses of Methodism, and Wordsworth's eulogization of it leads him to dismiss it as "not the Christian religion" (Cox 120) and as an "institutionalized despondency" (Cox 122), allowing us to reflect, once again, upon the Cockneys' consistent deconstruction of the Lakers' ideological flaws. This theme is carried forward into "Thinking Rivers: The Flow of Influence, Wordsworth-Coleridge-Shelley" where Wordsworth's ambition of inheriting the Miltonic epic form is manifested within the sonnet form, as gleaned in his sonnet sequence on Liberty and on the river Duddon. The fluvial, riverine movements may be witnessed in the Duddon sonnet-sequence as resembling, at once, "individual pools," (Cox 134) and as fluvial literary movement in its entirety. Shelley, in his "Mont Blanc", expresses disgust at Coleridge's "explicit religiosity" (Cox 140) in "Hymn Before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouny,", forming another line of subsidiary criticism besides Wordsworth's dismissal of it as an instance of the "Mock Sublime," (Cox 149).[2] Cox also assesses the probability of Wordsworth's encounter with excerpts from Shelley's aforementioned poem in Mary Shelley's *History*, which could have

1 "It [Wordsworth's land] is an anti-Keatsian, anti-Byronic land, avowedly English rather than Orientalist, but one governed by a naturalized paternalism" (Fulford 191).

2 Ian Balfour, "The Matter of Genre in the Romantic Sublime" in Charles Mahoney ed., *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*. Blackwell Publishing, 2010: 503-520. at 509 and 511.

inspired *The White Doe of Rylstone*. The author could be rightly speculating that Wordsworth was confabulating with Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" through his poem, by offering allusive references. But Wordsworth, unlike Keats, stubbornly holds on to the Englishness of his sonnet-sequence by de-glorifying the exotic "cosmopolitanism" (Cox 148) of Keats, rebuffing the Romantic, Cockney discourse which decentralizes (and attempts to re-situate) the Romantic movement from its English stronghold. The Duddon sonnet-sequence also isolates the evolved, Wordsworthian poetical discourse from hackneyed themes of poetry, allowing him to re-instate spiritual meaning in an alienated (from martial masculinities in war/physical combats, etc.), English countryside.

The final chapter in this book, "Late 'Late Wordsworth'" is the summation of the poetic prerogatives that Wordsworth had offered, and challenged his Cockney rivals with. *Ecclesiastical Sketches* echoes those themes explored earlier in the *Duddon* series, unconsciously incorporating the phrase "palm and amaranth" within his opening sonnet, entitled "Introduction," from Charlotte Smith's sonnet to "Mrs. ___." Wordsworth wants us to recognize and acknowledge the common poetic faith, shared for the fulfilment of a common poetic (read English) cause across compositions. He is alert to the compensation that must be paid for concrete perceptions, as in "Yarrow Visited" where he fears the loss of imaginative abstractions once reality comes into sight. This helps the mature Wordsworth come to terms with retrospective, imaginary experiences, which could be counted upon as "new strengths" (Cox 165), as he had wished for Scott. This transference modifies the original, aesthetic purpose of Wordsworthian poetry to become more "liturgical … political or ideological" (Cox 170) – something that, according to Cox, would be classified by the Cockneys as "ideological apostasy" (Cox 174). Wordsworth had attempted its remedy by publishing *Borderers*, a play from his radical years alongside his *Sonnets Upon the Punishment of Death* (1839-1840). It is useful to note how Wordsworth resisted creative inspiration from "touristic Italy" (Cox 176), relying upon memories of the English countryside to rejuvenate his imaginative self. Therefore, he is critiqued as a flawed predecessor to the second-generation Romantics, and a bad successor of the great tradition of Classical European literature, for his tendencies in offering "more opposition than advice." (Cox 190), leading to the later Wordsworth suffering from, ironically, the anxiety of Walter Scott's influence on him. To conclude, the Second-generation Romantic, here Wordsworth, had transitioned from meditative truths to irreversible "governing" (Cox 194), forcing the Cockneys to engage with Wordsworthian recentralization in creative and contradicting ways.

