

Diasporic Memories, Dissident Memoirist

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This ruthless and irreverent dismantling of the workings of discourse, thought, and existence, is therefore the work of a dissident. Such dissidence requires ceaseless analysis, vigilance and will to subversion, and therefore necessarily enters into complicity with other dissident practices in the modern Western world. (Kristeva and Moi 299)

I met Fawzia Afzal-Khan at the annual conference of National Women's Studies Association, an ideal site of intellectual exchange for dissident feminist academics in the United States. As a scholar, professor, academic, poet, singer, actress, critic, and memoirist, opinionated and equipped with a rich contralto and an unabashed head-turning laugh, she was a natural magnet for anyone interested in feminist struggles. I followed her to all her talks and finally sat around her in a circle on the floor of the book fair where she explained the complicated narrative within and around her memoir, *Lahore with Love: Growing up with Girlfriends, Pakistani-Style*. It is less a narrative about the self than a biography about others, her dear circle of girl-friends mostly from her days studying at the Convent of Jesus and Mary and subsequently, Kinnaird College for Women in Lahore, and has generated controversy. Afzal-Khan's memoir is neatly divided into five chapters with each chapter devoted to one friend so that the chapters are in equal part homage and eulogy for the loss of friendships. However, it is the final account of the one friend who is still alive, a friend rendered through the anonymity of name and enlivened in the sheen of fiction, that produces the ripple around the text, and finally leaves the memoirist without a press, and thus, outside the printing machine. As a feminist South Asianist, I am already intrigued. For the woman's voice is always too much and never enough.

The text and context are both punitive. Afzal-Khan narrates the lives of women and charts how epistemologies of discourse and power have disciplined and punished their bodies; in a larger sense, the text authored by her female pen is given due punishment on American printscapes. The narrative circles back upon itself in that Afzal-Khan is reminded of what she can or cannot say. Deeply aware of her own "Cassandra-like" positioning, she writes knowing the insufficiency of the medium because "No one listens; no one sees" (Afzal-Khan 5). This memoir, in charting the lives of a few women from Lahore, is also a bold attempt at

feminography and one of the numerous strokes against the reign of General Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s, an era that marks the great struggle of women's rights and launches the forces of fundamentalist revisions of gender and social order in Pakistan. Afzal-Khan does fulfill the prototype of Kristeva's new type of intellectual, a dissident writing from the exile of home, memory, moorings and cultural belongings. Afzal-Khan, in cataloguing the lives of other women, brings to light their passions and fierce presence, and simultaneously, writing from the doubled exclusion of diaspora and raced/gendered other, dismantles "the workings of discourse, thought, and existence" (Kristeva and Moi 299). In making legible the silence of feminine subjectivity, she performs her own complicity with western liberal projects of feminism as well as her own authentic self as a Pakistani feminist writing "to" death. In a Benjaminian sense, then, Afzal-Khan is the true storyteller, not afraid of looking at death in the face. Different prepositions such as "from," "of," "in," "at," "against," "before," "after," "despite," and "through," just to mention an elementary list, can be substituted because Afzal-Khan, like Scheherazade, the universal feminist muse, writes to stave off death.

Fawzia Afzal-Khan is marked by the crime of retrospection and reflection, a literary anamnesis; her counterpart in the Abrahamic tradition is the wife of Lot, forever unnamed, who physically turns to look at the burning cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and "she became a pillar of salt" (Oxford Annotated Bible, Gen. 19.26). In continuing with the 'unspeakability' of the transgressive female subject, the Qur'anic tradition "corrects" in order to inscribe the apotheosis of Prophet Lut, leaving behind his wife who is guilty of not sharing her husband's faith, and so it is ordained, "she will indeed be among those that stay behind" (Qur'an, 29.32). While Amina Wadud interprets this moment as "non-gender specific examples – in this case, of the individual responsibility towards belief" (Wadud 34), I posit that this shift of damnations from the Hebraic pillar of salt to the Islamic rain of sulphur, or "horror from heaven" (Qur'an, 29:34) is a productive tension yielding a composite image of the reflecting woman. Guilty of retrospection in the Judaic tradition, she is implicitly eviscerated from the Islamic scriptures for transgression of belief. Wadud, in neutralizing her gender, which goes along with the significant Muslim feminist tafsir of rendering both sex(es) equal when measured in front of God, elides the social politics of gender and its adherent nuances. Lot has the special relationship with Allah's messengers, not his wife, who remains unnamed in the Islamic Canon as well. Her presence does not extend enough to allow her to look back. Instead, she stays behind – condemned, and in Kristeva's order, unnameable, unrepresentable, void. Since both fates are arrested in place, one frozen in the process of leaving and the other, burnt at home, the dialectic

