Thinking through the Affective Skin: Affect-Based Literacy and Literary Orientations

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: Thinking through the Affective Skin: Affect-Based Literacy and Literary Orientations

My dissertation, “Thinking through the Affective Skin: Affective Literacy and Literary Orientations,” proposes affective ways of orientating our thoughts and skins to literacy practices, literary analysis, media consumption, and subjectivity formation. It contributes to the affective paradigmatic shift in critical theory by proposing its incorporation into education and the mechanics of knowledge production to acknowledge and accommodate multiple, alternative modes of producing and sharing knowledge, demonstrating comprehension, and projecting intelligence. I suggest that an affective orientation can shift affect’s analysis as an object of study to affect as study and analysis. The analogy of the skin envelops the mind-body duality to refer to affectivity as an open layer over and beyond corporeality or embodiment. Thinking through the affective skin, as an encompassing model, thus allows multiple affective regimes to be points of entry to thought and all thought to become points of reference for affectivity. It is an inter-disciplinary and multilingual project in its conception through an engagement with various genres of writing, literature, and media. In this project, I attempt an organic integration of critical theory, affect theory, composition theory, gender theory, postcolonial theory, media theory, cultural studies and writing studies. It is a multicultural project that situates my work in Comparative Literature within larger frameworks of literacy, intersectionality and affect.

Thinking through the affective skin as an orientation brings to the forefront marginalized histories and forms of knowing and theorizing processes and purposes. It offers a multiplicity of groundbreaking models for pedagogical innovations and affective accommodations. It provides

attention to previously ignored or under-researched details, nuances, and analyses of affective engagements. It can rationalize affectivities misunderstood, or not understood, prior to the affective orientation. In three chapters, I experiment with and exemplify different ways of engaging with affective writing. These chapters are thematically divided into three varied modes of literacy and literary engagements, while affectively connected via my affective orientation. It is a demonstration of thinking through my affective skin.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my doctoral dissertation to all the sponsors of my affective literacies—

Sohana Manzoor

Sahana Bajpaie

Mohsin Talukder

Jannatul Ferdous (Shila)

Rowshon Ara Islam

and Benjamin Friedlander.

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Introduction: Affective Beginnings

When I entered the Ph.D. program in Comparative Literature, I declared my research interest as “Memory, Affect and Identity”. Although I had a rough idea of what that combination of concepts meant to me, I could not get a hold of texts that addressed those three aspects of my primary field collectively. My coursework was producing more papers on different aspects of memory and/or identity, but the assigned texts and additional research on affect did not correspond to those fields. The more I looked for theorization of affect, the lesser my satisfaction was. It seemed like discussions of affect were stuck in time in a disappointing way and I did not have the language to pinpoint what was missing. I started to get discouraged and demotivated due to a lack of adequate resources and proper direction. As it was a comparatively newer field to me, I began gaslighting myself about my unrealistic expectations, especially because I could not express to anybody what I was looking for.

Life, however, kept going and instead of making progress on my research, I started unlocking unexpected revelations about my life through identity redefining memories and self-discoveries. In any other project, disclosing these reflections would have been irrelevant. But since they reshaped the course of this project itself, they need to be named and acknowledged. I realized that I was an empath, I have always had quite severe ADHD, complex PTSD, a generalized anxiety disorder, and multiple chronic illnesses working sometimes in collaboration and at other times in opposition to one another. These are some of my conditions (among others) that revealed themselves to me, all within the end of my coursework for the Ph.D. and prospectus submission. These observations and reconceptualization of myself were affecting me not only on a personal level, but also giving me insights into who I was, had been, or wanted to be on the academic and professional front. They were realigning my original ideas of research with

newfound passions for raising my voice, creating or taking back space, and fighting for my place in a world that seemed to have disproportionately disadvantaged me, and those like me. I was now even more determined to find a way to incorporate memory, affect, and identity into my work in a cohesive manner that would justify my perspectives, alongside those that have been historically, intentionally, and unsuspiciously marginalized within the academy and beyond for too long.

After looking for over three years, I finally found a nominal article on feminist phenomenology by Clara Fischer, called, "Feminist Philosophy, Pragmatism, and the "Turn to Affect": A Genealogical Critique" (2016). In the section titled, "The Affective Turn: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking?", Fischer wrote that this "affective turn," as termed by Patricia Ticineto Clough, "is distinguishable from the general philosophical or psychological interest in feeling, as it presupposes a retreat from, or a moving beyond, the "linguistic turn" via affect (Clough 2010)." "For this group of cultural theorists," she adds, affect is understood as a topic that certainly encompasses the common questions concerning the most salient aspects of feelings (such as their functioning, and social and political implications) on the one hand; but on the other, affect is posited as a new concept with which to reconsider basic ontological assumptions. As such, the recent turn to affect is methodologically and contextually different from the stable and more or less continuous preoccupation with affect and emotion evident throughout the history of philosophy. (810-811)

This was it. This is what I was looking for the whole time the academic discourses around affect left me wanting. I remember tearing up as I read more of Fischer's essay explaining the disparity between the understanding of "affect" via the linguistic turn and the "affect" in/of "the affective turn." Genealogically situating the seeming erasure of affect as a

move away from "subjectively felt emotional states," Fischer reintroduced affect as a "paradigm shift in critical theorizing." (811) This way of thinking about affect is anti-dualistic and "resists bifurcations of emotion/reason, mind/body, biology/culture" by "emphasizing the centrality of matter, embodiment, and/or affect," which according to Fischer, is "the promise" affect held "for feminist and similar liberatory politics." (811) This article thus opened up the first few doors for me, not only with language about the expectations I had from affect proposing pathways for memory studies and other identity-based "liberatory politics," but by also naming the theorists and theories of the affective turn I needed to look up.

Thus, I reverse engineered my way to Patricia T. Clough's texts; I first encountered her focused article, "The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedia and Bodies" (2008). Then I found the expansive book, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (2007) edited by Patricia Ticineto Clough with Jean Halley. As I started reading the introduction to this collection of essays, and Clough's expansive tracing of the affective turn, I knew I found my primary text for the theoretical framework of my project. Soon I knew that I had read a complementary theoretical text recently that would complete my vision of bringing together affect and identity through a component of memory. It was another collection of essays, *Thinking through the Skin* (2001), edited by Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey. Together, they formed the core conceptual trope of my dissertation: "thinking through the affective skin".

Thinking and writing through my affective skin has not been an easy process either. Even in this dissertation work, some of my unintentional struggles will become visible. I want to name a few of them, just to draw attention to the kind of awareness that thinking/writing through the skin can bring forth. They also are evidence for *affective thinking*, which is not either being affective, or thinking, but the thinking that originates from affectivities. For instance, my

theoretical framework might bear evidence of over-citation and endless quotations, unless I return to it after some distance and time to see how my words could replace some of the theorists'. However, my ADHD brain cannot prioritize between the quotes that are the most important and those that can be rephrased. There are memes about this ADHD tendency, which is one of my primary affective struggles, because I am so invested and in love with my primary texts that I want to share every bit of their excellence with my readers. That it took me so long to find these texts and that no courses or mentors of mine have ever engaged with these before, I have not had enough intellectual engagement with them to distance my affective thinking from the so-called professional, and effective versions that would quote/cite much less. It might take me a long time to be able to do this editing effectively, and in this case, the effectivity is being negatively impacted by my affectivities. In my second chapter though, I willfully mention and highlight the creative, and perhaps positive ADHD affectivities that allow me to engage with some of those texts more innovatively and organically. That is intentional affective writing to me. In such projects, my sentence structures, semi-creative formats of enquiry and streams of consciousness become integrated as side quests within my primary lines of inquiry. I have not always been aware of these symptoms of my writing, although I've been made aware of my unique perspectives, attention to details and nuanced analyses over the years. It was only when I understood my ADHD that I connected those affectivities to my *affective writing* qualities.

On the one hand, there are these cognitive affective challenges, but on the other, are the life ones. It can be argued that I should have had enough time to give myself the intellectual distance from my dissertation drafting and editing phases—all before the official submission. But if I could rise that easily above my affective shortcomings, would I even be writing a dissertation on the *affective skin*? In my exam statement, qualifying exam and prospectus, my

failures to complete projects and returns to revise them repeatedly were highlighted. At those stages of my research, I still had not come across these vocabularies that I am now using to describe my project, processes, and predispositions. This too, has been, an *affective realization*, and I am writing my dissertation through *affective reflections*.

Theoretical Framework

In order for me to get to the theoretical core of my project, I have to sift through quite a mass of complex ideas on the genealogy of the affective turn, presented in an affectively chaotic manner by Clough in the introduction to *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. I am attempting to shuffle up the information presented in the text in a structure different than Clough's, hoping to be able to summarize the focal concepts without getting into the intricate details of the fields of origin. From those concepts, I am proposing my conceptualization of *affective writing*, a phrase Clough does not offer explicitly. Clough, however, suggests that all writing presented affectively is autoethnographic and experimental in nature, due to its authors' idiosyncratic and nuanced routes, perspectives, and affectivities. Afterwards, I am summarizing and expanding on Ahmed's theories of "thinking through the skin," which is then synthesized with the affective turn. Through this integration, I enter my core theorization of an *affective orientation* that I apply to different genres of literacy and literary texts in the following chapters, while also experimenting with different genres of *affective writing* for an *affective engagement* with these texts.

The Affective Body

In the introduction to the book, Clough shares that the collected essays on *The Affective Turn* were borne out of the increased significance of affect across many disciplinary and

interdisciplinary discourses as “a focus of analysis,” “registering a change in the cofunctioning of the political, economic, and cultural,” i.e., “the social,” (Clough and Halley, 1) as categorized by Brian Massumi. Through these essays, affectivity is established as “a substrate of potential bodily responses, often autonomic responses, in excess of consciousness.” (Clough and Halley, 2) In this collective conception, “affect refers generally to bodily capacities to affect and be affected or the augmentation or diminution of a body’s capacity to act, to engage, and to connect, such that autoaffection is linked to the self-feeling of being alive—that is, aliveness or vitality.” (Clough and Halley, 2) This understanding of affectivity as a social phenomenon in response to the cofunctioning of political, economic, and cultural aspects of contemporary human lives foregrounds the important discourses on affect in various fields that have developed along parallel around the same time, necessitating a language for synchronization across disciplines. It had been clear in all the findings that affect is felt vitally, within the body, without prior knowledge or consciousness of its approach in the affecting or affected body and/or mind (if we may so binarize still). Therefore, there is no individual control and planning over such affectivities, only involuntary, post-affective feelings, thoughts, and consciousness, immediate or distant.

But Massumi points out that affect is not “presocial.” “A reflux back from conscious experience” is registered as affect whereas “past action and contexts are conserved and repeated, autonomically reactivated but not accomplished; begun but not completed.” (Clough and Halley, 2) “A nonlinear complexity” is constituted by affect, of which, “the narration of conscious states like emotion are subtracted, but always with ‘‘a never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder,” as noted by Clough (Clough and Halley, 2) Hence affect, i.e., affectivities, have been a concept in circulation in the academy for a long time, without enough robust unpacking of what it is and

how it can be understood better. Affect is not a linear process hence a linear application of theory did not work to explain it. Because consciousness is not at play during active affective responses, and the entirety of affect cannot be contained or reproduced through recollection or narration in an empirical, substantial, holistic manner, it is often gestured at as a point of consideration and contention, without adequate engagement with the topic. This is what Fischer was referring to in her article: that the discourses on affect being stuck on the linguistic-turn-based investment, and not proceeding to investigate its dynamic expansions through the affective turn.

