



Embodying the Chameleon Self: A Transcultural Analysis of Identity in Sabyn Javeri's "A World without Men"

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ARTICLE INFO Keywords: Transculturism, cosmopolitan, identity, fiction. Corresponding Author: Momina Hafeez, Email: mominahafeez@numl.edu.pk	ABSTRACT This paper explores the instances of transculturality in Sabyn Javeri's short story "A World Without Men" to examine the portrayal of transcultural experiences in the diasporic author's work. Javeri's work engages in the celebration of a new transcultural phenomena due to the increasing developments in the relationships between individuals belonging to different nations and cultures at a global level. Therefore, a reflection of this seems to manifest itself in the new literature produced by writers having cosmopolitan identities. This paper examines the selected short story published in the collection <i>Hijabistan</i> from a transcultural perspective. It employs Richard Slimbach's theoretical lens presented in his essay "The Transcultural Journey". This paper analyses the transcultural locale that has been portrayed in the selected text. The study focusses on the ways this particular locale creates and provides opportunities to experience a transcultural relationship amongst themselves. This study also focusses on the shifts that take place in the character's worldviews as they are presented with the new and challenging transcultural phenomena. Furthermore, it seeks to establish a link between the changing viewpoints as a result of transculturalism and the evolution of identity experienced by the fictional characters in the short story. This study falls into the category of qualitative research and follows the method of textual analysis in order to read the primary text from a transcultural perspective.
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INTRODUCTION

Diaspora literature written by South Asian writers is replete with the representation of transcultural identities and interpersonal relationships primarily due to the multicultural background that these writers hail from. It is also due to the history of myriad cultural exchanges that have taken place as a result of British colonization of South Asia. The cultural

hierarchies set in place by the colonial rule between the colonizer and the colonized have persisted till date, and have largely ensured that interpersonal relationships between individuals are generally viewed in a framework of binarism. However, perceiving relationships between individuals only in the form of binarism is problematic. Ashcroft et al. argue that “the problem with such binary systems is that they suppress ambiguous or interstitial between the opposed categories, so that any overlapping region that may appear . . . between the categories . . . becomes impossible to binary logic, and a region of taboo in social experience” (Ashcroft et al, 1998, p. 18). Hence, locking up individuals in a close-circuited loop which does not allow for nuance in the ways individuals form relationship with each other.

Contrary to this, recently emerging South Asian literature shows that things have been shifting in the landscape of cultural representations for some time, and now by showing the variegated aspects of this transcultural relationship that the characters from the Global North and South have been forming with each other. Such literary representations help challenge the perceived rigid hierarchism prevalent in society about the relationship between the Global North and South. This shift points towards a burgeoning pluralism and inclusivity that may lead to a revision of the politics of the binary as far as individual relationships are concerned.

Sabyn Javeri’s story “A World without Men” is one such work of fiction that sets in the cosmopolitan setting of the UK and explores this transcultural exchange between two female characters. The narrator of the story is a white woman whereas the other one is a brown Muslim woman. The narrative depicts the various transformations that take place in the narrator’s the conception about the cultural other as well as in her perception about herself as they both come into contact with each other. This paper explores the multiple dimensions of interpersonal relationships that Javeri’s literary representations have to offer and see whether such portrayals may be conducive for the creation of new possibilities in a transcultural space. This paper investigates the possibility of the breaking down of pre-conceived imaginary borders that exist between individuals belonging to different cultures as they inhabit the same spatial proximity. It also attempts to analyze whether the characters make attempts to overcome these cultural differences or do they simply sink back into the comfort zones of traditionally perceived assumptions about their identities. My main argument in this paper is that the transcultural exchanges between different individuals sharing the same locality provide these characters with the possibility to forge new and flexible identities for themselves. In doing so, these individuals create opportunities for themselves to come out of their reductive stereotypical pigeonholes to which they have been restricted for centuries.

While inhabiting a transcultural space, the individuals belonging to the previously colonized nations also seemingly get an opportunity to challenge the ethnocentric ideas about them. The contact with ‘the other’ is likely to make the individual more deeply aware of their perceptions about this perceived other. It may also enable the viewer to reconsider their own identity in a new fashion.