between this mirrored erasures of Lot's wife speaks volumes to the "unmentionable" and now, un-roofed memoir which seeks multiple simultaneities: to live and die, to leave and stay, to speak the silence, to utter the unnameable, and finally, to be woman and refuse to give in to the law of death.

Through this article, I explore the significance of Afzal-Khan's memoir in relation to three feminist theoretical positionalities: the psychoanalytical, the postcolonial, and the autobiographical. The article raises questions such as, 1) in what ways does the memoir disrupt phallic jouissance and threaten the sociality of community as configured most centrally through the account of Mad Medea? 2) how does feminist autobiography theory enrich Afzal-Khan's memoir which is a telling and witnessing of other lives? The text points to the blurring between 'self' and 'other' when position, privilege, location, language, and religion often change the loci of subject and object of desire. 3) Does the memoir invite criticism from subaltern theorists and/or postcolonial scholars from whom questions on the reductive and essentialist irreducibility of this text rise. Does the memoir reify normative western representations of their ally in a strange place (playing on Afzal-Khan's own opening which meditates on the strangeness of place from her vantage point). In what ways might this memoir contest the tired binaries of west and non-west by allowing for the singular voice of the memoirist and its attendant women to speak? The memoir then stands as a place of possibility where the voices urge a portrait of Lahore, Pakistan through female subjectivity that stands as metonym for the very fractures which break bridges. The text's own metanarrative emerges from a history of concurrent reproductions in the Pakistani episteme, from Ayesha Jalal's impersonation of Saadat Hasan Manto, a panoply of middle-eastern and Muslim women's speech acts, and the author's own earlier anthology which is a composite of all different disciplines, genres, and geographies, *Shattering the Stereotypes: Muslim Women Speak Out*. Above all else, this article writes from the desire to declare, despite its allegiance to the vocabulary of deconstructive feminism: the author, most certainly, is not dead.

Disrupting the Phallogocentric

Afzal-Khan's slender memoir belies its epic ambition; the memoir switches between story, poetry, ghazal, song, and eulogy. The memoir, in accounting for the friendships lost, lists the systematic method and madness with which patriarchy ravages the woman's body – murder, suicide, nervous breakdown, and finally, a shattering of friendship itself, a matter to which I return later. The memoirist's friend in college, a veritable powerhouse of art and popular culture who introduces her to Leonard Cohen and boasts parents who discuss "Eliot and Lawrence and Picasso"(38), is the one who marries for love, makes her choice in

a man who eschews bourgeois order and pursues in her marital union their dreams of “a classless society” (52). The very same Hajira, *urf* Haji, is the one who realizes in the failure of this relationship that she has made a mistake and leaves the family and friends to figure out the mystery of her distress in her suicide. Having invited her husband to witness a surprise, she shoots herself dead so that “they discover Hajira’s lifeless body, lifeless, the gun still smoking in her right hand, blood oozing out of the right side of her temple, her mouth twisted in a sardonic smile” (58). Suicide remains the irreducible, beyond the pale of narrative or absolute articulability and thus, Afzal-Khan’s exercise in bearing witness does require further examination. Here, feminist psychoanalytical theory becomes a useful way of seeing the erasure of female subjectivity as a disruption of the phallogocentric.