In the affective theorization, affect is not only conceived in terms of the human body, but also "in relation to the technologies that are allowing us both to "see" affect and to produce affective bodily capacities beyond the body's organic-physiological constraints." (Clough and Halley, 2) This technoscientific experimentation of affect "traverses the opposition of the organic and the nonorganic," "inserts the technical into felt vitality, the felt aliveness given in the preindividual bodily capacities to act, engage, and connect—to affect and be affected." (Clough and Halley, 2) The affective turn, thus, "expresses a new configuration of bodies, technology, and matter instigating a shift in thought in critical theory." (Clough and Halley, 2) The idea advanced here is that affectivities, i.e., the body's capacity to affect or be affected, is not located within the organic human body's physiognomic boundaries and those boundaries of conceptualizing the human body as entirely independent of/irrelevant to nonorganic bodies of other lives, matter, technology, and so on are therefore, also misleading, and untrue. In order for us to accommodate theories of affect, and for the affective turn to explain the affectivities of nonorganic life, Clough suggests a revision of the definition of human bodies itself and to think beyond the "body-as-organism" construct. She cites Luciana Parisi and Tizina Terranova's argument that what the concept of body as an organism, a closed system, was produced by a

"historically specific organization of forces brought into being by capital and discursive investments," "reinforced and given strength by the disciplinary society (of industrial capitalism) so that it could become the ultimate definition of what a body is." (Clough and Halley, 16) Such a confinement of the understanding of body was essential to the "reorganization of power in the interests of an emerging industrial capitalism" through various sites of "ideological interpellation" (Clough and Halley, 16) like the family, school, religion, labor union, etc. The body was defined to become "abstracted and organized" to "be trained: trained to reproduction within a thermodynamic cycle of accumulation and expenditure: and trained to work." (Clough and Halley, 17)

The authors of the essays collated in the book use both theory and method to "grasp the changes that constitute the social and to explore them as changes in ourselves, circulating through our bodies, our subjectivities, yet irreducible to the individual, the personal, or the psychological." (Clough and Halley, 3) The shift in thought that *The Affective Turn* expands can be described to be:

> marking an intensification of self-reflexivity (processes turning back on themselves to act on themselves) in information/communication systems, including the human body; in archiving machines, including all forms of media technologies and human memory; in capital flows, including the circulation of value through human labor and technology; and in biopolitical networks of disciplining, surveillance, and control. (Clough and Halley, 3)

Redefining the body as an open system through the affective turn is thus an anti-capitalist and rebellious movement in and of itself. It is a departure from "privileging the organic body to exploring nonorganic life," "the presumption of equilibrium-seeking closed systems to engaging

the complexity of open systems under far-from equilibrium conditions of metastability" and "focusing on an economy of production and consumption to focusing on the economic circulation of pre-individual bodily capacities or affects in the domain of biopolitical control." (Clough and Halley, 2) Clough finds this to be the "most provocative and enduring contribution" of the turn to affect that it points to "a dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter generally—matter's capacity for self-organization in being in-formational." (Clough, 1) Attributing her reconceptualization of the body to theorists like Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Baruch Spinoza and Henri Bergson, Clough proposes "forging a new body" to critically engage with the "technologies that are making it possible to grasp and to manipulate the imperceptible dynamism of affect." She names it "the biomediated body." (Clough 1-2)

In affective terms then, a biomediated body is an affective body with pre-individual bodily capacities to affect and be affected through the dynamic mediations of different nonorganic lives, matters and media that cause autoaffection(s) within the body, unexplainable and unpredicted by the body's physiognomic constraints. To imagine how the industrial, capitalist ventures constructed artificial boundaries between the individual, independent, self-sufficient human body and its surroundings is not surprising, even when considered in conjunction with theories of evolution and anthropocentric scientific interests of the time. This time in Western history was also launching the trends of theorizing in artificial binaries, so, mind versus body, nature versus nurture and the sciences versus the social sciences or the humanities were all taking shape as grand narratives of divide. The affective turn dismisses such arbitrary divides by having to combine theories of biology, evolution and other sciences with psychoanalysis and critical theory, to open up transdisciplinary interpretations that were restricted until then, due to the closed horizons of the research fields and disciplines themselves.

The affective turn as a movement in critical theory is departing from "a psychoanalytically informed criticism of subject identity, representation, and trauma" and arriving to "an engagement with information and affect." (Clough and Halley, 2) Clough originally began tracing the "shift in thought in critical theory" and the attention affect necessitates to the "intensification of self-reflexivity" (Clough and Halley, 5) through psychoanalysis. That led her and her students to "move through trauma studies," "the queering of melancholy and loss," "to think about technoscience" and eventually to "rethink technology, time, and the ontology of bodily matter." (Clough and Halley, 5) She then goes on to explain the trains of thought through discussions of the Lacanian understanding of the subject, "the imaginary wholeness of the mirror stage", and how trauma is linked to the Lacanian "Real" that is "always already lost and only leaves traces of its loss as traumatic effects," and is "unassimilable because it is nonsymbolizable." (Clough and Halley, 5) This "Real" is in "excess of the symbolic, an exclusion or void interior to the symbolic but not reducible to the symbolic," the very condition of the accidental origin of "subjectivity, identity, meaning, and materiality." (Clough and Halley, 6) Critical theory was influenced by Lacan's understandings on subject and unconscious desire and also the unassimilable. In Clough's words,

> Critical theory turned psychoanalysis into a provocative and productive way of thinking politically about subjectivity, identity, meaning, bodies, and reality . . . it retraced the unassimilable presenting itself in thought, finding the traces of the unthought of authorized knowledge . . . (Clough and Halley, 6)

Clough thus finds that the psychoanalytic discourse about trauma ably served "as a summary rendition of the epistemological crisis in Western thought, which critical theory instigated" and therefore, "psychoanalysis could offer an opening to the future of thought in the ontology it

proposes for bodies, temporality, memory, and materiality." (Clough and Halley, 5) The discussions of trauma around this time focused on "its effects on memory, its producing in the subject the incapacity to retrieve the past, or to speak the truth about it." Clough turns to Ruth Leys' proposition that "trauma is a forgetting without memory, so that traumatic effects are a symptomology substituting for what was never experienced as such." Because there is no repression, there is "no possibility of projection or displacement onto the other." Instead, trauma is relayed back to the ego being "overrun by the object or event" that it is fixating on. (Clough and Halley, 6) The ego gets stuck into "something like a trance state" of "mesmerized immersion in the object," "a "fascinated attention'" to the object or the event" to the point of "a coalescence of the ego with the object or event of fascination, such that . . . there is no ego . . . distinguishable from the object." (Clough and Halley, 6) Thus, trauma becomes "the engulfment of the ego in memory," but "memory without consciousness and therefore, incorporated memory, body memory, or cellular memory." (Clough and Halley, 6-7) In such a surfacing of "a difficulty in remembering or in being certain about the truth of memory, the body becomes a memorial, a ghosted bodily matter." (Clough and Halley, 7) Trauma is therefore, an "entanglement beyond all possibility of disengagement." (Clough and Halley, 7) This "body of entanglement" and "the ontological status of a ghosted body, of a haunted materiality" (Clough and Halley, 7) cannot be explained through just the bodily matter encapsulated by an equilibrium-seeking mechanism, forcing a rethinking of the body itself, and to "think the body differently is to rethink matter and dynamism inherent to it. It is to rethink the evolution of the species as well." (Clough and Halley, 11) In an affective interpretation of trauma in the body that is nonorganic life, "a coevolution of organism and environment is posited." (Clough and Halley, 11) Thus, considering the organism as "open to information," "where information is understood in terms of the event or chance

occurrence arising out of the complexity of open systems under far-from-equilibrium conditions of metastability" allows for the organism to be defined as a "machinic assemblage" approaching its "techno-ontological threshold." (Clough and Halley, 12) As such, body as matter, or nonorganic life, is understood through a "machinic evolution", where matter is "in-formational" and "form arises out of matter's capacity for self-organization out of complexity."

Trauma is rethought as an assemblage of body memories and pre-individual affective capacities. Trauma is opened up to "a new ontology of bodily matter, beyond the autopoiesis of the human organism, making it possible to rethink heredity, repetition, and time in terms of the virtual and the crack in time. (Clough and Halley, 9) The body-as-organism "presumed in the theories of trauma" is troubled by "the thought of a dynamism inherent to matter," (Clough and Halley, 9) suggesting an inherent origin of trauma within the body itself. Considering the human body nonorganic life (capable of self-organizing and emergence) allows autoenthnographic writing about trauma to "go beyond itself," "beyond speaking of the incapacity to speak, beyond a compulsive repetition of memory that fails to master traumatic effects." (Clough and Halley, 9) That trauma can be healed and recovered from, that post-traumatic speaking, recalling, and reflecting can go past the initial bodily responses of trauma, bears evidence of the body's affective capacities to evolve. (Clough and Halley, 9) Along these lines of thought, a Deleuzian biophilosophy offers an alternative to the autopoiesis of the organism, as his notion of "the crack" is "an invitation to think memory, image, and time differently, and therefore to think differently about trauma and writing about trauma." (Clough and Halley, 13) Clough finds this opening to think about how "living systems and their boundaries are caught up in machinic assemblages that involve modes of transversal "becoming,"" resulting in "communication across species and genus, across the evolution of phyletic lineages." (Clough and Halley, 11) Thus, the

affective body, according to the affective turn, can be summarized as a biomediated, informational becoming of a machinic assemblage.

Affective Writing

Trauma Studies within critical theory can be claimed to be a non-Eurocentric, non-Western, anti-colonial project from the start. Through taking up trauma, critical theory transitioned from "the deconstruction of the Subject of Western modernity to the production of multiple subjectivities and multiple modernities expressed in new forms of history, often presented at first in autobiographical experimental writings by diasporic subjects." (Clough and Halley, 6) This marks an essential swerve in critical theory's attention to and integration of non-white, minority experiences and narratives that since offered new directions for critical theory's expansion. Diasporic writing, often autoethnographic, here, becomes an affective mode through which the understanding of colonial, majoritarian trauma is explored and exposed. Such autoethnographic writing therefore is affective in essence as it "reflects the subjectivity of the writing." (Clough and Halley, 4) Through these genres of writing, the affective turn returns to thinking about "the disavowals constitutive of Western industrial capitalist societies, bringing forth ghosted bodies and the traumatized remains of erased histories." (Clough and Halley, 3) *Affective writing*, as I am calling it, therefore, is always already trauma-informed and experimental in form, as they perform the act of writing back and in parallel to the authorized or established normative forms. The course and trajectories of affective writing is determined by the affectivities involved in the perception and processes behind their production. They "render the traumatic effect of the long exclusion from writing, which haunts the writing as a motive force." In addition, these writings themselves are "traumatizing as they call into question the truth of representation, the certainty of memory, if not the very possibility of knowledge of the past.

(Clough and Halley, 6) *Affective writing*, therefore, is also a biomediated, in-formational, machinic assemblage.

Thinking through the Skin

In the introduction to *Thinking through the Skin*, Sara Ahmed+ and Jackie Stacey share,

> This book takes the 'skin' not only as its object, but as a point of departure for a different way of thinking. We seek to think *about* the skin, but also to think *with* or *through* the skin. Such an approach engenders a way of thinking that attends to the forms and folds of living skin at the same time as it takes the shape of such skin, as it forms and re-forms, unfolds and refolds. (Ahmed and Stacey, 1)

The project of this book on "feminist literature on lived and imagined embodiment" deprivileges the body as the focal point, instead it shifts the conversation to the skin as "the outer covering of the body that both 'protects us from others and exposes us to them' (Cataldi, 1993)." (Ahmed and Stacey, 1) They pose the question about "how skin becomes, rather than simply is, meaningful." (Ahmed and Stacey, 1) They call for a politics that takes "the fleshy interface between bodies and worlds" (Ahmed and Stacey, 1) as its orientation. For them,

> 'Thinking through the skin' is a thinking that reflects not on the body as the lost object of thought, but on inter-embodiment, on the mode of being-with and being-for, where one touches and is touched by others. (Ahmed and Stacey, 1)

Reading skin i.e., the readings and re-readings of skin is emphasized repeatedly as "the skin is always open to being read (and being read differently) and "these various techniques for reading produce skins in specific and determinate ways." (Ahmed and Stacey, 1) Reading skin is also considered a form of marking the skin and "marking of the skin is linked to both its

temporal and spatial dimensions." (Ahmed and Stacey, 1) Divided into parts on skin encounters, skin surfaces and skin sites, the essays in the book examine "different technologies of the skin and how particular discourses –medical, scientific, aesthetic – intersect to produce the intelligible skin, even when the skin cannot be held in place by such knowledges." (Ahmed and Stacey, 2) Ahmed and Stacey draw on multiple theoretical and disciplinary paradigms to consider how skin is lived, read, written, narrated, seen, touched, managed, worked, cut, remembered, produced, and known. These diverse approaches to thinking about the skin as a boundary-object, and as the site of exposure or connectedness, invite the reader to consider how the borders between bodies are unstable and how such borders are already crossed by differences that refuse to be contained on the 'inside' or the 'outside' of bodies. (Ahmed and Stacey, 2)

Skin is documentation, historicization, contextualization, configuration, and traumatization. Skin is also visual, tactile, and permanent witness and bearer of passings, passing by-s and passing through-s:

> Whether the skin is mortified or glorified, marked or scarred by ageing or disease, or stretched in enveloping the skin of another in pregnancy, it is lived as both a boundary and a point of connection. The skin is the place where one touches and is touched by others; it is both the most intimate of experiences and the most public marker of raced, sexed and national histories. (Ahmed and Stacey, 2)

For thinking through the skin, therefore, skin is understood "as both the locus of thinking—the site from which thinking takes place—and as the object of thought—as being already subject to interpretation and conceptualization." (Ahmed and Stacey, 3) Although this theorization will be read as "a contribution to feminist theories of embodiment, it also seeks to provide a critique of how 'the body' can become a privileged object within feminist theory." (Ahmed and Stacey, 3)

Skin, here, is both an expansion and a critique of the body. It aims to "address the question of embodiment without fetishising the body as the lost object", and "to think, instead, through the skin." (Ahmed and Stacey, 3) The authors are cautious of not replacing "one fetish with another (the body with the skin)," but rather "seek to interrogate how 'the skin' is attributed a meaning and logic of its own." (Ahmed and Stacey, 3) Skin is temporal in that "it is affected by the passing of time," it can be thought of as "bodyscape," as well as "landscape." (Ahmed and Stacey, 2)

Ahmed and Stacey notice turns in the feminist phenomenology space that are "indicative of the desire for an increasingly located and, indeed, fleshy body." Maurice Merleau-Ponty is sought for "a phenomenological account of inter-embodiment," Gail Weiss "offered an exploration of the relationships between body images, imaginary morphologies and materialisations" stressing the significance of Merleau-Ponty's "notion of 'intercorporeality.'" In this description of "embodiment as intercorporeality is to emphasize that the experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and non-human bodies' (Weiss 1999: 5)." In Merleau-Ponty's work, embodiment is "fleshy and material," but also "'worldly', as being in an intimate and living relationship to the world, which is a world made up of other bodies." With this "focus on the experiential", attention is shifted to "the multiplicity of sense perceptions: bodies can be touched as well as seen." There are relationships between "touch and the sociality of embodiment: one is always touched by others, not all of whom are necessarily human." (Ahmed and Stacey, 5) Our skin "opens our bodies to other bodies: through touch, the separation of self and other is undermined in the very intimacy or proximity of the encounter." (Ahmed and Stacey, 6) Ahmed and Stacey take all these enquiries to thinking beyond embodiment towards a metaphor that can

stand in for inter-embodiment, intercorporeality and the multiplicity of the senses of embodied experiences through external, additional layers of encounters. Thinking through the skin provides that model of reconceptualizing the more-than-body, despite including the body-paradigm shift in this context.