Literature Review:

The review of the following literature produced on *Hijabistan* shows that various researchers have analysed the collection of short stories from different perspectives:

The research article “Female Identity: A deconstructive Study of the “Adultress” by Sabyn Javeri” uses the lens of identity feminism by Khaddar (2019) and Derrida’s deconstruction to explore how the female character’s identity is represented in the story as being completely tied in a binary with the absent male character. The paper discusses how “it seems as if the female identity construction is done from the perspective of male in the selected text, but the deconstruction approach helps in portraying the identity of female that is misrepresented in the story” (Aslam et al., 2023, pp. 178-186). The article “Hijabing dissent: Responses to

Javeri's *Hijabistan* and the Limits of Academic Discourse in Pakistan" points out that in "A Country Without Men" hijab appears to be a "symbol of rebellion and defiance against societal expectations" (Ahmed et al., 2024, p. 425). "Patriarchy in *Hijabistan* (2019): A Critical Examination of Gender Inequality in Pakistan" analyse the text from the radical feminist perspective and "highlights the conflicting reception of radical feminist ideals in Pakistani society, where cultural, social, and religious norms often clash with feminist discourses advocating for transformative societal reforms" (Shah et al., 2025, pp. 162-73). The article "The Question of Woman's Identity and Hijab: A Critical Study of Sabyn Javeri's *The Urge* (*Hijabistan*, 2019)" focusses on the impact of hijab on the identity of female characters in the collection of short stories by Javeri.

The above-mentioned researches highlight how different scholars have viewed the Javeri's collection of short stories from different perspective. Though all of the articles included in the literature do not directly deal with the primary text in this study, yet all of the researches largely addresses the overarching themes that tie all of the short stories in *Hijabistan*. Therefore, these have been taken into account. The literature review shows that although the researches examine various aspects of the primary text, they have failed to point out the phenomenon of transculturality in the text. The current study attempts to fill this gap by looking at the selected short story through this lens.

Theoretical Framework:

Slimbach in the essay "The Transcultural Journey" argues that we exist in an "increasingly transcultural" reality these days (Slimbach, 2005, p. 205). This is because "the local and the global" seem to be more interconnected/interlinked today than ever before (p. 205). He points out that though various transnational relations help promote this environment of transculturalism, one thing that he finds central to this exchange is the "cross-cultural friendships" that people forge with other individuals belonging to different cultures (p. 206). Therefore, the personal relationships that human beings create amongst themselves in a transnational space may supersede any external or institutional exchanges that take place between organizations or individuals belonging to different cultures. Slimbach's essay provides the reader with a roadmap which may be helpful in the perception of a person capable of embracing the transcultural reality that they have been faced with. Therefore, he presents some propositions regarding various human faculties in order to generate "transcultural competence" in the humans desirous to engage in relationships with other people living in a transcultural world. Transcultural competence may be defined as an ability to have "open and ethical interaction with people across cultures" (p.206).

Slimbach (2005) is of the view that interaction between individuals belonging to different cultures can develop "perspective consciousness" in people (p. 206). He defines this kind of consciousness as "the ability to question constantly the source of one's cultural assumptions and ethical judgements, leading to the habit of seeing things through the minds and hearts of other" (p. 206). This means that the establishment of the interpersonal relations among people belonging to different cultures in a transcultural locale may compel them to reevaluate their traditional ways of conceptualizing the other. This also suggests that this interaction allows for a revision of the biased assumptions one may have for people who do not share the same cultural roots. This kind of relationship may provide individuals with an opportunity to understand each other's lived experiences with cultural openness. Being in a transcultural space may create the possibility for the co-existence of multiple perspectives at the same time. Slimbach is of the view that such an environment may lead people to acknowledge and accept other people's varied perspectives on culture with less hesitation and more readiness.

Slimbach also focuses on the "affective development" of the individuals co-existing in an inter-cultural environment (p. 207). He defines 'affective development' as "the

capacity to demonstrate personal qualities and standards “of the heart” (e.g. empathy, inquisitiveness, initiative, flexibility, humility, sincerity, gentleness, justice and joy) within specific intercultural contexts in which one is living and learning” (p. 207). Again the emphasis has been put on the emotional aspect of human relations. This amplifies the significance of the affective side of human beings and how it needs to be consciously cultivated in order for transcultural relations to effectively take place among individuals.