Renata Salecl provides an illuminating reading of the event of Odysseus and the Sirens in the Greek epic. She complicates this through Kafka’s rewriting of the epic event. Wherein the Homeric event contends the sirens as embodiment of feminine *jouissance* that proves to be deadly to men and thus, is countered by the heroic *polytropos*, Odysseus by tying himself to his ship and covering his ears with beeswax, Kafka rewrites it to show the change in this moment. While Odysseus assumes that the sirens are singing and he is resisting, in actuality, they have fallen in love with him for his self-composure and confidence and do not sing. It is love-sickness that renders them mute and then dead. While it can be read as the Sirens caving in to Odysseus’s masculine primacy and superior ardor, Salecl offers an alternative position: “the fact that the Sirens either became mute or died, proves that they did not compromise their *jouissance*” (Salecl 193). Odysseus neither notices the Sirens stretching out their arms and in turn, their gaze that swallows his, nor does he understand that he had survived a hollow test. The Sirens do not confess their love to him and beseech or importune him to become his *objet petit a*. Feminine *jouissance* is not something that can be articulated or understood fully. It is not something that takes the place of masculine *jouissance* but something that happens beyond it. It is neither expected nor transparent. Feminine *jouissance* is a trauma to the masculine order and thus, Circe requires Odysseus to retell it to Penelope and as with trauma, it is repeated. It can be summed as feminine subjectivity without subjecthood, or a state of penitent abjection. Salecl explains, “What the Sirens’ silence offers is an exemplary case of subjectivization without accepting symbolic castration” (194). While the normative order that mirrors patriarchal ideologies of regulating women’s bodies at all costs will find the “dead” woman guilty of having dared to “end” her own narrative without permission by god, state, or man, Haji’s bullet to the head can be read as an “exemplary case of subjectivization without accepting

symbolic castration.” Her husband’s hypocrisy, depravity and cruelty, revealed to her through the institutional system of marital arrangements do not leave room for dialogue or communication. Further, I read her fatal self-mutilation as her way of making explicit patriarchal script that was always already writ large upon her body. Afzal-Khan’s own imaginary adds, if we missed the point, Haji’s sardonic smile to this final performance as speech which defies the phallogocentric order. This smile which possibly psychically cleaves Sufi to the ground is a synecdoche for feminine *jouissance* that nevertheless remains inscrutable.

The memoir-text also benefits from being read through the prism of dissidence offered by Julia Kristeva who categorizes resistance along three arcs: the political, the psychoanalytical, and the experimental. Women, always already distanced by exile, are afraid of neither death nor law and their dissidence foregrounds all three. And thus, she remains fragmented, singular, unnameable. Feminine subjectivity then arises out of this repressed basis where pregnancy signifies the threshold but maternity its singular ethics. The woman remains both the guarantee and threat to the patriarchy in which she has been buried. Walter Benjamin’s angel of history, *Angelus Novus* does figure into the specter of the female chronicler who looks back while moving forward, her feet buried in the present so that female creation has to be regarded through the lens of future anteriority. While Kristeva rightly reminds us of the female (auto)biography as the work of the exiled, Afzal-Khan’s memoir exceeds the limits of the text by posting bouts of laughter at random and strange junctures. Speaking to the Bakhtinian theory of the novel, Afzal-Khan’s text is saturated with the bawdy and carnivalesque, culminating in the Spanish landscape of the bullfight, and this is no careless misstep of the wandering itinerant writer but a writer who chooses to situate the Dionysian squarely within the geographical markers of Europe, and not its other. In her retrospections, Pakistan pre-Zia is organized around the luxuries of the petit bourgeois and post-Zia, a new world carefully principled around gender and social segregation, but ordered nonetheless. In relating the Shia mourning rituals in the public sphere to the carnality of bull fighting in Spain, the author imbricates European hegemony with the bacchanalia generally attributed to its other, and translates the familiar Sunni derogations into the larger theme of middle-class distaste for the carnivalesque of religion, “seven days of unabashed libidinal energy unleashed in honor of the fiesta of San Fermin, that ever-so-saintly bishop of Pamplona” (79). The authorial picaresque across the globe touches upon the vexed relationship between the pantheons of religious decorum and its own shadow, the bacchanalia inspired of the same institutions. As this truth rings out from streets in Pakistan to Spain, the humanism of Afzal-Khan’s project is underlined in red once again.