Skin as Writing

Ahmed and Stacey repeatedly draw their readers' attention to "the skin of the book" and "skin writing." The title of their introduction to *Thinking through the Skin* is "Dermographies," influenced by the medical term, 'dermographia,' which means "writing on, or marking, the skin." But they use it "to suggest that skin is itself also an effect of such marking." (Ahmed and Stacey, 15) However, skin definitely cannot be "reduced to writing, for the skin matters as matter":

> it is a substantial, tactile covering that bears the weight of the body. But the substance of the skin is itself dependent on regimes of writing that mark the skin in different ways or that produce the skin as marked. The skin is a writerly effect. (Ahmed and Stacey, 15)

They clarify that "writing is an effect of skin: the touch of the technologies that produce the words; the skin that is shed in the endless processes of composition and decomposition." They push the readers to think more provocatively, to "consider the materiality of the signifier as produced by skin, by the weight of the bodies that are formed as they are marked, cut or written into the world." (Ahmed and Stacey, 15) Therefore, they propose that writing "can be thought of as skin, in the sense that what we write causes ripples and flows that 'skin us' into being: we write, we skin." (Ahmed and Stacey, 15)

Like writing, skin can also "be 'cut off' and made to signify anew," "can acquire new meanings, new forms, new shapes." But this potential rewriting or reskinning "does not render irrelevant the historical contexts in which skin has already been marked or which skin has already marked. For, like writing, skin carries traces of those other contexts in the very living materiality of its forms, even if it cannot be reduced to them." As Freud suggests through "the mystic writing pad," "the process of 'cutting off' or 'erasure' also leaves its mark." (Ahmed and Stacey, 15) In a manner similar to trauma's future being pre-determined by the past and an absence of the present as it cannot be presupposed or predicted, Ahmed and Stacey believe the skin and/or writing's futurity to be dependent on the past's relativity:

> This relationship to the past, which is neither simply absent nor present on the surface of the skin, is hence also an opening up of a different future. It is precisely by paying attention to the already written, to what has already taken shape (for example, the colonial, racialised and sexed histories of touch as ownership and possession) that one can open up that which has yet to be written, and even touch the skin that has yet to be lived. (Ahmed and Stacey, 15)

Thinking through the skin thus establishes various ways of reading the skin of writing: books, authors, intercorporealities between writing and reading, nexuses of authorships, intertextualities, broader contexts of books, productions, processes, receptions, and so on. Writing as skin takes on markings, traumas, hauntings, ghostings, timescapes, landscapes, remembering, misremembering, forgetting, regretting and all that is beneath, beyond and in between. Situating affectivities outside the academy and its intellectual spheres actively undermines the lived, embodied and/or imagined experiences of historically disadvantaged populations. Such exclusive practices protect the predominantly white, cis-het-male academic

conventions and their beneficiaries from being affected/overturned by the influx of underprivileged voices. For instance, when a person of color is asked to leave "politics" outside the classroom, they are essentially being asked to put labor into erasing traits and discourses of their racial and cultural presentations and performances before coming to school. But because cis-het-white-male supremacy is naturalized, their privileges and entitlement are not considered "politics" and hence need not be left off.

My dissertation looks into these complex layers of skins/affectivities that constitute such unjust challenges and invisible labor for the academy's nontraditional members. If feminist, queer, non-Western, non-white, anticolonial, disabled, neurodiverse, etc. are the silenced voices within academia today, then embracing their affective discourses is imperative to disrupt the existing hierarchies and hermeneutics. Affect as an orientation can allow these marginalized members to translate their embodied and imagined experiences into recognizable models for scholarship and research. Affect as process and/or method can make possible observations and interpretations traditional methodologies overlook, to innovate alternative equitable processes for perception and evaluation. Hence, I use "thinking through the affective turn" to claim that every academic and intellectual function we perform is affective. Yet, the intellectual framework to think through these affective functions was absent. My dissertation dissolves this distinction between our functional cognitive affects and affective cognitive functions.

Thinking through the Affective Skin

Ahmed and Stacey open their book by quoting Donna Haraway's question: "Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?" Just as Clough's project dismisses the body's closed boundaries as the producer and receiver of affectivities and opens it up to a "becoming" of "in-formational" matter through a machinic

assemblage, Ahmed and Stacey reject the body as the creator and receptor of meaning and shifts the attention to the infinite prospects of the skin as intercorporeality. While Clough's interest is in the becoming of the biomedial body, Ahmed and Stacey's focus is on the becoming of skin, which is comprised of, but, is in addition to, the body. Combining their research asks for a skin that is affective—an *affective skin*. The *affective skin* is capable of thinking affectively. Thinking through the affective skin yields results unforeseen, unthought by the nonaffective body. It has layers built into its thinking protocols and mechanism that are very specific because of the multiplicity of affective assemblages involved in its individualized becoming. Although the independent variants of its thought might be personalized, I want to propose an affective collective thought. Just like any other paradigmatic shift, an orientation to and through affectivities can be trained into and for. Thinking through the affective skin as an orientation will expand the skin of thought to accommodate the multitudinous thoughts of affective skin(s). It will foreground affectivities and skins' endlessness to create more affective thoughts.

Thinking through the affective skin can thus become the primary orientation to literacy and literary practices and processes. Instead of marginalizing affectivities, thinking through the affective skin can empower the skin's affectivities to produce thought and intellectualize it from an *affective orientation*. It can become an alternative mode of intelligence and intellectual capacity that can be taught and learned, albeit in a spectrum of capabilities, like in every other field. Having "thinking through the affective skin" as a specialization will still open up new possibilities for disciplinary or interdisciplinary majors, pedagogical preferences, classroom topics, research interests, and subjects of analyses. Thinking through the affective skin can become the anti-oppressive, equitable, all-inclusive, social justice model for the overhaul of today's capitalist, exclusionary academic environments.

My dissertation contributes to the *affective paradigmatic shift* in critical theory by proposing its incorporation into education and the mechanics of knowledge production to acknowledge and accommodate multiple, alternative modes of producing and sharing knowledge, demonstrating comprehension, and projecting intelligence. Thinking through the affective skin as an orientation brings to the forefront marginalized histories and forms of knowing and theorizing processes and purposes. It offers groundbreaking models for pedagogical innovations and affective accommodations. It ensures attention to previously ignored or under-researched details, nuances, and analyses. It can rationalize affectivities misunderstood, or not understood, prior to the *affective orientation*. In three chapters, I experiment with and exemplify different ways of engaging with affective writing. Although the chapters are thematically divided into three varied modes of literacy and literary engagements, they are affectively connected via an affective orientation, thinking through my affective skin.

"Thinking through the Affective Skin: Affective Literacy and Literary Orientations," proposes affective ways of orientating our thoughts and skins to literacy practices, literary analysis, media consumption, and subjectivity formation. An affective orientation can shift affect's analysis as an object of study to affect as study and analysis. The analogy of the skin envelops the mind-body duality to refer to affectivity as an open layer over and beyond corporeality or embodiment. Thinking through the affective skin, as an encompassing model, thus allows multiple affective regimes to be points of entry to thought and all thought to become points of reference for affectivity. Historically, underprivileged and underrepresented populations have been further trivialized in critical discourses through the exclusion of their affective realities. I propose that an affective orientation to representation, organization, and

pedagogy is the much-needed intervention that can empower and center such oppressed minorities in an equitable, empathetic approach in the academic and professional world.

My dissertation is inter-disciplinary and multilingual in its conception through an engagement with various genres of writing, literature, and media. I attempt an organic integration of critical theory, affect theory, composition theory, gender theory, postcolonial theory, media theory, cultural studies and writing studies. It is a multicultural project that situates my work in Comparative Literature within larger frameworks of literacy, intersectionality and affect.

My first chapter, "Affective Literacies and Pedagogies: Naming What We Kinda Know; Or Do We?" primarily uses three essays from the writing about writing model school of thought within writing studies. That this field goes by many chaotic names within the college education system: composition studies, writing studies, literacy studies, college composition, composition and rhetoric, first-year writing, writing pedagogy, and so on and so forth, already points towards the in-discipline/lack of discipline conflicts. However, it has been and continues to remain a field within general education that schools cannot get rid of entirely, even when they cannot agree on the visions and purposes behind their existence and relevance. My chapter, therefore, walks the line between the conflicts chaotically too, trying to establish two ways of looking at the affective orientation in the writing classroom: *affective literacy* and *affective pedagogy*. While they obviously go hand in hand, the roles of the practitioners shift between learners and educators. Playing with the words of Linda Adler-Kassner's seminal book in writing studies: *Naming What We Know* (2015) laying out the "Threshold Concepts of Writing," my chapter tries to point to three affective essays for me. I try to break down their concepts embedded in writing studies language through my affective interventions of reading their work and suggestions affectively. These essays seemed fit for my project as they were affective in forming my thinking through

writing and pedagogy skins, while addressing quite-easily graspable concepts and their relevance to pedagogy. Their affective recommendations can easily be translated to the classroom environment in every stage of education, exemplifying an affective orientation and affective attention to literacy learning and teaching pedagogy.

It is surprising to me how often the experiences of teaching/being an instructor as a parallel scholarship and learning practice to the trainings of a graduate student/researchers get left out from our academic work. Contemporary composition teaching bridges this gap successfully when writing studies scholars affectively incorporate their lived, embodied and imagined experiences and material, corporeal/inter-corporeal conditions into their writing and pedagogy. However, much like the affective turn in literature and theory, not all of writing instruction in the U.S.A. has caught up with these practices. Even when introduced to or aware of its merits, not all programs embrace this pedagogy. A systemic exclusion of affective pedagogies is easily traceable in pre-dominantly white programs, ironically highlighting the inherently anti-oppressive qualities of the methodology through this disengagement. My chapter therefore attempts to synthesize the affectivities of composition training and teaching as reflected in my own affective thinking and writing, while also being suggestive of how my perceptions of thinking through the affective skin is indebted to, and representative of a training internalized through affective authors and teachers like Donald M. Murray, Deborah Brant, and Nancy Sommers.

My second chapter, “Affective Landscapes of Poetic Memoryscapes: Who I Am and How I Got Here,” tries to model two different formats of affective writing about poetry; the quintessential highbrow literary genre within the discipline. The first half of this chapter is an affective reminiscence and narrative recalling of my affective memories of/with poetry. Starting

from my earliest exposures to poetry, I trace this personal literary genealogy of my affective engagements with poetry, highlighting the non-literary affectivities that made those poems affective for me. It almost draws an alternative picture of my journey as an affective student, scholar and instructor of literature that does not get the space to be discussed in a traditional setting. Academic journeys are often viewed as linear, which is not the case for many. Among the multifarious traditions, genres, authors, poets, and theories we are exposed to, only a few lead to official majors and concentrations. For example, of the many trainings and academic pursuits I've been involved in, my core orientation to the world remains feminist, and to literature and media of the West, postcolonial. However, these aspects of my literary core are in contrapuntal engagement with my work and experience in Multiethnic American Literature, Cultural Studies, Memory Studies, Poetics, and now the Affective Turn; all of which I have spent a substantial amount of time working in and with, in my academic career. My affective orientation to the study and teaching of literature hovers around the affective presence of all or some of these affective perspectives at all times. Even when we have pared down areas of study, we revisit and return to some literatures time and again. That is affectivity. Every time we reengage with a text, we bring in our newly evolved perceptions and modes of engagements with us, which helps us discover new aspects of it. Even when we are rediscovering aspects of a text, we have our renewed views and visions that impact our engagement: which is why these practices are called reviews and revisions. These returns amplify their affectivities for us, and our affective lenses shift the ways we reengage with them. Some poems and poets from my formative years show up in my affective memory periodically, which seem to have had a lasting impression in my mind as a reader of poetry. Even though I have not engaged with those poems/poets in any substantial academic ways, their poetry remains affective in my memory like I imagine it would be for a

non-literature scholar, but a lover pf poetry. Rabindranath Tagore, Kaiser Haq, and Claudia Rankine, on the other hand, are some poets whose texts have affectively formed my literary safe space and I have returned to working with when feeling academically insecure or affectively threatened in/by life.

This chapter therefore affectively engages with these affective memoryscapes in a less literary manner in the first half, somewhat demonstrating thinking through the affective ADHD skin for a scholar of literature today. The second half of the chapter zooms into the affective assimilation of Claudia Rankine's affective poetry and my own affective struggles within academia, while working on her poetry. These two affectivities get mixed up in my writing in this section of the chapter, forming almost a singular affective voice. Through this experimental, almost creative academic engagement, I wanted to highlight how much the work is affective for me, and how my affective engagement with them can add new dimensions to this work. I am perhaps attempting to show the extent to which affective engagement and alignment is possible when thinking or writing through the affective skin.