There are a few, minor misprints that could be traced across the book (pp.

111, 112, 121, etc.). While Cox's book offers a coherent reading experience from cover to cover, there is an uncanny return of Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* in its final stages, perhaps as a reminder that the psychoanalytic framework was never, and could not have been discarded in the first place. But, because of a conscious dismissal of the earlier method, and an adoption of another which relied on allusive contingencies, one finds, not unexpectedly, a handful of "seems" and "perhaps" in the book, probably leading the reader into his own methodological anxiety of reading a text which, at times, compensates with its lack of theoretical depth. Nonetheless, the book is an important addition to the scholarship of "Late Wordsworth", and shall continue to enrich readers worldwide.

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Judith Butler's *Who's Afraid of Gender?*

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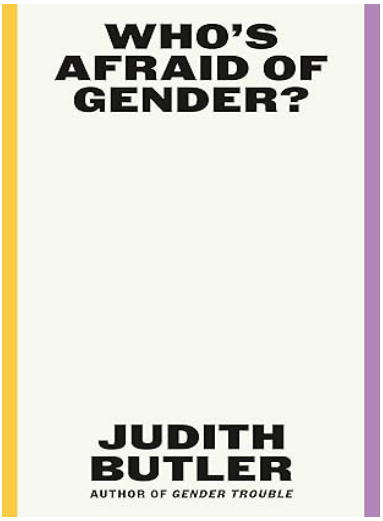

Who's Afraid of Gender?
Judith Butler
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It is ironically regressive that Judith Butler, who, in writing *Gender Trouble* in 1990, has permanently changed the epistemological direction of western feminist and queer theories, would publish a book in 2024 titled *Who's Afraid of Gender*? If, by comparison, the new title sounds anachronistic, then that is the point Butler makes, rather passionately, often angrily, in their[1] new book: the world is sleepwalking to authoritarianism. Gender is the homogenous scapegoat, the political phantasm, deliberately instrumented to take the postmodern clock back to the time of a homogenous patriarchal order that never existed. Readers may pay particular attention to the dedication page and the note of acknowledgements before they delve into the book of 300-odd pages, divided into ten chapters plus an Introduction and a Conclusion. The dedication, "For the young people who still teach me", establishes the temporal tone of the book. 68-year-old Judith Butler, whose esoteric and enigmatic writing style has given them the status of an impenetrable mystic, would now write for young people, the Generation Z and Alpha, who probably are more used to watching YouTube videos and listening to bitesize podcasts than to reading theoretical books. The Acknowledgement provides a loose context and the purpose of the book. Butler conceived the book's idea after an attack they encountered in São Paulo, Brazil, in 2017. Saved by two opposites in the scene, their partner, Wendy Brown, and a stranger young man, Butler became curious about questions of "spontaneous ethics" and "political solidarity" (289) and the book became forthcoming.

1 Judith Butler uses they/them as their pronoun. Therefore, I have used they/them throughout the text to refer to their pronoun. I am aware of the inconveniences this may cause to the readers.

Readers following Butler's body of work would not be surprised by their preoccupation with ethics and political solidarity. Indeed, most of Butler's writings, books, interviews, and public talks in the last two decades (after the so-called 'War on Terror') have engaged with the question of ethics, the idea of grievable life when the representation of war frames some lives more grievable than others (Butler, *War*). As gender became mainstream both in academia and outside of it, and Butlerian terms such as "performative", "heteronormative matrix", "the repeated stylization of the body" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 47, 175) have become academically common phrases, although not unproblematically, Butler, the theorist, seemed to move on from gender discourse, journeying into the core realm of philosophy: ethics and politics – what makes life livable and how do we coexist in an increasingly divided world? One can question why Butler felt compelled to return to the gender question and how this gender question would fit into their questioning of ethics and politics. This book brings all these issues together as Butler argues that the political fear-mongering around gender in contemporary times is at the heart of many unethical policies and practices that hinder the possibilities of life. Countering this would require a reimagination of feminist politics of resistance based on "transnational coalitions" (28) of shared goal to challenge oppressive forces of authoritarian power.