Kristeva's directive that exile is a way of surviving in the face of the dead father can be complicated in the sense that for the exiled Pakistani woman, the fathers double in the diasporic journey from Pakistan to the United States, and writing is an oscillation between the silences learned under the Name of the Father. For the writer then, as Trinh T. Minh-ha explains, "identity is a product of articulation. It lies at the intersection of dwelling and traveling and is a claim of continuity within discontinuity (and vice-versa)" (Minh-ha 31). Writing from exile is a way of divesting from the privileges, banality, and mass institutions that dominate everyday of the modern. In Kristeva's expressions, true dissidence arises in representing the unrepresentable, or in a Lacanian sense, gesture at the real. Articulation occurs in the signs beyond the imaginary and the symbolic. It is in the fourth chapter, not so clearly about the friend or friendship or loss as such, but a messy entanglement of ruminations on home(s), travel, religious frenzy, sexual heat where the formula of the memoir is ruptured, the authorial denunciation encoded in the single line of recall about her old friend, Chambeli, "Haji and I are the only friends from school who make it to her wedding to a Sunni man, angrily shunned by her father..." (92). The entire chapter rests on the punitive regime of the Law of the Father that dooms its object, the woman, into erasure once a certain border has been crossed. For the border-crossing agent whose future rests upon the multitudes of pasts configured through the present, a future anteriority allows for the ambiguous layering of person and time in the final lines of poetry that conclude the chapter, "Imagining Forever/ being Mad about Me" (94). The lines, hinting at Bakri's lyricization for Fawzia, the college student, also suggests in its ambiguous texturing a selfhood of romance and further, time itself constituted under the proper appendage of "Forever" as being the unforgiving entity that remains disconsolate and irreconcilable. The memoir makes visible the difficulty of retrospection made sensible in the linearity of time.

Barbara Johnson charts the melancholia of the feminist writing self, records the fact of castration for the girl, and the internalization of illness, incompleteness, and a splitting that makes visible the invisible in the western canon. In writing about Nathaniel Hawthorne, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Sigmund Freud, making of them all literary case studies, she notes:

This is not to substitute a cliterocentric universe for a phallogocentric one, but rather to take the clitoris, as Gayatri Spivak and Naomi Schor have both suggested, as a synecdoche for the possibility that the world could be articulated differently, that resistance is always the sign of a counter-story, that the "knife that cuts both ways" does so not because the stories are symmetrical but because they are not, because each of them is differently

situated, serves different ends, and accounts for different things. There is no guarantee that the figures in a *truly* recursive figure would fit together at all. (Johnson 31)

The memoir here, emerging from the resistant feminist script of a non-western context, is not the simple substitution of centering the female, and thus, writing/righting the world. Instead, it is an attempt toward “the possibility that the world could be articulated differently” (Johnson 31) under the aegis of telling a counter-story, a counter-history to Zia’s campaign to nullify the rights of women, or put more plainly, the lives of women. In fact, the recursiveness of these chapters that account of the losses suffered by the woman she, the author, knew, do not fit together neatly, nor do they necessarily signify sameness. The final chapter on the one living testament to this life spent trespassing and transgressing is a fellow activist, theatre artist, and feminist icon who literally speaks through the seams of the text back at the audience. In Afzal-Khan’s memoir, it is not only the dead who speak. The living mouth back their rejection so that the text splits at its seams exposing its own extradiegetic gestures of constituting memory.