The propositions described above, among the other ones laid out by Slimbach, aim to achieve “an attainable ideal” of creating a “transculturally-competent person” (p. 207). The model attempts to promote the acquisition of “a set of personal attitudes, social sensitivities, and intellectual skills” that may enable a person to embrace diverse cultural experiences in order to better understand the ever culturally evolving reality that they may be a part of. He points out that the whole “aim” of the above-mentioned propositions is “to cultivate a new way of seeing the world, and thus, of understanding ourselves” (p. 207). Therefore, the efforts to live in a more culturally accepting society may as well lead to the creation of the possibility to understand and reevaluate our own existence. Therefore, understanding the others may be deemed deeply linked with the reconceptualization of our own identities.

The rationale for striving to attain a transcultural being is also clearly described by Slimbach in the essay. He is of the opinion that human beings share “a common humanity and transcendent reality” with each other (p. 208). This is the reason why an awareness of a common collective ground may be helpful in coming closer to each other on the human grounds by forging interpersonal relations with each other. The subject matter that Slimbach is concerned with is interdisciplinary and borrows greatly from “the received wisdom of social anthropology, intercultural communication, and international education” (p. 207). Therefore, he refers to some anthropological assumptions while attempting to elaborate on his model for the attainment of an ideal transcultural human identity. He comments on the usefulness of anthropological studies in regards to understanding the human nature as follows: Anthropology has broadly concerned itself with the human condition: what human are, what humans do, and the problems that confront them. By investigating these matters among all peoples in all times and places, anthropologists have helped the rest of us understand and respond to human predicaments from something more than a parochial perspective. (p. 208) This basically suggests that understanding humans in a better way may be highly dependent on studying various groups of individuals as they exist in different cultural habitats. This emphasizes the importance of the comparative study of culture if they are to be truly understood in their full essence. So looking at cultures in a broader paradigm may be extremely vital as the comprehension of the human nature itself seems to be interlinked with it in the most intricate and complicated manners. He quotes Clyde Kluckhohn who points out that “all people are like all others, like some others, and like no other” (208). This suggests that human beings may be deemed absolutely unique when studied on an individual level, and also strikingly similar when perceived collectively across the cultures.

Slimbach is of the view that human behaviours appear to have universal features when viewed in a broad “continuum” (p. 208). These “universals” include “eating, family life, language, and clothing” (p. 208). He points out that these ‘universals’ seem to be constant throughout cultures however the ways these ‘universals’ may be manifested across the cultures may be entirely unique. That is these similar cultural traits may assume “many local, wildly different forms and defy any single, overarching explanation” (p. 209). Therefore, an awareness of the ‘universals’ disguised under the various unique shapes and forms may prove to be crucial in bringing people together to experience a shared sense of a transcultural identity. That is to say that understanding that different cultures may seem to be completely oppositional by nature yet may share remarkable similarities with each other upon thorough

investigation. He points out that acknowledging the personal may be extremely important in order to study human behaviour yet, understanding the existence of “deep structure” of human nature or culture is also of extreme significance (p. 209).

Slimbach is of the view that the recognition of the “personal” lying on the opposite end of the human “behavioural continuum” is also very important as it allows one to understand the unique differences that are produced as a result of individual cultural intervention (p. 208). The personal aspect of human culture is significant since it denies the assumption about human beings “as being little more than empty but programmable minds” (p. 209). It instead points to a contrary view of the individual as “a complex set of functional capacities – of intellect and imagination, of emotion and experience, and of self-determination” (p. 209). This point is especially crucial to my analysis because I attempt to discuss the over-arching similarities between the concerned cultures in a transcultural reality while keeping in the forefront the significance of the personal experience.

Analysis:

This paper analyses Sabyn Javeri’s short Story “A World without Men” while keeping the above-mentioned theoretical framework in mind. The selected theoretical lens allows me to analyse the experience of transculturality as represented by the author in the selected text.