My third chapter, "From Subtle to Toxic: The Affective Curry Traits of Bollywood" brings in my ambiguous, tumultuous affective navigations of South Asian Cinema. While growing up as an avid consumer of Indian Cinema, primarily Bollywood, had shaped my sense of self and the world in affective ways, revisiting and reengaging with those cultural productions have mostly been eye-opening at best, if not infuriating or traumatizing for most. For my altered subjectivities and affective lenses, the "Subtle Curry Traits" of affective cinema have become oppressively toxic. Through detailed close-reading and affective analyses of three Hindi movies and one Bengali movie, this chapter highlights toxic masculinity and toxic parenting as damaging curry traits. While specific expressions of toxic masculinity are getting called out in

Bollywood by a handful of feminists, subtler forms continue to slip by without any scrutiny because of the viewers' and filmmakers' internalized curry traits. This endless perpetuation not only emboldens the existing social practices reflected in these movies, but also empower them further to continue to be practiced. My chapter draws attention to such slippages through an affective engagement in conversation with the affective theoretical texts of Purnima Mankekar, Laura Marks and Harisur Rahman. Of all my chapters, this is the most outwardly trauma-informed, although it does not highlight trauma studies or theorists. The choice is as simple as the fact that for victims and survivors of trauma, the theories do not have to be cited, because it is part of their thinking though the affective skin.

My affective orientation in this chapter is informed by my personal and socio-cultural traumas, some of which are affectively communicable to a broader public, while others remain very nuanced. The first two Bollywood movies, *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (1995) and *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (1999) are popular classics, almost canon at this point. The dangers of these movies to remain untouched by critics on the toxic levels therefore remains higher. I therefore attempt going where others have not, in pointing out those toxicities. The third Hindi movie, *Main Prem Ki Deewani Hoon* (2003), in contrast, is highly ridiculed and memed as an example of a bad movie. However, I see a plethora of realistic representations of toxicity and positive traits of a healthy romantic relationship in this movie that makes it affective for me. I fear the dismissal of the movie in its entirety making it lose the valuable conversations it could have and should have generated. The last movie, *Maacher Jhol* (2017), is comparatively newer and is trying to make cultural heritage claims about an identity I am very closely associated with. The toxic masculine takeover of this movie's narrative is the toxic curry trait that becomes interchangeable with the cultural identity it is attempting to revive and glorify. By breaking

down these personal, nuanced observations, I try to establish how very personal affective analyses can still be theorized, traced, and rationalized through an affective orientation to the texts of concern. These skin-specific (my skin-specific) affective takeaways are only explainable through this very specific affective perspective, which I hope can demonstrate the endless possibilities of affective engagement as someone with a different skin will have an assemblage of alternative engagements.

In my conclusion, titled Affective Aspirations, I ambitiously look ahead to a possible future of affective orientation in the academy and projects that thinking through the affective skin can collaborate with. where my assemblage of subjectivities can come together to inform a new kind of scholarship. Conversations around “racializing assemblages”, queer phenomenology, neurodivergence and disability studies are hinted at in this section of my dissertation. It synthesizes my current teaching and pedagogical choices with my research proposals evidenced in this project. it also looks forward to research interests and ideas that arose from my dissertation, and that I would like to pursue moving forward. Finally, my conclusion cautions against an unsuspecting dive into affective practices before establishing an affective system that is entirely prepared to embrace the affective orientation.

Chapter 1

Affective Literacies and Pedagogies: Naming What We Kinda Know; Or Do We?

Since we have already started the discussions of skin as reading and writing, affective reading, affective writing, and reading and/or writing affectively, this chapter is transferring these concepts into the field of literacy. Literacy learning, learning to think, read and write or the teaching of reading, writing, and thinking can all be affective. While some learners and teachers are already affective through their preindividual capacities to affect or be affected, others might not be as aligned to being as affective as learners or teachers. However, I believe that the academy has intentionally pushed affectivities away from academic spaces through centuries of artificially constructed binaries between mind versus body, intellect versus emotions, practicality/professionalism versus affectivity/sentimentalism and such divides that the academy seems to have constructed and put into place as the only or proper way to administer educational spaces. These notions seep into our academic practices, even in aspects like literacy and pedagogy, where learners and teachers have actively been discouraged to pay attention to and display signs of affectivities. Personal and affective realities and experiences are deemed unprofessional in these spaces and anybody in seemingly professional settings are encouraged at best, and forced at worst, to leave their affectivities out of these realms. A performative un-affectivity is preached, and affectivities are vilified in these places.

Literacy, composition and writing studies have been fighting these arbitrary presumptions and legacies in colleges and universities for the past few decades. This movement of course has caused frictions and fractions among the college composition communities themselves and in addition, marginalized writing programs within higher education institutions more than before. I am calling these attempts of composition studies to incorporate the personal, reflective sides of

students' affective lives into the classroom, *affective pedagogies*. The affective sides of learning processes and practices this field showcases are what I am referring to as *affective learning*. In what follows, I am discussing three texts on writing that not only exemplify *affective writing* models in and of themselves, but also uphold *affective concepts* related to literacy and pedagogy. These essays also show how learning is affective, and affective learning can be passed down through affective pedagogies. All of these writing scholars thus practice and propose what I theorize as *thinking through the affective skin*.

Famous journalist Donald M. Murray has an essay titled "All Writing Is Autobiography" (1991). He begins the essay by sharing all the forms in which he wrote, from poetry, fiction, nonfiction, academic essays, columns, and even for corporate and government leaders—all as the same person that he was. In each and all of these genres and roles, there remained a thinker and writer that was essentially just him. As he looked back, he writes, "I suspect that no matter how I tuned the lyre, I played the same tune. All my writing-and yours-is autobiographical." (Murray, 66) "We are autobiographical in the way we write," (Murray, 66) our autobiographies are formed through the existing examples of our writing of every piece, the way the text is organized, sewn through individual thoughts and language. We all have our own "peculiar" ways of looking at the world and using our language to communicate what we perceive and how. For Murray, it is his voice in "the Scottish genes," "a Yankee environment", "of Baptist sermons and the newspaper city room," "of all the language" he had "heard and spoken." (Murray, 67) As writing is a knowledge-making activity, as Murray was writing this piece, he came to know even more clearly that "all writing, in many different ways, is autobiographical, our autobiography grows from a few deep taproots that are set past in childhood." (Murray, 67)

If we reframe what Murray is experiencing and writing about, it is affectivities. He is describing writing through his affective skin. Not only is he observing his affectivities from childhood to adulthood reflected in his writing, but as the affectivities proliferate, he sees more of those underlined by his writing. He recalls formative, life-altering affectivities from throughout his life, as well as some traumatic lived, embodied and imagined experiences that make up his writing core and is at the core of the writer he became. He cites Willa Cather, who said, that "[m]ost of the basic material a writer works with is acquired before the age of fifteen." (Murray, 67) He quotes Graham Greene saying finding "the first 20 years of life" for writers to "contain the whole of experience," while "the rest is observation." (Murray, 67)

Murray adds that writers repeat their topics in renewed ways of writing or getting inspired by. His own poems, novel, and some of the newspaper columns he wrote "keep returning to" his family and childhood, through which, he believes he seeks an "understanding" hopes "for a compassion that has not yet arrived." (Murray, 67) He shares his "lifelong fascination with how writing is made," and assumes that most of his audience are aware of his "obsession with writing" and his "concern with teaching." He traces these interests and investments back to his "early discomfort in school that led to" him "dropping out and flunking out." Therefore, he thinks that his "academic writing is clearly autobiographical," (68) because if he had not had those experiences with being unsuccessful in school, he would not have developed his passions for investigating what goes behind successful writing and teaching. In this very article, we see his return to the fascination with writing, naming and recalling the life events that he finds formative for himself, and thinking about academic writing in an intentional autobiographical format and tone. He is enacting the thesis of his essay through the content of it. He is blending his styles and bending the genres to make the essay more fluid, reflective, and

personal yet theoretical and educational. It is autoethnographic while being autobiography, it is effectively affective in its awareness of the affective skins of both himself, and his writing.

As writing is an affective topic for him, his research shows the other writers that have been affective for him. His writing, by incorporating their thoughts and writing, extends its affective skin. He shares the words of Latin American writer Ledo Ivo: “I increasingly feel that my writing creates me. I am the invention of my own words” (*Lives on the Line*, Ed. Doris Meyer, U of California P)” (Murray, 70). He then cites Don DeLillo, who explained,

> Working at sentences and rhythms is probably the most satisfying thing I do as a writer. I think after a while a writer can begin to know himself through his language. He sees someone or something reflected back at him from these constructions. Over the years it's possible for a writer to shape himself as a human being through the language he uses. I think written language, fiction, goes that deep. He not only sees himself but begins to make himself or remake himself. (*Anything Can Happen*, Ed. Tom LeClair Happen, Ed. Tom LeClair 1988). (Murray, 70-71)

What I take Murray and DeLillo to be getting at here is that every writer has their affective language, language that becomes their writing skin. They think and write through this language. The more they use this language, the more it becomes part of them, the more affective it becomes for them, the more it becomes their affective writing skin. A reader of these writers can track the affective writing skin of the authors over the years through the language that becomes representative and indicative of these writers. Even if they change up the topic, genre, and or style, the affective language remains traceable. In Murray’s words, “[w]e become what we write. That is one of the great magics of writing.” (Murray, 71) If asked of all their settings are real,

Murray would prefer answering through Melville: “[i]t is not down on any map: true places never are.” (Murray, 72) These true places are in affective memories and landscapes, in inter-corporeal affectivities and skins of these authors, and their skins. Even if they cannot pinpoint one single memory or affectivity as the source or origin of their affective resonances, their repetition with consistency and/or variation prove their affective places in the author/poets’ writing skin:

> I confess that at my age I am not sure about the source of most of my autobiography. I have written poems that describe what happened when I left the operating table, looked back and decided to return. My war stories are constructed of what I experienced, what I heard later, what the history books say, what I needed to believe to survive and recover-two radically different processes. (72)

Thus, these embodied, lived, and imagined experiences happen over multiple layers of affective skin contact, reading or encountering any skin of any affective text can add more layers to the base. The affective skin becomes a magnetic field for such affective interactions, picking up others’ affectivities and assembling those. Thinking through the affective skin is thus stackable, a machinic assemblage of expansive skin. Some of these affectivities present themselves in incoherent forms too, like dreams. Although we do not always understand consciously where the dreams are rooted, they always originate in some affectivity or the other. For Murray, it is a regular confrontation:

> I dream every night and remember my dreams. Waking is often a release from a greater reality. I read and wear the lives of the characters I inhabit. I do not know where what I know comes from. Was it dreamt, read, overheard, imagined,

> experienced in life or at the writing desk? I have spun a web more coherent than experience. (Murray, 72)

For him, even in their uncertainties, they are "clearly autobiography." Murray then moves on to sharing the relevance of his theory of autobiography in research and scholarship that "instructs our profession. We make up our own history, our own legends, our own knowledge by writing our autobiography." (Murray, 73) He believes that the implications of these affective realities that we construct is huge for our students, or at least they should be. He refers to psychologist, linguist, and educator Vera John-Steiner's seminal book for the discipline of teaching/writing, *Notebooks of the Mind* (U of New Mexico P, 1985), who wrote, "[c]reativity requires a *continuity of concern*, an intense awareness of one's active inner life combined with sensitivity to the external world." (Murray, 73) Murray dwells on her repeated documentation of "the importance of allowing and even cultivating the obsessive interest of a student in a limited area of study." (Murray, 73) He takes it as "the importance of encouraging and supporting the exploration of the autobiographical themes of individual students—and the importance of allowing ourselves to explore the questions that itch our lives." (Murray, 73) I argue this to be the importance of teaching affectively, where students can work on their own affectivities through the support and guidance of their affectively oriented instructors and mentors. If all educators were trained to teach and facilitate learning affectively, even when the affectivities for teachers and students might be different, the skills of affective teaching/learning should and can be transferrable. Even though Murray does not use the language of *affective transfer* of *affective content* for students of his audience, he recognizes how one affective piece can have multiple affective receptions. He hopes that his teaching like his poetry, for example will inspire such affective rewritings, where a woman might write about "how she was made into a docile

helpmate by a society that had its own goals for her," a person of color might write "another autobiography" "translated by personal history," someone with childhood trauma would write about how they were "mistreated in childhood," and so on. (Murray, 73)

Murray then goes on to providing very specific recommendations to the writing classroom, which he had been building up to, through his autobiographical take on writing and education. He writes with certainty,

> I do not think we should move away from personal or reflective narrative in composition courses, but closer to it; I do not think we should limit reflective narrative to a single genre; I do not think we should make sure our students write on many different subjects, but that they write and rewrite in pursuit of those few subjects which obsess them. (Murray, 73)

But then, he acknowledges his affective biases, by noting, "of course, I am writing autobiographically, telling other people to do what is important to me." (Murray, 73) This is an example of *affective awareness,* which not only is necessary in having an affective orientation, but also built into the model I am proposing. Affectivity cannot come without self-reflexivity, as explored in my introduction. As "writing is subversive," affective writing might trigger a multiplicity of unpredictable affectivities, some of which might not be pleasant even at first. However, working through affectivities is working through negative emotions and trauma too, and the awareness that affectivities are multiple is key in an affective pedagogy. Murray writes, "something dangerous may happen as you hear my autobiography." (Murray, 73) On the other hand, his expectation is to produce the multiplicity of affectivities:

> I suspect that when you read my poem, you wrote your own autobiography. That is the terrible, wonderful power of reading: the texts we create in our own minds while we read-or just after we read-become part of the life we believe we lived. Another thesis: all reading is autobiographical. (Murray, 74)

I do not suppose that a full exploration of all reading being autobiography is required after reading Donald Murray's exposition of how reading and writing are companion activities: one drives the other. All writing and reading thus become skin as they come in contact with the reader and writers' skin, and the affective skins of educators that can affect the skins of their students. I gather Murray to be proposing an invitation to affectivities into the classroom and providing students with tools and modeling of affective learning, in a way that they can become part of their *affective becomings* and *affective skins*.