Mad Medea, her pseudonym for this chapter being Medina, is the friend who arises from the depth/death of text charging the press for slander. Medea, artistic, fiery, productive, prolific, just like our memoirist, is separated from her because Medea does not leave. However, if read through psychoanalysis, her gendered condition is already one of exile. This final chapter contains the mixture of genres and disciplines – history, journalism, poetry, memoir, gossip, and mostly, a settling of accounts. It reeks of the woman-to-woman competitiveness marking female complicity in classic patriarchy most aptly coined by Deniz Kandiyoti as the “patriarchal bargain.” We are made privy to her winning the most prestigious artistic title in Pakistan, and thus, routing us to her actual identity, as we are also made to realize the achievements and honors heaped on our memoirist. How does one account the difficult passages and in-roads and gullies of feminist awakenings and feminist friendships? What happens when these friendships go awry? Is it better to stay complicit in the familiar silencing of patriarchy or engage in the unabashed speech of uttering these difficult dialogues. The text here becomes a “knife that cuts both ways” (Johnson 31) and shows a mirror effect – the subject and object of her study are both similar, but they do not fit together at all. Like the authorial feminine subjectivity, the text also splits in two – the feminist binary, the self and the other, the native and the diasporic, the artist and the scholar, the sister and the stranger. And this time, we point the finger, not to regulating hand of the Father, but the seismic convulsions evident in transnational feminisms. The author is only guilty of naming the unnameable.

In Ranjana Khanna's invaluable imbrication of psychoanalysis with colonialism, she offers cautions to the transnational feminist. The memoirist's account here is vulnerable in its naked mirroring of a past rendered honest through its flattened gestures at its own margins – the poor, the working class, the African, the conservative, the religious. In the memoirist's world, the heavy-handed pejoratives mark the privilege of her world defined against the massive backdrop of those left out of its glowing canvas, and the text legitimates the problematic Khanna asks us to ponder: "An ethics that bases itself on a theory of desire is a problem; it is solipsistic because desire for subjective wholeness ultimately falls into a kind of idealism" (228). Where she moves towards spectrality which "demonstrates the weight of history as an ethical and psychical structure, an epistemic violence, a melancholia, a phantom or an "unjustifiable violation" (229) that can only be mitigated by a sense of justice that takes into regard the historical ruptures consequent of colonialism and psychosocial losses as prefigured by gender. Afzal-Khan writes with this knowingness and the text is implicated in the vexed ethics of diasporic memories, most palpably spelt out in the authorial 'double exile' from nation and print capital.

Along the Transnational Feminist Axis

Alice Munro's recent story, "Axis" published in the aftermath of updated critiques of Betty Frieden's *Feminine Mystique* brings to the surface questions critical to western feminist discourses. Whereas Munro's fictional voice speaks to the second wave that was yet to contend with the scholarship of women of color, coalition politics, anti-imperialist praxis (Mohanty) emblemized in the pithy encapsulation of a whole era, "When the great switch came in women's lives—when wives and mothers who had seemed content suddenly announced that it was not so ..." (Munro 68), Afzal-Khan's memoir speaks to a non-western feminist reckoning with the losses of the period starting with the military dictatorship of General Muhammad Zia Al-Haq's reign, a period of military collaboration with religious fundamentalism and American dollar leads to the further regulation of women's bodies and lives under the name of nationalism and heteronormative politics of power. In many ways, the memoir traces the neat line of losses from the deaths and violence suffered by women all the while naming the feminists who spearhead the Women's Action Forum and fight the iniquities starting with the Safia Bibi and Khushi Muhammad cases. In fact, much of the text carefully sets order in the chaos of losses and nostalgia by slipping through the binary famously named by Mahmood Mamdani as the 'good Muslim' and 'bad Muslim' in his book by the same title, a binary that sets the stage for Iraqi invasion under the aim of "a regime change intended to liberate "good" Muslims from the

political yoke of “bad” ones ... good Muslims are modern, secular, and Westernized, but bad Muslims are doctrinal, antimodern and virulent” (Mamdani 24) that exists alongside the historical amnesia that misremembers “the Islamization of the Pakistani state, under Zia, occurred under the protective American umbrella during the Cold War” (249). The difficulty of absolute speech is made most explicit in Mino Moallem’s difficulty in answering the question: are you a Muslim woman? Previous missions of civilizing are now translated as humanism and she concludes her reflection on the impossibility of plain speech: “I am faced with the impossibility of transgression since either I am required to submit to the “itinerary of silencing” by refusing to answer the question or to adopt a subject position that makes me “pass”(Moallem 55).