The Introduction, 'Gender Ideology and the Fear of Destruction', gives an overview of the topics that the book aims to cover with varied success. Butler does not claim to define gender; rather, at the book's onset, they remind readers that while gender is now commonplace, it does not always follow an agreed-on definition. For Butler, the open-endedness of the term gender, much celebrated as a form of postmodern fluidity, also makes it vulnerable to be an "empty signifier" or an "overdetermined rhetoric" (30), quickly filled up with right-wing political rhetoric and religious dogmatism, especially at a time and age of global precarity and disinformation. Gender is central to the local, regional, and global 'rises' of nationalism, religious and cultural fundamentalism, leading to xenophobia and brutal hatred at individual and community levels. Drawing on French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche's concept of fantasy as a social instead of an individual location of desire and anxiety, Butler suggests that Laplanche's theory of "phantasm" or "phantasmatic scene" can be appropriated to shed light on how "gender substitutes for a complex set of anxieties and becomes an overdetermined site where the fear of destruction gathers" (26), contributing to proliferating an anti-gender political ideology. Given the centrality of this concept to substantiate the book's overarching claim to find a counter-narrative (or imagination) to combat this threatening phantasm, it is limiting that in subsequent chapters, the idea is sidetracked or is left unattended until the Conclusion, where concepts of anti-gender as phantasm reappears.

The book's ten chapters can be divided into two broad terrains: political and theoretical. The first five: 'The Global Scene', 'Vatican Views', 'Contemporary Attacks on Gender in the United States', 'Trumps, Sex and the Supreme Court', 'TERFs and the British Matter of Sex' are context-specific elaborations and analysis of the rise of anti-gender ideology and political position across many parts of the world, including in the western liberal states. The Global Scene is undoubtedly broad brush, and deliberately so. Butler avoids the trap of dividing the world in the so-called 'global south' or 'north', arguing that whether it is Vladimir Putin's Russia, Georgia Meloni's far-right Brothers of Italy's ascension to power, or Hungary's ultra-nationalistic political ideology to protect and promote Hungarian families to combat immigration, in European contexts, conservative gender ideologies are dominating election-winning manifestos. While the Roman Catholic Church's view on sexual differences between men and women and heterosexuality as the central mandate to form families may have a strong influence in the Eastern European context, Butler is no less critical to suggest that in the United States, the land champions to celebrate individual freedom, federal states increasingly control ranges of rights, from women's reproductive rights to what children can read in schools and libraries. Only recently (in May 2024), Harrison Butker, American football player, blamed "gender cultural ideologies" for making educated young women forget that their ideal role is at home, as a homemaker, wife, and mother, bearing testimony of Butler's concern (Looker).

For the UK context, Butler's exclusive focus on specific feminist ideas, which they define as "anti-gender ideology"' (142), is disproportionate to the enormity of the religious/state nexus presented in the US and other global contexts. Reviewers of the book have rightly criticized Butler for their inability (or unwillingness) to differentiate between authoritarian regimes and feminists with alternative viewpoints on complex issues such as transgender rights and the boundary of women as a category (Özkırımlı; "From Ivory Tower"). Butler takes issues with British writer J.K. Rowling's position to differentiate between transgender women and natal women to ensure women's access to safe space. They have failed to develop a critical dialogue with British feminist philosopher Kathleen Stock, whose book, *The Material Girl*, they cite profusely, only to dismiss. Butler seems to sidetrack the fact that Stock's writing was mainly about the loopholes of the statutory law called 'Gender Recognition Act' introduced in 2004 in the UK, which making it a statutory law to recognize people's acquired gender, identity, has over the years raised genuine concerns around women's access to female only space (such as public toilet) and transgender rights. Only in April 2024, the National Health Service (NHS) published a full and independent report on the health and care needs, challenges, and services for a growing number of

young people needing clinical/care intervention around their gender identity (Cass). Stock's points are crucial, and dismissing her points as mere transphobic feminism as Butler does is intellectually counterproductive.