The next essay I am diving into is "Sponsors of Literacy" (1998) by Deborah Brandt. Her essay is based on longitudinal studies of multiple people's literacy journeys in various fields. Her groundbreaking research is not only a commentary on literacy trajectories, lineages, and passion projects, but also about resources and accesses or their lack. Brandt begins her essay about the changes the field of writing studies had undergone over the last quarter of the 20th century, especially about its stances on "individual literacy development," that her essay contributes to. She writes,

> we have theorized, researched, critiqued, debated, and sometimes even managed to enhance the literate potentials of ordinary citizens as they have tried to cope with life as they find it. Less easily and certainly less steadily have we been able to relate what we see, study, and do to these larger contexts of profit making and competition. (Brandt, 166)

From the start, we can see her *affective criticism* of the field of writing studies, as it had began meddling with the lives of common people, who had increasingly joined the college classrooms that were not originally designed for them. The major shifts and challenges for the field were also brought about by these "ordinary citizens" who had very different lives and necessities for education than their previous generations. She notes the "most pressing issues" researchers and educators in the discipline were dealing with— "tightening associations between literate skill and social viability, the breakneck pace of change in communication technology, persistent inequities in access and reward—all relate to structural conditions in literacy's bigger picture." (Brandt, 166)

Brandt draws our attention here to the disparity between the backgrounds of the educators in the classroom and the masses that obtain various levels of education from them. Especially in the college level, the gaps are palpable of we think about first generation students and generationally privileged instructors, or even in middle or high school education of underprivileged students and their writing or language teachers, especially in the context of English. Brandt reflects,

> When economic forces are addressed in our work, they appear primarily as generalities: contexts, determinants, motivators, barriers, touchstones. But rarely are they systematically related to the local conditions and embodied moments of literacy learning that occupy so many of us on a daily basis. (Brandt, 166)

She, therefore, offers "a conceptual approach that begins to connect literacy as an individual development to literacy as an economic development", at least how she sees the two have played out throughout the twentieth century. She calls her approach "sponsors of literacy":

> Sponsors, as I have come to think of them, are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way. (Brandt, 167)

Just like the commercial sponsors brought to us by radio and television, she found it useful to think about "who or what underwrites occasions of literacy learning and use" (Brandt, 167) for individuals or groups. What is fascinating is what we perhaps know affectively or intuitively, but do not always acknowledge academically or professionally is how "the interests of the sponsor and the sponsored do not have to converge (and, in fact, may conflict)," "sponsors nevertheless set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful incentives for compliance and loyalty." (Brandt, 167) Sponsors thus provide resources and access to the sponsored, economically, or otherwise, and hold power over the sponsored literacy in a way that binds the sponsored populations into a visible or invisible contract with the sponsors. For Brandt,

> Sponsors are a tangible reminder that literacy learning throughout history has always required permission, sanction, assistance, coercion, or, at minimum, contact with existing trade routes. Sponsors are delivery systems for the economies of literacy, the means by which these forces present themselves to—and through—individual learners. (Brandt, 167)

Brandt studied the sponsors of literacy across the 20th century for "ordinary Americans" over five years, through their recollection of "how they learned to write and read." (Brandt, 167) She conducted more than 100 in-depth interviews of diverse groups of people born roughly between 1900 and 1980. In the interviews, "people explored in great detail their memories of learning to read and write across their lifetimes, focusing especially on the people, institutions,

materials, and motivations involved in the process." (Brandt, 167) The longer her project went, the clearer it became to Brandt that these narrations "were filled with references to sponsors, both explicit and latent, who appeared in formative roles at the scenes of literacy learning." (Brandt, 167) I am referring to these accounts as *affective narratives*, as for Brandt, these patterns of sponsorship "became an illuminating site through which to track the different cultural attitudes people developed toward writing vs. reading as well as the ideological congestion faced by late-century literacy learners as their sponsors proliferated and diversified." (Brandt, 167) Sponsors are thus *affective influences* on people during their literacy journeys and they can be individuals, communities, organizations, and much more for different people's assemblages. Brandt's essay foregrounds "why the concept of sponsorship is so richly suggestive for exploring economies of literacy and their effects" and demonstrates "the practical application of this approach for interpreting current conditions of literacy teaching and learning, including persistent stratification of opportunity and escalating standards for literacy achievement." (Brandt, 167) She also addresses their implications for the teaching of writing at the end of her study. Brandt defines the term further by expanding how it came to her intuitively:

> sponsors seemed a fitting term for the figures who turned up most typically in people's memories of literacy learning: older relatives, teachers, priests, supervisors, military officers, editors, influential authors. . .[they] are powerful figures who bankroll events or smooth the way for initiates. (Brandt, 167)

Although typically richer, more knowledgeable, and more entrenched than the sponsored, the sponsors still "enter a reciprocal relationship with those they underwrite." (Brandt, 167) While lending their resources or credibility to the sponsored, they also expect to gain benefits from the

success of their sponsored, “whether by direct repayment or, indirectly, by credit of association.” (Brandt, 167)

With the proliferation of sponsors and sponsorships in commercial arenas throughout this century, the term also fit the relevance and popularity bill of the time. Sponsors were everywhere: “the magazines, peddled encyclopedias, essay contests, radio and television programs, toys, fan clubs, writing tools, and so on, from which so much experience with literacy was derived.” (Brandt, 168) As this was the time when “the abilities to read and write into widely exploitable resources, commercial sponsorship abounded.” (Brandt, 168) There is thus an *affective relationship* between the sponsors and the sponsored that gear the directions of their literacy one way or the other. Brandt found that “obligations toward one’s sponsors run deep, affecting what, why, and how people write and read.” (Brandt, 168) If there were sponsors to begin with, the sponsored people’s literacy would align with the suggested paths of the sponsors, while a shift in sponsors could redirect and change those paths after. Needless to say, without any sponsors of literacy, there was no literacy. An access to sponsors of any sort in the first place began the journey of literacy, and then the resources provided by/through their sponsorship. Thus, this concept of sponsors helps to explain “a range of human relationships and ideological pressures that turn up at the scenes of literacy learning—from benign sharing between adults and youths, to euphemized coercions in schools and workplaces, to the most notorious impositions and deprivations by church or state.” (Brandt, 168) It is also useful to track “literacy’s materiel: the things that accompany writing and reading and the ways they are manufactured and distributed. Sponsorship as a sociological term is even more broadly suggestive for thinking about economies of literacy development.” (Brandt, 168)

Brandt's project reinforces (1) "how, despite ostensible democracy in educational chances, stratification of opportunity continues to organize access and reward in literacy learning;" (2) "how sponsors contribute to what is called "the literacy crisis," that is, the perceived gap between rising standards for achievement and people's ability to meet them;" and (3) "how encounters with literacy sponsors, especially as they are configured at the end of the 20th century, can be sites for the innovative rerouting of resources into projects of self-development and social change." (Brandt, 168) Although questions of affective access and resources might seem very obvious to us today, there is still not enough conversation about those in the academy, or in the classroom. The sponsors of literacy of the academy, both social and financial, seem to want to suppress these discourses and those that try to incorporate the obvious *affective arches* of privileged versus nonprivileged sponsorships, receive backlash. While we have gone a quarter of the century after Brandt, these topics are still shunned, not mainstream, even in the language, composition or writing classroom. The *affective modes of literacy* that address questions of sponsorship, access and resources are not sponsored by the traditional, conventional system that wants to maintain status quos within educational institutions and beyond. In such a setting, open conversations and focus on sponsorship can "force a more explicit and substantive link between literacy learning and systems of opportunity and access." Unsurprisingly, "a statistical correlation between high literacy achievement and high socioeconomic, majority-race status routinely shows up in results of national tests of reading and writing performance." (Brandt, 169-170) Brandt's findings reemphasize the obscure, yet very present "unequal conditions of literacy sponsorship that lie behind differential outcomes in academic performance." (Brandt, 170)

Brandt's study not only makes overt comparisons between how different social groups' literacy practices, processes and destinations differ, but also how those vary on individual levels through "different access routes, different degrees of sponsoring power, and different scales of monetary worth to the practices in use." In fact, Brandt wants special attention given to how the interviews she conducted are full of examples of "how economic and political forces, some of them originating in quite distant corporate and government policies, affect people's day-to-day ability to seek out and practice literacy." (Brandt, 172) Here, the lived, embodied, imagined, and inter-embodied, inter-corporeal, affective experiences of people are explicitly called into consideration, where one set of corporealities directly affect others. Thinking through the affective skin for the sponsored populations becomes linked to the skins of their sponsors and the bigger networks their sponsors encapsulate and/or associate with. There is a nexus of *affective sponsorships* that then get passed on, and down to transcend generations, space, and time to establish *affective literacies*.

Brandt then moves on to establishing the relevance of the concept of sponsors of literacy to teaching and pedagogy. She encourages analyses of systems of sponsorship for literacy for educators to think through economic and political changes within their regions, effecting "people's ability to write and read, their chances to sustain that ability, and their capacities to pass it along to others" (Brandt, 173) in various ways. She reminds educators that "[r]ecession, relocation, immigration, technological change, government retreat all can—and do—condition the course by which literate potential develops." (Brandt, 173) An ordinary person's literacy learning trajectory "follows the transformations going on within sponsoring institutions" (Brandt, 177) economically, ideologically. and beyond. Institutions undergo change, "affecting the kinds of literacy they promulgate and the status that such literacy has in the larger society." (Brandt,

177) The “deeply textured history” within the literacy practices of institutions and any individual’s literacy experiences, accumulate “layers of sponsoring influences” through families, workplaces, schools, memory to carry or abandon specific forms of literacy. These processes become histories of intergenerational sustaining of resources in the quest for literacies. Brandt realized that by this time in her research subject, the value across multiple generations of literacy acquisition changed: “forms of literacy and their sponsors can now rise and recede many times within a single life span.” (Brandt, 178) Brandt finds that literacy sponsors are affective for literacy learning in two powerful ways: in organizing and administering stratified systems of opportunity and access, and in raising the “literacy stakes in struggles for competitive advantage.” (Brandt, 178) Moreover, sponsors “enable and hinder literacy activity, often forcing the formation of new literacy requirements while decertifying older ones.” (Brandt, 179) Over time, “dominant forms of literacy migrate and penetrate into private spheres, including private consciousness.” (Brandt, 183)

Highlighting the vulnerabilities and limitations of educators bound by/within larger institutional sponsors of literacy, Brandt writes,

> [We] haul a lot of freight for the opportunity to teach writing. Neither rich nor powerful enough to sponsor literacy on our own terms, we serve instead as conflicted brokers between literacy’s buyers and sellers. At our most worthy, perhaps, we show the sellers how to beware and try to make sure these exchanges will be a little fairer, maybe, potentially, a little more mutually rewarding. (Brandt, 183)

These imposed forms of sponsored literacies not only affect the public-facing, educational aspects of instructors, facilitators and proponents of literacy leaning, but also their private,

personal affiliations, developments, and sense of self or purpose. These aspects eventually affect the writing and scholarly practices of these writing practitioners, who are often researchers themselves. These internal conflicts can create divided affectivities and affective writing reflective of these struggles. Brandt thinks that these affectivities influence the texts these authors produce or do not produce, perhaps—

> the ideological pressure of sponsors affects many private aspects of writing processes as well as public aspects of finished texts. Where one's sponsors are multiple or even at odds, they can make writing maddening. Where they are absent, they make writing unlikely. (Brandt, 183)

In this iteration, Brandt is definitely referring to writing being an affective act of thinking through the skin. The interruptions to a writing or literature scholar's cohesive, peaceful, or joyful journey due to their conflicting role as an educator can be parsed through these words. For those that it gets overwhelming, they even move away from writing or any literacy practices for that matter. They are then affectively sponsored their way out of the literacy space by the "obligatory relations" catalogued by the history of literacy institutions. In Brandt's words,

> That this catalogue is so deeply conservative and, at the same time, so ruthlessly demanding of change is what fills contemporary literacy learning and teaching with their most paradoxical choices and outcomes. (Brandt, 183)

At the end of her essay, Brandt reminds her readers, primarily educators in the writing classrooms that her advocacy for literacy learning is not motivated by capitalist endeavors but is rather contrary to that. She cautions these sponsors of pedagogical change that people come from a multiplicity of affective backgrounds. So, "as we assist and study individuals in pursuit of

literacy", we also need to "recognize how literacy is in pursuit of them" and when "this process stirs ambivalence, on their part or on ours, we need to be understanding." (Brandt, 183) I see Brandt calling for a space of affective modalities and affective empathy that has been declining in the academy.