It might seem like an idealization here to claim that Afzal-Khan abilitates the subaltern, her friends now dead and beyond the realm of language and symbolic order, to speak. In a sense, this might agitate the theoretical gestures towards the complexities in subaltern representations which Spivak herself has been quite actively doing. Nalini Persram’s meticulous critique of Spivak’s meanderings around sovereign subjectivity is an urgent inroad to this discussion: “Representation, as Spivak observes, is not about representing “them” (*vertreten*) but about learning to represent (*darstellen*) ourselves”(Persram 84). Persram implicates postcolonial desire in the silencing of the subaltern; speech is possible, albeit interrupted by the authorial silence in moments when conversations come to a cease-fire. The authorial voice, given to poetry, ghazal, singing refrains in the middle of sentences, operatic sentimentality suffers the silence willingly performed by friends who have switched sides in the feminist camp. To the mother’s prejudice that elevates Sunni over the Shia, the daughter’s interrogation, “Why are you so full of hate, so prejudiced?” is what I really want to ask her, but she has risen from the table” (84) is never voiced. In the poem that follows this episode, the author unveils her mother’s own adulterous love affair evidenced through a childhood memory. The feminine silence exists in simultaneity with the supplement, *jouissance* as evident through both the melancholic and the erotic. The mother’s latent desires, left unwitnessed in her command, “you didn’t see anything” (87) emerges through the completion of the daughter’s memoir – logos stitched into eros in the beat of the thanatotic. The daughter does “see” and the memoir, a defiant gesture at self-expression, identity, assertion of the politics of exile and belonging, refuses to be easily categorized through genre or discipline or any other form of regulation. In the ways that the women in Afzal-Khan’s life were once defiant, infecting the author with a lifelong sense of autonomy, the memoir is an unruly jumble of snapshots, recollections, anecdotes from then and now, a text that refuses to be regulated.

While none of the friends lost in this narrative are directly penalized by Zia's campaign against women because as is evident, the women who suffer the ravages of the state often were poor, illiterate and unable to afford legal counsel, the women in Afzal-Khan's circle pay a price to the ossification of classic patriarchy as it realigns itself through the Hudood ordinance passed in 1979. Sam's murder, Haji's suicide, Saira's nervous breakdown and Chambeli's alienation are all marked by the change in the air, and women of privilege often come from families whose power gives them impunity from the law, who are freer than the poor to punish their wives and daughters. Much scholarship has been devoted to this era of rising religious prescriptions in the Pakistani public sphere (Jamal; Jafar; Silva; Haq; Weiss; Hegland; Khan "'Zina" and the Moral Regulation of Pakistani Women"; Korson and Maskiell; Mumtaz) who attend carefully to the conditions on the ground post-Hudood and pre-2006 repeal of the Hudood. Shahnaz Khan offers a very astute analysis of the difficulty of reading fundamentalism and women's involvement in it calibrated between tropes of orientalism and secularism and western hegemony, and she does it by attending rigorously to Pakistani feminist movement (Khan "Reconfiguring the Native Informant: Positionality in the Global Age"). Amina Jamal's work is critical in the way Muslim piety performed by women is read as acts of feminine subjectivity rather than "the site of a battle between fundamentalist men and elite women in Pakistan" (62) but it is to Shahnaz Khan I turn whose work with the women incarcerated under the Zina laws sheds greatest light on the manner, method, and significance behind the regulation of women's bodies in contemporary Pakistan.