The story deals with the dramatization of the relationship shared between two women belonging to two completely different cultural backgrounds. One character is a brown Muslim girl coming from Pakistan while the other one is a white, British woman. Right from the very beginning, the author seems to establish a gap between the two because of the cultures they belong to. In fact, the opening lines of the story seem to point towards an out of the ordinary cultural experience between the two characters. The story begins with first person narration by the white woman as she ponders about her interaction with the other woman. She reflects that “in ordinary circumstances, I would have taken her in. But this was an extraordinary situation. Firstly, she was my student. Secondly, she was a Muslim. Thirdly, she was invisible” (p. 75). Keeping the reflections of the character in mind, it may be pointed out that the white woman seems to be deeply aware of the “extraordinary” cultural experience she is shown to be having (p. 75). More importantly, the strangeness of the said experience seems to have been informed by the different identity of the ‘Other’ since the narrator draws attention to the cultural markers of the other character. Here the other woman’s religious identity and the way she chooses to dress herself are brought into the focus as the word “invisible” seems to point to the hijab that the woman dons (75). Therefore, the cultural signifiers that are placed at the very forefront of the narrative demand to be thoroughly analysed.

The cultural signifiers of identity of the Muslim woman are further emphasized when the narrator further describes her attire that renders her invisible to those who surround her. The woman seems to be “shrouded from head to toe” in a piece of clothing referred to by the narrator as the “jilbab” (p. 75). The narrator calls the ‘jilbab’ as one of “the complications” between the two women (p. 75). It may be interpreted that the difference of clothing, signifying cultural otherness, is viewed as somewhat problematic by the white woman. It seems as if this difference in the way these two individuals choose to dress creates some kind of a cultural barrier between the two.

The difference in the cultural attire however does not seem to be the only ‘complications’ in their relationship (p. 75). The characters are shown to share a teacher-student relationship and, therefore, a whole new dimension is introduced into their interaction with each other. In fact, the white woman reflects that “having something of a relationship with your student was higher on the list of risks” (p. 75). Therefore, the author seems to establish that it is not only the other girl’s “orthodox” Muslim identity but also other cultural

norms regarding public relations that complicate the relationship between these two human beings (p. 75).

The cultural markers mentioned above are considered as “complications” by the white woman (p. 75). This means that the cultural identity of the other woman acts a hindrance in their communication with each other. The human-to-human communication is rendered nearly impossible because the two women belong to cultures that are generally considered as opposite in the dominant cultural discourses. Therefore, the interaction that is likely to take place between these two individuals may likely be categorized as inter-cultural in nature.

The association of complexity by the white woman towards the relationship between her and the Muslim woman reveal the former’s culturally conditioned attitude towards the latter. The fact that she assumes the other woman’s cultural identity to be one of the ‘complications’ in their interaction indicates that the Western woman seems to have already formed an opinion about the woman belonging to the East. This indicates that the white woman, consciously or unconsciously, perceived the idea of being a woman to be monolithic and any deviations that arise from that definition help only complicate her understanding of womanhood. Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticises “the [white feminism’s] assumption of women as already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or local location” (1991, p. 55). This apprehension at the prospect of encountering “difference” shows how, even in the postmodern, multicultural environment that these characters exist, the white woman’s perception of the Muslim woman seems to be highly informed by the Orientalist prejudices about the East as well as about the people belonging to that part of the world. It highlights how the white woman’s ideas about people belonging the Eastern cultures largely guided by the age-old colonial stereotypes and that she lacks “the transcultural competence” needed to establish a human contact with the Other (Slimbach, 2005, p. 206).

As soon as these two factors influencing the characters’ interaction with each other have been established, the narrative moves on to add another complicating dimension to the relationship that these women share. This new angle is of the homosexual identity that the Muslim woman claims to possess. The revelation that the white woman has come to be in a contact with a Muslim homosexual woman seems to be something almost inconceivable by the former as she refers to her student as having “bipolar tendencies” (p. 75). This shows that it is beyond the western woman’s ability to reconcile the other woman’s perceived cultural identity and her sexual orientation. This again points to the pre-conceived notions that the Western woman seems to have about the other woman. Bell Hooks argues that the white feminists’ idea of feminism “rarely question whether or not their perspective on women’s reality is true to the lived experiences of women as a collective group. Nor are they aware of the extent to which their perspectives reflect race and class biases” (Hooks, 1984, p. 3).