While my first two affective essay exemplify affective writing and pedagogy through very systemic observations and research perched with cohesive autobiographical and autoethnnographic accounts, the final essay writes from and through chaos. Affectivity can absolutely give rise to and arise from chaos simultaneously. Even Brian Massumi touches on the cofunctioning chaotic elements of affect that opens Patricia T. Clough's theorization of the affective turn:

> Each self-reproducing system in this generalized production of order out of chaos combines modulations of what could be called, broadly, the "political" dimension . . . the "economic" dimension . . ., and contributes in a way that could be called "cultural" . . . For lack of a better word, the chaotic cofunctioning of the political, economic and cultural dimensions could be dubbed the "social"—although all of these designations are fairly arbitrary at this point. —Brian Massumi, "Requiem of Our Prospective Dead (Toward a Participatory Critique of Capitalist Power)"

Chaos, as a force, almost always marginalized and considered affective, cannot be neglected in an *affective discourse* of writing and pedagogy. Nancy Sommers opens her essay, "I Stand Here Writing," (1993) in her kitchen, among chaotic thoughts barging in from all directions: "I stand in my kitchen, wiping the cardamom, coriander, and cayenne off my fingers. My head is abuzz with words, with bits and pieces of conversation." (Sommers, 420) Through these bits and pieces of everyday occurrences, chores, fragments of remembrances and

misremembrances of recent readings and affective past memories, Sommers builds her essay. Through many distractions and fragments of thoughts, she arrives closest to the complete recollection of a sentence stuck in her mind. She thinks it is “Writing is a radical loss of certainty,” “(Or is it uncertainty?),” she wonders immediately after. (Sommers, 420) All these random sentences floating in her mind and voices stuck in her head, take away from the cooking of the chicken she was working on, but keep her company, she shares:

> I am a writer, not a cook, and the truth is I don't care much about the chicken. Stories beget stories. Writing emerges from writing. (Sommers, 420)

Sommers then accredits her beings and becomings to her beginnings; her family and childhood. It is not very common for a writing studies scholar to openly reconnect her language, writing, and scholarship to their parents or childhood traumas the way Sommers does. That is why this essay remains to affective for me as an educator and scholar myself, who had not come across an affective recollection of an author’s personal life in a writing studies anthology/textbook like this. Sommers says, all she knows is that “no matter how many facts I might clutter my life with, I am as bound to the primordial drama of my family as the earth is to the sun.” (Sommers, 420) Writing when she was almost my age, Sommers then recalls her parents’ backgrounds: her father, “the son of a severe Prussian matriarch,” her mother that believes in the touch of magic and sends her monthly good luck cards “with four-leaf clovers taped inside.” (Sommers, 420) These cards remind Sommers of “Reynolds Price’s words: “Nobody under forty can believe how nearly everything's inherited.” And she wonders what her mother knows or is trying to tell her “about the facts of my life.” (Sommers, 421)

Sommers tries to make meaning of her own life through her mothers’ life and gestures. She paints a romantic image of her mother “in a field of clovers lyrically conjugating verbs of

love," to place them carefully through the pages of Sommers' high school-French book. Sommers wonders how her mother remains this optimistic and hopeful, despite "the sheer facts of her life"—"a shy and conservative woman whose own mother died when she was five, whose grandparents were killed by the Nazis, who fled Germany at age thirteen with her father and sister." (Sommers, 421) Sommers is awed by her mother's response to her life traumas, whereas Sommers herself "was left, for a long time, seeing only the ironies" as her defense mechanism against the facts of her own life. (Sommers, 421) Sommers here is opening up about her personal, intergenerational traumas and trauma responses, in a matter-of-fact manner, literally referring to those as the facts of their lives. It almost feels healing/healed in her tone, which is again, a rare occasion for the academy, or academics to casually mention in their academic writing. At the same time, the healed trauma from her generation and her parents' perhaps preserved her own daughters from being protected, and also, distanced from those wounds of history. They pick out Sommers' autograph book from 1959 and "laugh uproariously" at the note from her best friend: "Mary had a little lamb. Her father shot it dead. Now she carries it to school between two slices of bread." (Sommers, 421) But what this memory triggers in Sommers is a flood of associated traumatic experiences, when this friend of hers whispered "the Jews killed Jesus" looking her straight in the eye on the first day of first grade. Sommers does not know how to heal or dissociate from those memories. She wonders,

> How do I embrace these experiences, these texts of my life, and translate them into ideas? How do I make sense of them and the conversations they engender in my head? (Sommers, 421)

The flood doors to her affective associations open as she thinks about more words she heard at that time of her life: "Love is blind, but the neighbors ain't," "Mary's father shot her little lamb

dead, and now she carries it to school between two slices of bread." (Sommers, 421) These rhymes were not as innocent as her daughters find them—

> I hear them and think about the ways in which my neighbors in Indiana could only see my family as Jews from Germany, exotic strangers who ate tongue, outsiders who didn't celebrate Christmas. (Sommers, 421)

These thoughts lead her to other thoughts as she starts wondering if she shares a common language with her daughters. Instead of getting answers, she reaches new questions. She calls these thought patterns sources, where one source leads to another, changes meaning, opens up "new ironies, new questions." (Sommers, 422) She begins forming her theory of sources here:

> I want to understand these living, breathing, primary sources all around me. I want to be, in Henry James's words, "a person upon whom nothing is lost." These sources speak to me of love and loss, of memory and desire, of the ways in which we come to understand something through difference and opposition. (Sommers, 422)

Sommers thus finds herself surrounded by sources at all times. She has "an academic need" to find connections that sends her to the library. Like her mother walks into clover fields and picks out the four-leaf clovers, she imagines herself walking "into the fields of writing, into those eleven million books, and find the one book that will explain it all." (Sommers, 422) However, she has "learned to expect less from such sources," because they "seldom have the answers." Whatever answers they may have are not revealed during this phase on conscious searching, but they are revealed to Sommers "at the most unexpected times." (Sommers, 422) She knows now that books are not the sources that lead to the truths she is in search of, but they are elsewhere.

Borrowing others' words without understanding them, whether from books or others' writing, taught Sommers a lesson about losing her own words. She still dreams of that haunting event from twenty years back, when in a debate competition Sommers used a quote that she did not understand. Bobby, her opponent that she despised back then, and now recurs in her dreams, asked her follow-up questions about the quote that she could not answer. Since then, Sommers is haunted by the fear of not knowing answers, not understanding words she uses or others do. Sommers now believes that Bobby has become "what the Sea Dyak tribe of Borneo calls a *ngarong*, a dream guide," the source that keeps motivating her to understand "the endemic rivalries" (Sommers, 423) within herself. Once, a rival, Bobby, is now a source for Sommers. These understandings lead her to understand other sources that co-opted her fascination with words and fear of not understanding. She even joined the English department and its debate team "to learn how to be an orator who could stun audiences, to learn a personal eloquence" she thought she "could never learn at home." That is why Emerson's essay, "Eloquence" was an affective text for her. She was constantly trying to fight her image within the English department, where she felt not seen for her scholarship, but for her "long hair, untamed and untranslatable," and her "long distance bicycle rides." (Sommers, 424) Then she realizes that

> Perhaps only children of immigrant parents can understand the embarrassing moments of inarticulateness, the missed connections that come from learning to speak a language from parents who claim a different mother tongue. (Sommers, 424)

Throughout her undergraduate days, she tried to free herself from "that mother tongue," that felt like "amulets of oppression" weighing heavy on her mind, as she could see no connection between those aspects of her lived, embodied, and imagined experiences and her

"untranslatable" sides set "in opposition to authority." In an overwhelmingly isolating experience of being and feeling othered in the academy, within the English department, Sommers found solace in Emerson's writing. How she describes feeling while reading Emerson, and now recalling it, still reliving those feelings, is what an *affective reading* experience is. She writes,

> And then along came Emerson . . . I liked the promise and the rhapsodic freedom I found in his sentences, in his invitation to seize life as our dictionary, to believe that "Life was not something to be learned but to be lived." . . . Going into Emerson was like walking into a revelation; it was the first time I had gone into the texts not looking for a specific answer, and it was the first time the texts gave me the answers I needed. Never mind that I got only part of what Emerson was telling me. I got inspiration, I got insight, and I began to care deeply about my work. (Sommers, 424)

Reading Emerson not only changed Sommers' relationship with her work, but also her outlook towards life. In my next chapter, where I discuss some of the poets that were affective for me, I find my language, my thoughts, and strong emotions about those texts very similar to Sommers' passionate tribute to Emerson. She then shares how rereading Emerson today still gives her a lot of wisdom, but new ones. She shares very similar sentiments to mine, about returning to affective texts and authors as I mention even in the introduction to my dissertation. Sommers rereads "The American Scholar," underlining the sentence, "One must be an inventor to read well" this time around, which doesn't contradict what she read twenty years ago, "but it means more today."

> I bring more to it, and I know that I can walk into text after text, source after source, and they will give me insight, but not answers. I have learned too that my

> sources can surprise me. Like my mother, I find myself sometimes surrounded by a field of four-leaf clovers, there for the picking, waiting to what I can make of them. But I must be an inventor if I am to read those sources well, if I am to imagine the connections. (Sommers, 424)

Sommers here is describing what I call *affective rereading*, where the readers bring their affective selves to the readings and rereadings of texts, adding more value not only to their own reading experiences, but also to the meanings of the texts themselves. Sommer underlines too how her reading experiences now come from a collective affective assemblage of her thinking through the skin. In her words,

> As I stand in my kitchen, the voices that come to me come by way of a lifetime of reading, they come on the waves of life, and they seem to be helping me translate the untranslatable. They come, not at my bidding, but when I least expect them, when I am receptive enough to listen to their voices. They come when I am open. (Sommers, 425)

Sommers wants to transfer these realizations to her writing students through her teaching. She wants to teach her students "to see themselves as sources, as places from which ideas originate, to see themselves as Emerson's transparent eyeball, all that they have read and experienced—the dictionaries of their lives-circulating through them." (Sommers, 425) She wants her students to see themselves, their lives and life's lesson as their biggest sources for writing. She wants them to understand "how it is always the writer's voice, vision, and argument that create the new source." (Sommers, 425) Although she is aware of the restrictions imposed by timelines and deadlines of lessons and entire semesters of lessons, she wants to start her students off on this empowered journey that will lead them to becoming fulfilled writers someday. Sommers

criticizes the school structures and curricula that train students “to collect facts,” and to “act as if their primary job is to accumulate enough authorities so that there is no doubt about the “truth"” of their thesis.” (Sommers, 425) Sommers thinks such a training buries the students’ own words, voices, and understanding behind “borrowed words” and they end up as parrots of the failed, failing systems, “allowing sources to speak through them unquestioned, unexamined.” (Sommers, 425) Instead, Sommer calls for thinking through the affective skin as students write:

> Being personal, I want to show my students, does not mean being autobiographical. Being academic does not mean being remote, distant, imponderable. Being personal means bringing their judgments and interpretation to bear on what they read and write, learning that they never leave themselves behind even when they write academic essays. (Sommers, 425)

Thus, I think, Nancy Sommers, standing in her kitchen, through chaotic thoughts and traumatic sources, pens an affective essay that calls for affective writing in the academy. All the authors mentioned in this chapter, not only demonstrate affective writing and affective ways of teaching writing in the classroom, but also in scholarship, in and outside the academy.

These three authors can be considered to have marked my initial affective trajectory in teaching literacy, and my affective pedagogical awakening. Teaching composition for three consecutive years using *Writing about Writing: A College Reader* (2010) as the primary textbook to design and teach my own assignment sequences was essential in how I came to understand my place and potentials (or the lack thereof) in the U.S.A, through an intensive, involved training. During my time at the University of Maine, while the majority of my cohort chose and continued to teach texts the cis-white-male composition sharks preferred and preached, I had to hand-pick my sponsors of teaching literacy. While Brandt’s essay made me think about the “local

conditions and embodied moments of literacy learning that occupy so many of us on a daily basis," (166) Sommers encouraged me to bring chaos along to my writing and the teaching of it. She made me feel like I belong in this community of scholars and writing instructors immersed in the "living, breathing, primary sources all around me." (422) Instead of having to shed off my chaotic skin(s), Sommers showed me how to embrace and incorporate it into my academic being and becoming processes. As my assignment sequences developed, a deeply reflective understanding of my own literacy practices and processes in relation to and in contrast with others around me, emerged. This enlightening exercise practiced over the years has sometimes been confronting, sometimes illuminating; but always healing and rewarding to the writer/scholar I became because of it. The *affective qualities* of this introspective training have shaped much of my scholarly and pedagogical choices since then and equipped me with the language to bring the multitude of my embodied, lived and imagined skins into conversation.

Since then, I have expanded and developed these pedagogies further and incorporated them into wider, overarching models of culturally responsive, anti-oppressive teaching of diversity, equity, and inclusion, even beyond the writing classroom. While I taught writing courses affectively through using textbooks like *Ways of Reading: An Anthology for Writers* (1987)

Chapter 2

Affective Landscapes of Poetic Memoryscapes: Who I Am and How I Got Here

Patricia Clough discusses the concept of time in Deleuzian biophilosophy in great detail, in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. It perceives time as virtual, in contrast to "the actual." (Clough, 13) The actualization of time is "an affecting or materializing of a virtual series." (Clough, 13) For Deleuze, the "time-image," i.e. the direct image of time, is different from "the movement-image," a variant of which is "the action-image." Together, the action-image and the movement of "a human "sensory-motor schema"," "fixes time to the unfolding movement of a linear narrative." (Clough, 13) The time-image on the other hand is free from the motive of representation and "points to the productivity of time, the movement of time outside the subject, and suggests a different sort of memory." (Clough, 13) The first section of this chapter is dedicated to such time-image-oriented *affective memories* of my early encounters with poetry and their *affective returns*. The second section of this chapter is almost a live-streaming footage of affective writing that attempts to capture *affective poetry* or *living affectively* through poetry as an intimate process. The genre of this portion is intentionally different to demonstrate the many ways in which *affective poetry* can be written about while thinking through our affective skins. Poetry, as a genre, is a standout example of affective memory, because if we think about it, how many poems do we remember in full, from memory? It is almost always a couple lines that stand out in our memory, unless we are actively working on that poem currently. It is those flashes of lines or phrases from poems, and any other affective writing, for that matter, that become *affective memoryscapes* or *affective recollections* for us and thus, part of our thinking through skins. I try to tribute this chapter to some of those *affective poems* and *affective poets* of mine.