The notion of Pakistan, literally the land of the pure, evokes a desire for a national community of moral citizens. I argue that this morality is expressed in discourse suggesting the ideal citizen as a moral disembodied male. Women's narratives disrupt this ideal. Their accounts suggest a hidden side of the nation. Yet in their desire to present themselves as gharaloo (domesticated), they too desire to be part of the national narrative. As Pakistan narrates its past and present and tries to imagine its future, there is a struggle over ideology and particularly which interpretations of Islam will help construct the guiding force of the nation. (88)

Khan gathers powerful narratives in her interviews of women incarcerated for periods of days to years regarding their putative crime against the state which she finds to be less about the religious transgression of zina and more, familial desire to punish women who make autonomous choices or utilize their bodies for further economic gain, and if the women pose any resistance, they are tossed in front of

the slow machinery of state law. In actuality, once incarcerated, a woman of no economic means might have to wait for years for trial and meanwhile, her family gains the upper hand of having punished the “unruly” woman. In an article written the following year, Khan complicates her interviews with the women in the shelter, Darul-Aman, by bringing into relief larger structures of western hegemony, ideological state apparatuses and economic devastation that play into keeping the *Zina* laws in place: “Pakistani women, controlled by poverty and their families, may be controlled again by the orientalist gaze and co-opted into mystifying the oppression women in the West face” (Khan "Locating the Feminist Voice: The Debate on the Zina Ordinance" 663), and urges the transnationalist feminist to think of the condition of gender iniquity in Pakistan as continuous with the classic patriarchy in the western world as well, rather than as dichotomous or aberrant. In further highlighting how the cases of Saima Sarwar and Uzma Talpur, women of the upper class, who were killed and disappeared respectively, by their own families, she complicates the class question. The poor and working class women are punished through incarceration and the state shelter system while the upper class women whose families can afford to resist the long arm of the law can then administer the justice themselves.

Afzal-Khan’s memoir speaks to the aporia “class” represents in women’s lives for whom the bargain with patriarchy is what sets the self-destruction in motion. It is only at the ritual surrounding Sam’s death that the author finds out her friend does not have a home of privilege like “the upper-middle-class enclaves of Gulberg, Cantonment, and Shah Jamal Colony” (22) but instead an urban home, unerringly quiet in mourning. Haji’s landscape is one of privilege and ennui, the alienation of the elite while the rest are all bound to struggle such as Saira who has to scuttle between continents to satisfy her wandering husband and dictatorial mother-in-law. In a proleptic move to the late 1990s, the author recalls an event that stands as synecdoche for the memoir of losses here, the murder of a young woman who is on the run from her ex-abusive husband and family that refuses to abide by her divorce and desire to remarry a man of her choice. In front of the human rights lawyer and the author’s cousin-aunt, Asma Jahangir, the young woman is murdered by her own uncle and mother. “The first gets Samia in her head; the second, in her heart; and the third, clean through her crotch” (32). Shahnaz Khan’s call to continuous reading of western and non-western patriarchies emerges in that what Botting and Wilson note about the iconic American anti-feminist film, “*Pretty Woman*” since anti-feminist structures of the law render no justice to women’s bodies because of “a libidinal economy of total servitude that demands the excision of every form of useless negativity that it cannot reaffirm and reinvest for profit” (184). The symbolism cannot be clearer – if the woman’s

body disobeys, it is of no use to the patriarchal apparatus. For the autonomy exerted by her head, heart, and sexuality, she is killed while her murderers can excuse their sin under the utterance, “God’s will is done,” her father’s declaration to his constituents in Peshawar. It is the very slippage between the name of the father and the no of the father. For her transgression in refusing to abide by her own commodification and concurrent subjection to the law of the father, she is excised from the legal script, her body terminated with extra-judicial impunity in the offices signifying the juridicality of the state. The irony should not be lost here. The familial has simply fastened the much slower juridical machinery of the state. The name of the father (kin) is coterminous with the law of the father (state).