The final five chapters are theoretical, drawing from a wide range of local epistemological resources that powerfully counter the dominance of the western theoretical premises shaping gender discourses. Topics such as 'What About Sex?' 'What Gender are you?' 'Nature/Culture: Toward Co-Construction' may seem resurrecting from the post-Beauvoirian era. However, they are essential topics that need continual discussion. One of the long-standing criticisms of the cultural/postmodern 'turn' of gender theory from the 1990s is that this body of theory undermines the material reality of the sexed body, an issue Stock takes up in her previously mentioned book, especially against Butler's cultural theory of gender. Within this context, Butler returns with the argument that the binary of sex as natural/gender as cultural is epistemologically flawed, in part because sex is always social, hence semi-imaginary and semi-mandated by socio-cultural and economic norms. In other words, celebratory phrases such as 'it is a boy or a girl' are always social, although the identity is assigned based on biological marks. As gender theories are typically embedded in humanities and social sciences, it is easy to forget that the term gender most primarily appeared as a medical (instead of social or cultural) term with John Mooney's now infamous Gender Identity Clinic at Johns Hopkins (1966-1979), where Mooney, through a series of cruel surgical process, attempted to bring sex and gender alignment for babies born with intersexed bodies. Butler needs to be appreciated to remind their readers the biological/experimental origin of the term. When sex is already gendered and gender is an arrangement to align sexed bodies, how can we reconcile, yet again, the decade-long debate of sex versus gender as nature versus culture? Butler proposes the term 'co-construction' to move beyond the binary framework because human lives, indeed any life, are "born into a state of dependency that makes its life processes social from the beginning" (210).

The final two chapters, 'Racial and Colonial Legacies of Gender Dimorphism' and 'Foreign Terms, or the Disturbance of Transition' revisit the historical trajectory of heterosexualisation of male/female relationship as a colonial/imperial project that violently undermined the indigenous, localized, non-institutional ways of bonding relations across genders. Earlier in the book, Butler articulates clearly, "World Bank and the EU cannot, and should not, be the representatives of gender freedom and equality" that may "confuse exploitation with freedom" (62). To conclude, Butler wishes that feminists across border will take the responsibility of creating a world of freedom and equality, for who translation will be an ethical responsibility to counter the western epistemological hegemony: "Because no

national language can supply an adequate framework for understanding gender, translation becomes one important scene for an anti-colonial alliance" (242). "Alliance, translation, and a counter-imaginary" are needed to make gender a collective instrument of political change. Butler, one of the influential thinkers shaping the 21st century's epistemology, urges feminists to take politics of coalition and resistance at the heart of feminist discourse because, without politics, feminism can be a neoliberal lifestyle choice, an academic consciousness with little bearing on reality, and an easy political weapon to divide and conquer anxious electorates.

Who's Afraid of Gender? is a book with specific yawning gaps. With robust editing, it could have been half the size. Butler's reluctance to engage critically with broader feminist voices questions their capacity to handle academic critique, and their sparsely referenced writing style can easily confuse graduate students who are constantly penalized for not adhering to academic integrity. Beyond these and many other gaps, this book discusses issues that affect individuals at local, national, and transnational contexts of our living time. It is commendable that Butler has used their public intellectual status to write a book that brings gender, politics, and ethics into one collapsing frame, asking feminists of the future to be proactive to create a just world for all.

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