As a second grader, when the Bangla literature textbook introduced us to the poem, "প্রতিদান" (Pratidan) by poet Jasimuddin, I read it over and over again, because I didn't know what I was feeling. I don't remember if I cried (I think my crying-at-everything- phase was activated by puberty). But I know I felt like this poem was about me, for me. I memorized the poem immediately and don't remember it being a favorite for the exam questions. We also didn't learn what I thought I needed to know about the poem or the poet (that is a recurrent theme in my life that I might get into later). We learned that the poet, Jasimuddin, was called the "পল্লী কবি" (polli kobi), the expression Google translates as "rural poet". Polli, however, is translated as countryside. So, the "poet of the countryside," "country poet," or "poet of rural Bengal"—feel like better translations to me. As I cannot seem to find a translation of the poem in English to quote here, I guess I am translating it now. It goes something like this:

আমার এ ঘর ভাঙ্গিয়াছে যেবা, আমি বাধি তার ঘর,
আপন করিতে কাঁদিয়া বেড়াই যে মোরে করেছে পর।
যে মোরে করিল পথের বিবাগী;
পথে পথে আমি ফিরি তার লাগি;
দীঘল রজনী তার তরে জাগি ঘুম যে হরেছে মোর;
আমার এ ঘর ভাঙিয়াছে যে বা আমি বাঁধি তার ঘর।

(জসীমউদ্দীন)

I build houses for those who destroy mine,
To bring back my deserters, shed tears divine.
When they make me lose all face-
I pine and beg for their grace.
Worry all night laying awake for those that sleep fine;
To have my deserters back, I shed tears divine. (My translation)

Now, what's obvious is that "প্রতিদান" (Protidan), meaning compensation, is not a poem about the countryside and it does not pop up when you look at a list of the most famous poems

by Jasimuddin. How and why it made its place into the grade two public school curriculum remains a mystery. It is a poem about reciprocation, or the lack thereof. Over the years, I would recite the poem from my memory to myself during events of perceived betrayal, almost as a self-counseling, self-assertive mantra. Tears would roll down my cheeks as it would play in my head quietly at other times of heartbreak or shock from the behaviors or actions of people I trusted. As more years went by, less and less of the poem remained intact in my memory, although the first two lines kept their place. They would play in my mind or make a reappearance in my memory at similar occasions of somebody or the other breaking my trust or taking advantage of me. Once every few years, I would read the entire poem again; either from a younger cousin's textbook, or online when the internet became accessible; even after I left Bangladesh, even as a full-grown adult. The affective resonance of this poem to how I felt on so many occasions in my life was so potent that it would return to my embodied memory as a self-soothing tool, even when I had not remembered or thought about it consciously in years prior to the emotional triggers. Looking back, I realize that "Protidan" became synonymous and synchronized with all my overwhelming feelings of being misunderstood and mistreated as a young empath with ADHD. Because I did not have the tools to stand up for myself or did not even have the language to effectively express what I was going through, my brain just borrowed the words from Jasimuddin as a self-affirming meditative practice, to give me a sense of comfort and belonging. The poem made its place deep into my core coping mechanisms, while allowing me to be in constant interactions with it. I assumed that at least this poet knew what was up, he had been there, and that I was not feeling feels that didn't even exist. It made me feel seen, valid, and 'almost' sane.

Sometime around eighth grade, somebody recommended I read "কেউ কথা রাখেনি" (Keu Kotha Rakheni) by Sunil Gangopadhyay. It was one of those poems that so-called

passionate/poetic men from my previous generations loved, read, and recited, I believe. I think some dude referred to the poem, in some gaslight-y way to guilt me about my lack of reciprocation to his romantic/sexual advances towards me. Eighth grade. I know. Much had happened by then already. I don't remember who it was and wonder if he had also handed me the book, because I don't know how else I would have access to the poem back then. This was not only pre-internet, but also pre-computers for us. Anyway, I was interested in the title, loosely translated as "Nobody Kept Promises," and expected its message to be similar to Protidan's. However, after the first couple of stanzas, the supposed impoverished male speaker of this poem started complaining about all the women that were either so privileged and "fair" that they did not notice his existence or didn't keep the promises they made to him. Even as I looked the poem up just now to refresh my memory of its content, I started getting angry. I had been putting off reading it since outlining this chapter, because I knew it would trigger me, even though I don't remember which manipulative younger/older man from that phase of my life resonated with it so much that they made me read it. They were plenty and often blend into one big blob of blurry unpleasantness in my inactive memoryscape.

Even back then, in my early teens, with no critical exposure to literary criticism, it felt odd to me and made me mad. I felt that the title of the poem was not justified and had a biased perspective. The accused women were not even part of the narrator's life ever; they were just getting shat on for being privileged and not having the struggles the narrator had. Now that I think about it, it may have been Prufrock's equivalent in Bangla literature. So, you get the picture. I was very disturbed by the poem's unfair representation of the women, but I hadn't yet learned the language for what bothered me. But because I thought the title of the poem had potential, I wrote my own version under the same title (in Bangla). (Un)Fortunately, it seems like

I also translated my own version into English some time in my undergrad years, (when I was trying to internalize thinking/writing in English, I believe); so I can quote from my versions in both languages:

এ নয় সুনীলের কোন কবিতা,	It's not any poem by Sunil,
নয় কোন কবির গান;	Nor the song of some poet;
এ শুধুই আমার জীবন গাঁথা,	It's only the truth of my life,
আমার জীবনের ব্যাথা-	The pain that I survive-
কেউ রাখেনি কথা! (Me)	None kept their words. (Also Me)

While cringing inside out reading what I originally wrote in Bangla and how I translated it in English, I am not editing them for the sake of authenticity. I am not pasting the entire poems here; just enough to give an idea of the poems' tone and structure. From Sunil's (I just realized that we refer to poets by their first names in Bangla) narrative storytelling of specific characters and the harm caused by them, I clearly shifted the tone to that of a general feeling of betrayal in rhyming couplets. While Sunil's speaker affirms himself through the memories of hurt caused by people he names, my version situates the problem in the author/speaker. With direct reference to the renowned poet, the ungendered "I" voice declares that they are just scribbling down their truth and pain in the form of this poem. That no one kept their words/promises seems not to be the fault of others, but how others' actions had collectively affected the author. The accusatory voice from Sunil is replaced with a self-accepting, mourning voice almost. Cringingly quoting another stanza to address two other points I just noticed:

অনেক দিয়েছি ভালবাসা,	যখন প্রতিদানের পালা এলো,
অনেক জেগেছে আশা!	হাত বাড়িয়ে পেয়েছি-

শুধুই কুয়াশা!

I've spread enough love,

But hoped for less than half.

When repayment time arrived,

Spreading hands, I received-

Foggy void above.

The point to be noted here is that the word "প্রতিদান" (Protidan) shows up in my Bangla version, reflecting the definite line of thought that was important to me when I wrote this poem, and now, when I paired them together as significant and relevant poems in my memory. Memory, here, is the place where they resided, and I only recollected them vaguely in their affects. I only remembered the first two lines of "Protidan" and the title of "Keu Kotha Rakheni." I knew that I wrote my version of it, but had very little memory of the content of my Bangla version; with absolutely no memory of ever translating it into English. I found it when I was looking for a translation of the Sunil original to use for this chapter and could not believe that I myself had a translation of my version. I smirked and cringed, pasted it on to this document and only read them today to write about them. These poems feel like placeholders in my memory of the times when I read or wrote them, and how I was affected by them. They dwell only in a place of affect and partial recollections upon thinking hard, but not in my functional memory.

The unrelated point I am noting here is a question: is there an elephant in my poem(s)? Does the stanza structure and/or the use of punctuation remind anyone else of Emily Dickinson's style? Now if I hadn't written the Bangla version in my early teenage years, I would think that I might've been inspired by her style. But I hadn't read a single poem in English, let alone Dickinson, when I wrote it in Bangla. Fun fact, these punctuations look almost identical to Dickinson's or to English because the exact same punctuations exist in Bangla, except for period

(.). Bangla uses a “dari” (।) to denote end of sentence, but all other punctuation marks were derived directly from English for its modern written form. Therefore, my original Bangla poem was not influenced by Dickinson and the English version seems to have kept all the same punctuations as the Bangla. Just a coincidence then? Or was it a spiritual affective calling? More on this later.

Now to go back where I came from: I don't know how poetry is taught and evaluated in elementary and middle school here, but we had to memorize all the poems on the syllabus. We had to then reproduce the ones on the exam questions not only word for word, but also duplicate the style in terms of stanzas, spacing, indentation, punctuation, and all that. As an affective learner, reader, and scholar, any text with any affective memory or associations, stays with me for longer. If they aren’t affective for me, memorizing and reproducing them to the T during exams caused me severe anxieties with the inaccessible exam formats. With those clarifications, let me introduce the next poem that secured its place in my heart and affective memory—Rabindranath Tagore's “সোনার তরী” (Shonar Tori). Its affectivities on me were two-fold. The first one was simple: I visited the conception place for this poem when I was younger. This temporary home in Kushtia, Bangladesh possesses remnants of the Tagore family's houseboat (Padma), and the home (now a museum) tour package includes a spiel about this collection of poems (“Shonar Tori” being the title poem). The poem itself is on display next to the houseboat, which I remember reading on the spot. So, when this poem got introduced on the syllabus in high school, it reignited all my happy memories associated with that trip. It was pre-puberty and with my favorite cousins. Those positive memories of having an intimate history with the poem already alleviated some of the academic anxiety I would have about memorizing it and answering

questions about its literary context or significance. Then it was time to read the poem officially. What's freshest in my memory even now are the penultimate lines:

শূন্য নদীর তীরে
রহিনু পড়ি',
যাহা ছিল নিয়ে গেল সোনার তরী।

On the bare river-bank, I remain alone -
What I had has gone; the golden boat took all.

(Translated by William Radice)

But she says, 'No'-the boat is laden with my gift
and no room is left for me.

(Tagore's own translation)

I was deserted
By the empty riverside,
The golden boat took all that I had.

(Revision attempt by Me)

I am not a translator. But as an affective reader of translation, I didn't like either of the available translations for these lines either. So, I attempted translating it myself to make it closest to the Bangla. I tried around fifty variations after trying to make the rhyme and rhythm echo the original vibes. But failed of course. However, I liked all my attempts more than the existing translations. This brings us to the second layer of affectivities the poem had on me through its content. If the last lines haven't given those away already, then some of these lines might:

গগনে গরজে মেঘ, ঘন বরষা।

কূলে একা বসে’ আছি, নাহি ভরসা।

. . .

যত চাও তত লও তরণী-‘পরে।

আর আছে?– আর নাই, দিয়েছি ভরে।

The rain fell fast…

while I waited alone on the lessening bank

. . .

She comes, and takes all that I have to the last grain;

(Tagore)

Take as much as you want, I said.

Fill up your space!

Is there more?

No, I gave away all I had

To cover the surface. (Me)

Clouds rumbling in the sky; teeming rain.

I sit on the river bank, sad and alone

. . .

Take it, take as much as you can load.

Is there more? No, none, I have put it

aboard.

(Radice)

Thundering clouds, heavy rain.

I am seated alone by the river in vain . . .

“Shonar Tori” thus becomes a lesson in ungratefulness or being robbed off of everything a person possesses in disguise of being lent a helping hand. As my ADHD and affective empathy only got more intensified as I got older, by the time I read this poem in school, I had mastered what I call the art of instant tears. Like before, it didn't take me long to memorize the poem and at every exam, I wished to see questions about it as the first prompt I respond to. All my extreme anxieties surrounding very strict memorization-based, long, and timed exams would be eased, if I saw this poem on the exam questions. Most other exams I could not finish during the allotted time, because neither ADHD, nor accommodations are known concepts to mainstream Bangladesh still. And I am talking about another 20 or so years back.

To me, “Shonar Tori” (1893) reads as “Protidan” 2.0 (1930). Chronologically, if I was introduced to Tagore before Jasimuddin, then “Protidan” would have been the 2.0 version of “Shonar Tori”. Together, it seems like Jasimuddin is exploring the general theme of unreciprocated acts of service, while Tagore is exemplifying a specific rural scenario in that regard. Almost like how teenager me had turned Sunil's very specific examples in “Keu Kotha Rakheni" into a broader exploration of the theme, isn't it? I am not comparing my trivial, cringeworthy poem to these great poets' works. I am just drawing the connections I am seeing while discussing these poems together as they reside on the same affective plane of my evolving memoryscape. (Un)Surprisingly, all of them are about betrayal; lack of judgment on the speakers' part on who to trust, how much service to provide, and what (not) to expect in reciprocation. In this neurotypical, goal-oriented society, these are still the daily struggles that hold me back in life, making prioritizing my feelings or time hard and being social primarily stressful. These seemingly different Bangla poems from three very different poets are thus

affectively connected through my lifelong struggles of incompatibility with existing social codes and feeling out of place. Most of my life events can be summarized through either one of these three poems' perspectives. Emotional dysregulation and multiple chronic conditions caused by ADHD and childhood trauma, platonic over-investments out of empathy and incomprehensibility of sexual motives accumulated into the glorious existential crisis that I inhabit and exhibit today. However, those affective experiences also informed all my literary experiences to bring me here, to write this dissertation chapter, in this way, and about these poems. I call this the cycle *of affective engagement*, which is essentially what I expand in my dissertation under the metaphor of thinking through the affective skin.