Autobiographical Assumptions and Biographical Detractions

If Islam and Christianity take the foreground, Judaism is present by implication. Nawal El Saadawi challenges the patriarchal tradition common to all three Abrahamic religions, but is not afraid to exploit it. After all, were it not for Allah, there would be no Bint Allah. (Malti-Douglas 117)

A girl child is better than ten thousand boys;
If she’s far away she asks after her mother;
If she’s near she brings me her love
And she gives me part of her food. (Tunisian lullaby in Fernea and Bezirgan 89)

Oh God, inspire the men in our government to do right because their injustice to the nation has many repercussions on us. It seems that we have not received anything more than men receive except pain. This reverses the Quranic verse that says, ‘One man’s share shall equal two women’s shares.’ (al-Badiya 136)

Theorizing the autobiographical involves legitimizing and canonizing the unstable, genre-crossing, memory inspired, kin of fiction that the category becomes once subjected to autobiographical assumption of the ‘female pen’ (Showalter), as opposed to earlier phases of feminine or feminist. For the woman writer, like Scheherazade, writing is a way of forestalling death, resisting while abiding and gathering lives in the interstices of patriarchy. From the earlier feminist writing in the Arab world, as evidenced by al-Badiya’s lament or the lullaby which sounds out the unconscious in folk song, women have always already been aware of their subjugation and thus, through modernity, as Shahnaz Khan reflects, seek to participate in the national narrative. Even where she is seemingly celebrated in the

lullaby, it calls attention to her labors without which the familial cannot function. Afzal-Khan's memoir adds to the already lengthy tradition of Arab, Muslim, and middle-eastern women writing about the self and subjectivity pushing against patriarchal subjugations. Yet the woman's body is fetishized even in celebrations in ways that elide agency and cohere along the axis of commodification – use, reuse, refuse. Often women are rendered within this libidinal economy as the contesting object rather than speaking subjects, reordered in Afzal-Khan's feminist poetics as “The places/And colors/In between” (135).

The female pen is not necessarily a gendered pen. In the memoir's need to elide or transgress gender norms as the writer traverses western and non-western spaces, Leigh Gilmore's conclusions drawn from Teresa de Lauretis's work remains useful, “the ‘feminine subject’ immersed in the ideology of gender is not the only gendered construction available to women” (Gilmore 20). The ideological underpinnings raised by Gilmore lead to questions of authority, self-representation, and legitimacy, the questions haunting the woman's text, and thus, it is almost ritualistic that the memoirist here ends on a note of doubt and humility “reading” in the women of faith an autonomy and agency that makes them less complicitous than “the accommodations to philandering husbands my saner, more secular-minded friends have had to make” (143). Liz Stanley, in putting the ‘bio’ back in autobiography outlines the blueprint of Afzal-Khan's textual ambitions most cogently while alerting us to the epistemological concerns of the type of feminography engaged by the autobiographer. Ultimately the memoir, nodding in the direction of women who have chosen to write their lives before, does so knowing the ontological precipice offered women who speak. Instead, Afzal-Khan psychologizes, rhapsodizes, ruminates, enjambes and questions, “Who am I? Why am I here?” (145) ending on a notion of ceaseless eternal motion. The conclusion where we are left astride the see-saw, reader subjectivity coming into play alongside the writer's childhood frolic, is one of motion, the childhood games a mere precursor to the life of wandering entailed in the diaspora for Fawzia Afzal-Khan.

In conclusion, it is helpful to bear in mind the hopes and realizations evinced in a recent conversation between Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak wherein Spivak introduces the term ‘critical regionalism’. Such a system of thought begins where Derrida introduces the disconnection between birth and citizenship, a point Spivak unpacks, “... we can't make a clear-cut distinction between self-determination and nationalism, regionalism and nationalism. There must be a persistent critique that operates during and beyond the rational arrangements. This is the regionalist imperative-discontinuous with the politico-rational” (Butler and

Spivak 108). It is in the very sutures and ruptures of this diasporic journey of distanciation and negotiation with one's own socio-politics and gendered reconsiderations that Afzal-Khan anchors her autobiographics. We live in an age when everyone can have an opinion and bloviate like the talking heads on a podium and reach a vast audience. It is also much too easy to categorize each position into boxes that remain cemented and separate so that discursivity becomes military exercises in further alienation. Afzal-Khan, instead, seeks to speak on the subject of the city of her youth through an axis of critical regionalism that leaves the text in the contested terrain of strange friendships, intimacy and complicity leaving a trail of questions thicker than the text itself on sovereignty, nation, gender, and exile.

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