Thus, it is the non-conventional sexual orientation of the brown woman that unsettles the other woman’s culturally prescribed definition of the other woman’s identity. Moreover, it invites the white woman to revise and reconsider her ideas about the identity of people belonging to other cultures. Jeff Lewis sheds light on Foucault’s emphasis on inter-personal relationships and points out that “Foucault substantiates this when he refers to the pervasiveness of power through the stratum and sub-stratum of social and personal relationships” (Lewis, 2002, p. 15).

The conundrum presented by the non-conformist sexual identity of the Muslim woman compels the white woman to reconsider her own life and identity as well. After encountering the non-normative life of her student, she begins to realize the strangeness of her own seemingly simple life. She reflects on the peculiarity of her life in the following lines: And that’s what my life has been all along – a paradox, an oxymoron, or in layman’s terms, something that looks simple on the surface but has so many tangled roots beneath it that that

my tongue grows fuzzy at the thought of an analogy that even begins to describe the mess my life is. (p. 76)

Here we get to see that the inter-cultural encounter provided by the transcultural context that these two individuals share not only makes this particular character attempt to understand the other person's reality, it also compels the individual themselves to re-evaluate their own life journeys and identity in return. This implies that the western woman begins to "question . . . the source of [her] cultural assumptions and ethical judgements" (Slimbach, p. 206).

In order to understand herself and her conception of identity better, the woman dives deep into her "relatively normal childhood" leading to her journey into the adulthood (Javeri, p. 76). After living a happy-go-lucky childhood, the woman remembers how a late night bus accident left her traumatized for life. She recalls that she "survived, but [her] self-esteem didn't" (p. 76). In fact, it was this accident that seems to have left a mark not only on her physical self but also on her psychological being. This points to a probable identity crisis as she points that "a nasty gash on [her] forehead and a slight limp left [her] needy and confused. A point came when [she] felt the need to tell [her] story" (p. 76). The character's thoughts on her own identity and the crisis that may be associated with it allow us to analyse her assumptions about her own identity. It may also reveal how she perceives the gradual transformations in her identity. It may also be noted that this readiness to see her identity anew and register the events that might have led to changes in her identity. Therefore, the transcultural experience that the Western woman encounters seems to induce a heightened awareness of not only of the 'Other' but also her own fractured self (build on this argument). In his essay, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory" Abdul R. Jan Mohamed comments on this type of interaction between a European and an Eastern person in the following lines Faced with an incomprehensible and multifaceted alterity, the European theoretically has the option of responding to the Other in terms of identity and difference. If he assumes that he and the Other are essentially identical, then he would tend to ignore the significant divergences and to judge the Other according to his own cultural values. If, on the other hand, he assumes that the Other is irremediably different, then he would have little incentive to adopt the viewpoint of alterity. He would again tend to turn to the security of his own cultural perspective. Genuine and thorough comprehension of Otherness is possible only if the self can somehow negate or at least severely bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of his culture. (1985, p.18)

In the white woman's case in selected narrative, we can see that she seems willing to reconceptualise her previously held cultural assumptions about the Muslim woman when faced with the 'multifaceted alterity' of the Other. This is evident in the way she chooses to introspect her own self as she comes in contact with her. An attempt to reevaluate her own identity that is inextricably linked with the culture the woman exists in show her willingness to not only understand the other woman but also to understand her own self in a better way. Her former way of viewing the other's culture actually emerges "from the wide-spread perception that of the state as the legal and political expression of a sovereign, unified and culturally unique nation" (Eigeortaigh and Berg, 2010, p. 7). Thus the seeds of a cultural understanding between the two women seem to be coming into existence because of the transcultural reality these women are shown to be inhabiting.

The contact between the two characters is made possible when the English woman is forced to move away from her previous comfortable home and life after her husband decides to go on a world tour. This means that she has to leave her life in London where she was "happily married" and had "a secure job" (p. 77). However, all this is uprooted when her husband decides to "rediscover himself" (p. 77). Here too we see the trope of transculturality being manifested in the husband's character who decides uncover truths about his own

identity and possibly embrace new changes. This parting of ways with the husband also ushers the woman to begin a journey of her own.

This journey lands her in an environment that appears to be a lot more culturally diverse than her previous surroundings. The class of students she gets to teach belongs to various races and cultures. She reflects that she “found [herself] in a room full of students of varying shapes and sizes. All women, [she] noted. Different skin tones in different modes of dress, from shalwar suits to tracksuit bottoms . . .” (p. 80). The mention of the cultural indicators such as ‘shalwar suits’ indicates how the narrator finds these new modes of dressing to be different from what she is accustomed to. Her astonishment at coming across a diverse cultural setting suggests her lack of awareness about her cultures. It in fact seems to emerge from the notion of “distinctiveness of societies, nations and cultures” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992, p. 6).

The recounting of the initial encounter between the two women again points to the white woman’s inability to consider her as a normal human being. She referred to her “in her head” as “the girl with no face” (p. 81). This is again due to the cultural attire donned by the other woman. The white woman further thinks that the student “was covered from top to toe in a tent-like garment she called the jilbab. Mother to the hijab?” (p. 81). This re-emphasises on her incredulity towards the ‘Other’ who appears to be extra-ordinary different from the white woman herself.

The contact with the Muslim woman also compels her to revisit the kind of cultural literary production that is available to the people living in the fairly monolithic society that she belongs to. The student demands the teacher, who also works as a librarian at a local library, to search for two books by an Iranian author for her. She soon realizes that the “small, provincial library” does not possess the “foreign titles” (p. 82). This revelation itself indicates the cloistered nature of the society that the woman inhabits in which literature from the third world countries is considered to be a rarity. Even though the white woman is not shown to reflect on this particular event, one may interpret that the inclusion of this incident may not be without a good reason. This is important because earlier in the narrative, the character mentions how upon moving to the new town she “found [herself] teaching the same Dead White Male writers [she] had come to abhor” (60). This indicates that the narrator is shown to possess a certain level of defiance to the pre-existing cultural and patriarchal norms and values that she has seemingly inherited. However, this defiance appears to be rather generalized and somehow depersonalized.

Her encounter with the Muslim woman, on the other hand, makes her aware of the issue of exclusivity in a more specific and personalized manner. Upon realizing that the books she had asked for aren’t available, the Muslim woman shows clear signs of distress and disappointment. The white woman-narrator reflects that “It was meant to be a joke, but she looked crushed” (p. 82). This allows her to realize the personal and individual impact of experiencing exclusion from the mainstream cultural discourse. The display of exclusivity as far as the literary narratives are concerned may appear to be ‘a joke’ for a white woman occupying a position of privilege, however, it means something entirely different for a woman of colour who exists at the receiving end of such politics of exclusion.

This particular incident also seemingly becomes the reason for the white woman to have “affective development” (Slimbach, 2005, p. 207). The conversation compels the narrator to approach the other woman on a human level instead viewing her as a mere object “with no face” (p. 80). She remembers that “her eyes dimmed and her head stooped. I was fascinated. Could eyes really be so expressive? Talking to her required a whole new set of communication, coded through body language” (p. 82). These lines show that the white woman experiences a broadening of perspective as she tries to communicate with the other woman. She also comes to realize that the tools of communication that she is equipped with

may not be sufficient to establish contact with her. This indicates that the woman comes to realize insufficiencies in her own culturally acceptable mode of communication. This also shows that focus begins to shift from verbal and linguistic mode of interaction to the non-verbal one which she begins to view as possibly more effective. Here we see that the character's emotional involvement plays an integral role establishing relations with another individual in an inter-cultural context. The woman feels "a surge of pity" for the other woman (p. 82). Thus, the affective factor seems to be predominantly involved in the inter-cultural interaction that these two women are shown to be engaged in. Therefore, it seems as if the narrative depicts woman "being in contact and understanding the culture of otherness 'alterite'" (Cuccioletta, 2001, p. 1).

The narrative development shows the deepening of the affinities between the two characters as the white woman starts to pay more and more attention to Saira, the Muslim woman. In fact, since the narrative is told from the first person narrator's perspective, the readers get to know the name of the Eastern woman quite later on in the short story. The white woman only gets to her the other woman's name when she feels sufficiently intrigued by her personality. Before that, it seems as if the Muslim woman had been relegated to namelessness and facelessness by the White woman. The text shows how the teacher feels compelled to perceive the other woman as a whole individual rather than just a faceless stranger. The white woman still refers to Saira as "a strange and lonesome girl" (p. 83). However, the definition of the word "strange" is allocated an elaboration by her as she explains that that Saira appeared 'strange' to her not "in an obnoxious way but more in an eccentric fashion" (p. 83). This shows that the encounter with Saira makes the white woman shed her preliminary assumptions about the individuals belonging to other cultures, and seek new definitions for her already familiar lexicon.

The deepening of the white woman's perception of the 'Other' seems to be accompanied by the individuation of the Eastern woman. For example, previously she is perceived as "quite and studious type, but closer inspection reveal[s] a streak of mischief in her" (p. 83). The white woman is depicted as keenly observing the other woman engage in all sorts of activities in the library. The teacher refers to these attributes as "crazy little eccentricities" that she finds "endearing" (p. 83). Thus, a clear shift in the perception of the white woman for the Muslim woman may be observed. This indicates a departure from "the wider social framework into which" she is born (Kidd and Teagle, 2001, p. 1).

While focussing on the representation of the inter-cultural relations between the two women, one may not overlook how the narrative stresses on the power dynamics of the concerned relationship. From the start of the narrative, the white woman is shown to assume the position of power by having the chance to project her voice and present her narrative in the story. On the other hand, the Eastern woman is shown to be "quite" or voiceless (p. 83). This is significant because the transcultural space is assumed to be one where people coming from various cultural backgrounds may share equal opportunity in enjoying their cultural identities. However, we see that the balance of power seems to be tilted more in the favour of the European woman. She assumes the role of the spectator whereas the Eastern woman is reduced to that of an object of "inspection" for the European woman (p. 83). Moreover, we see the Western woman embarked on an epistemological journey of discovering herself i.e. she seems to be constantly engaged in an act of 'selfing', whereas the Eastern woman is shown to exhibit an ontological identity. This is because she seemingly exists statically and passively for some other individual to discover and study her. This kind of representation of the inter-cultural relations between the Western and the Eastern women seemingly reinforce the Orientalist binaries between the two. Javeri very carefully reconstructs these binary relations between the two characters and then attempts to deconstruct them by presenting a nuanced take on them.

The selected text problematizes the reinforced Orientalist approach of the Western woman by inverting the roles that these two women are shown to be occupying. The narrative reveals that Saira's identity to be a carefully constructed one by her according to her own volition to arouse the interest of the Western woman. In fact, Saira is shown to be intentionally entertaining the cultural assumptions of the white woman only to challenge and subvert them. For example, the white woman is forced to revise the stereotype of the submissive, veiled woman upon encountering various aspects of Saira's identity. The narrative depicts how the two women begin to shift from sharing a public space to a more domestic one together. The role reversal becomes more and more evident as the white woman is shown to be getting more and more personally involved with Saira as they begin to "talk every night via texts" (p. 89). The text shows how she becomes the object of study for Saira as she begins to divulge the details of her personal life to the other woman. The following lines demonstrate the way Saira assumes the role of the spectator as the teacher reveals her life story to her:

The topic was often me and my failed marriage or my failed career as a writer. I found myself opening up to her, telling her about my string of failures. I had managed to get a book deal but it had bombed badly. I hadn't been able to believe my luck at first when it had got published without the usual one hundred rejections that writers were supposed to go through. (pp. 89-90)

The above-mentioned lines show place Saira to be the subject of the conversation whereas her teacher, on the other hand, appears to be its object. This subjectification of the previously objectified character indicates a major reversal and a transformation of the relationship between the two women. Now the two characters seem to be viewing each other on an equal par instead of occupying the binaries of the centre and periphery. This transformation of relations between the two characters shows transcultural competence may be developed when people belonging different cultural come into contact with each other and usher them into "a new cosmopolitan way of life" (Onghena, 2008, p. 181). However, the interpersonal and the affective factor of this interaction is shown to be of utmost significance when it comes to coming across people belonging to diverse cultures.

Conclusion

To conclude, this research paper discusses the representation of the transcultural relationships between individuals belonging to different cultural backgrounds. It also sheds light on myriad cultural aspects that influence the interpersonal relationships formed in the transcultural space. Through textual analysis, this study reveals how embodying fluid identities may lead to a better understanding of human beings across the cultures.

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