All these poems spoke to me and remain important to me only because of how I gathered an affective interpretation of them because of my combo of struggles. Whether or not the poets themselves intended all the affectivities that I derived from them is debatable. But that is how affective poetry works-as if an affective placeholder marks them in our minds and even when we don't necessarily remember their contents, we recall them in affects. We constitute our place in them and the poems create a place for us. Today, when I am trying to draft my dissertation chapter as a Bangladeshi graduate employee in the U.S.A., I feel expected to write about the place(s) I am from or left behind. That is my affective relevance in this space, at this time, co-constructed by social expectations (you know how much I love those) and internalized mis-speculations. I am, whether I sign up to be, or not, most Americans' first or only impression of and window to, Bangladesh. It often takes the same amount of affective labor on my part either to perform that role, or to resist it. However, choosing to not perform the role of cultural representative/interpreter increases my risks of being considered unsocial and viewed as unintelligent. So, I am hoping to pass off the lack of clarities in this portion of my chapter as a

mystery-flared compromise. While I cannot claim to be desired back by my home country, or entirely claim that nation/social space to be mine after nine years of being away from it, my affective search for a home took me on a journey through these poems. I traveled through the good, bad, ugly, alien, and familiar; in my embodied reality of being here and now, while my affective corporeality navigated the parallels of being then and there with the presence here and now. When you permanently dwell in such multiplicities, the sense of place gets blurry. Poems take their place in memory and places in memory become allusive, poetic affects, of unattainability.

All the corporeal conditions I mentioned above couldn't have produced a subject that wouldn't be mind-blown after reading their first poem by Emily Dickinson. Before my B.A. in English, I had never read an English poem other than nursery rhymes and “I Wandered Lonely as A Cloud,” which was part of our English textbook in high school, but not on the syllabus. It was renamed as “Daffodils,” accompanied by a black-and-white image of flying ducks. The flowers may have been part of the image, but I was convinced that the poem was about some breed of ducks called Daffodils. Anyway, the Dickinson poem on the syllabus for my first poetry course was, “Because I Could Not Stop for Death,” It was not my most favorite, but I was intrigued by the poets' style and tackling of death. So, for my presentation in the "Introduction to Feminism" and my Psychology course's final project, I chose to work on Emily Dickinson's poems. My favorite (that became my first Facebook profile bio) was “I am Nobody, Who are You"”. Not only did all her themes and style fascinate me, but her personal tragedies and rejection of publisher/editor expectations also resonated with me. No matter how stereotyped or ridiculed Dickinson's portrayals of death, depression, and isolation gets by the youth, for someone identifying with those closely, her work was remarkable. And to take pride in being a nobody

and speaking to other nobodies couldn't be more validating and encouraging. At this point, I was not only struggling academically to find my place as an English major, but was also recognizing that my senses of alienation was not going to go away as an adult. It was the defining reality of my life; so, to see a poet that became "famous" writing about such struggles motivated me to keep reading her poetry and to write papers on them. As an introvert too, when I read, "How dreary-to be-Somebody!"; I felt assured that I was not the only one who hated attention drawn to me. That didn't mean I didn't value myself or the work I was doing, I just wanted to do it quietly; as she did.

Because I was educated in a third world college with very limited resources and access, my understanding or even the teaching of her work wasn't expansive. I didn't know that her poems were often arbitrarily edited with the punctuations that we read as her unique style, nor did I read many scholarly works written on her. It wasn't until I came to the U.S.A, landed in New England, coincidentally in the university that celebrates Emily Dickinson's birthday each year and in the department with an Emily Dickinson scholar that I understood how big of a deal she was. I had mostly encountered people that made fun of her themes and did not understand why or how somebody could be a fan of those until then. But my professor's knowledge, passion and commitment to Dickinson, and a deeper investigation of the history behind her hand-written and posthumously published works finally took away the shame I was made to feel for appreciating her work at the start of my college days. When the comprehensive exam was approaching, I was not worried about this one poet's work. I knew her poetry enough to feel confident about incorporating her work into mine. The academic relevance and proficiency, of course, validated my affective attachment with Emily Dickinson and her poetry. I gained the confidence to not only share how familiar I was with her work, but could also include her in my

scholarship and teaching without having to doubt myself again. Now, I was a reader and scholar of Emily Dickinson, who spent years in New England herself. My scholarship now feels weighty and valid. It feels like, now "there's a pair of us!"

The illusive reference I made about the elephant in my versions of "Keu Kotha Rakheni" is the use, or overuse perhaps of punctuation marks. Learning English in school, especially in the grammar-translation methods, taught by our elementary to high-school teachers, was rough, to say the least. Our teacher themselves were often products of the same system, or self-taught in the Bengali-medium textbooks, after completing their English-medium education in a very different curriculum. So, a lot of what I learnt was based on memorization and self-teaching usage of grammar (including punctuations) through examples and Bengali/English explanations of rules. In this process, I started overusing punctuations, not only in English, but in Bangla as well. This piece I am writing currently also bears evidence of this tendency, and although I mostly accept MS Word's suggestions of using/not using certain punctuations, sometimes I ignore them, because I feel strongly about their necessity as an intonation marker of my accent and flow. Some of those might even be completely wrong for what I know, but to me, they signify my postcolonial English, slightly modified, even incorrect at times. So, if you look at my "Keu Kotha Rakheni" rewritings, they look like the overly punctuated Emily Dickinson poems we were once taught as her signature style, some demystified since as posthumously edited into the poems as we saw them online or in books, replacing her original dashes. However, at least my Bengali version of "Keu Kotha Rakheni," written much before I had ever read or heard of Dickinson, still looks a little like "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" with its overuse of exclamation signs, to the point where a teacher who once saw some poems' manuscripts of mine, commented on how she thought I was overly influenced by Dickinson. Although in reality, when I came

across Dickinson's formats first, they looked like my writing's structure to me, which was one of the other reasons why they resonated with me so much. I recognize that this point may have become null by now and could've been left out of this narrative arc of mine, but for ADHD's sidetracks' sake, I am leaving it in, as writing ADHD-ly is affective writing for me. I am constantly quieting down so many streams of thoughts, anyway. Since reading more and becoming aware of the casual racism of her time reflected in her poems has worn down my original fascination with Dickinson, as expected, but those were not the poems that reached my third world reading lists during my first phase of exposure to her work, or even the second. But that is not surprising or shocking to a postcolonial reader/scholar like me at all, just disappointing, if that even. Dickinson's reign on my intellectual journey had come to an end, and it did.

Before leaving the New England stream of consciousness though, Robert Frost needs mentioning. The woods were lovely, dark and deep. And I had thousands of miles to go before I could sleep. And I still have many miles to go with this dissertation, before I sleep. Hence, moving on.

It's not very often that I can count my privileges as an international graduate student in the U.S.A. But when I teach and introduce colleagues/friends here to Kaiser Haq's poetry, I can share that I've been privileged to be taught by him. Again, when I started out as an English major in a not-renowned private university in Bangladesh, I barely understood his English in my introduction to poetry class. Not only was it all difficult, but he is infamous for quieting down during lectures, while explaining something or sharing anecdotes. I still have the notes from that course somewhere in my treasure trunk in Bangladesh, where many words from his lectures are non-words, underlined with a rough spelled-out version of what I heard or thought he could've

said, to look up in the dictionary for a somewhat meaningful approximation of what it could've been. Four years and some months later, I was his TA for the same course, smiling through lectures when he'd quiet down, or hear students express their frustrations from not being able to hear or understand him. My job now was to bridge the gap between those students and him. The tables had turned unexpectedly. This time around, however, while taking notes during his lectures, I did not have approximated non-words populating my notebook. This was a sign for me to actually believe that I did in fact came leaps and bounds from where I had started. I now understood what Kaiser Haq said in class, understood all his references, and knew exactly what students were going through. I knew how to help them understand the poems, contexts, and how to ask Haq to raise his voice when he suddenly got quieter during lectures.

By then, I had also attended multiple book launches of the poet, including *Published in the Streets of Dhaka,* heard him read from his book and heard others recite and teach his poems on various occasions. I too had written a paper on him during my M.A. coursework, one of the firsts to have dared to do so, as I remember it. It was bold of me to write on the work of a living poet, one that I worked alongside, and was a current student of. When we were taught his poems in the postcolonial literature in English course, it felt only natural. From "Published in the Streets of Dhaka," written in response to Gore Vidal's random reference to Dhaka as "a city of philistines," to Icarus's carelessness rewritten through a relatable pre-teenager from old Dhaka in "A Myth Reworked,"—it all just fit the prompt. No postcolonial studies scholar in South Asia needed much explanation behind these poems, especially not Bengalis or Bangladeshis, familiar with almost all his imageries and references: so familiar, so local.

However, as I got displaced from the South Asian, postcolonial setting, his poetry and all of the field that he was so intricately a representative of, seemed to have lost its value. When I

decided to pick his poetry back up to present in a conference in the U.S.A., despite my attempts at breaking down the contents and contexts of each poem, the audience's bewildered expressions bothered me. Whether it was just his poetry, or my presence, topic, and accent as a combo deal produced those affectivities, I will never know. But even those familiar with me, my presence, and accent, needed a lot more background knowledge from me, to appreciate some of his poetry to the extent that I had taken for granted in South Asia. My foreignness, felt more oppressive when even the biggest English poet from Bangladesh was hard to understand for the people, including poets here. That is when I knew culture shock like I had not before. That was my coming of age in the academia, in the literature departments in the U.S.A. That experience, that realization of out-of-touch-ness perhaps aged me and brought me here.

A very common trope/topic in postcolonialism is that of familiar/unfamiliar colonial objects and imageries. When an English-major student is reading about New England in literature or in biographies, they are not necessarily imagining/understanding the weather, landscape, or location of the place outside of the texts' immediacy. Reading and teaching about New England, even with movies, relevant pictures, maps, and geographical approximations never made me think about a day when I would/could be there. Nothing prepared me for when I was. The surreal feeling that I am now living in a place I've only read and taught about for years cannot really be expressed in words. How cold winter is, how vibrant Fall is and how real snow is--no reading or picturization could affectively translate into that reality. When I stood in front of the Robert Frost statue at Dartmouth, I realized that I had barely ever seen his photographs during my new-to-the-internet, computers on the college campus only availed for assignments that required typing and information available on *the internet only* days. I pulled up his photos standing in front of the statue and thought, well, there's that.

The unfamiliarity of/with the Bangladeshi poet's thoughts, imageries and even the very "English" English made me think of the other side of the coin. The colonial/ first-world privilege of not having to read or wonder or fantasize about a third world country like Bangladesh. Even if they're brought up through stereotypes or exotic references on the news or the media, the privilege of not ever giving it any thought, the privilege of not having to know. Anything. About anything. At all. You know? It is almost a realization of an affective allusiveness, a privileged distance, an entitled sense of not having to give a f*** that hurt my postcolonial, underprivileged affective ego's proximity with this reality. The absolute privilege of non-affectivity felt extremely palpable and raw in comparison to my absolutely ridiculous amounts of affectivities.

So, last year, when I introduced Kaiser Haq's poetry to my students in the U.S.A., and he promptly becomes some of their favorite in the context of a Comparative World Literature course titled "Poetry's Others and Others' Poetry," it baffled me. Once again, I did not know what was behind this affective response of students. Was it just the poem, "Ode on the Lungi"? Or was it also my affective relationalities with the poem/poet/place of his origin? Or was it my curation of the syllabus where they easily drew connections between the poetry of Derek Walcott and Kaiser Haq or Kamala Suraiyya and Kaiser Haq? I do not know. What I know is that teaching Kaiser Haq's poetry with the unexpected amount of success and affective resonance for so many students restored some faith for me and in my career/purpose as an instructor of literature in the U.S.A. that was previously taken away from me. What else showed me my place in being out of place in my affective journey? The next section of this chapter will try to answer that question in a slightly different mode of affective readings, and analyses.

Poems we live with. Poems I live with. Poems I am a liver of.

> Why do I care about the liver? . . . because the word *live* hides within it . . . the liver is the largest single internal organ next to the soul, which looms large though it is hidden. –Claudia Rankine. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric,* 54)

Do I read poems in English the same way I read them in my first/native language? I don't think so. Neither do I live with them in similar ways. They feel like parallel paths to distant multiverses that do not come into direct contact with one another unless fantastical Marvel-like malfunctions bring them together. There are significant linguistic, cultural, and emotional gaps between my reception and perception of the world in English and Bangla. I acquired Bangla as part of a linguistically privileged population based and educated in the capital of Bangladesh, whose 'mother tongue' was instilled in us through various national, patriotic, romantic, culturally distinct signifiers. Even if we leave alone the baggage the 'mother' tongue carries within its analogy, the drastic differences in the holistic experience of the world were palpable to me the moment I emigrated to reading literature in another language as an adult. In SouthAsia, the concept of 'mother' denotes a position of utmost respect, connoting unparalleled levels of kindness, love, care, selflessness, pain, suffering, laboriousness and all that jazz. Motherland, mother tongue and all such expressions with the mother prefix are thereby deeply rooted in emotions and traditions woven over centuries of an umbilical inheritance of cultural significance. Bangladesh literally means the 'country of the Bangla-speaking'; so, the legacy and associations of this language as 'mother tongue' is intrinsic to the socio-political recognition of its speakers as "model" citizens. Although the poetry tradition is Bangla can be traced back to multiple linguistic and cultural heritages, the most commonly encountered genres of poetry draw from any/all of those. Expressed and acquired through songs and other unwritten forms of

communication, the folk poetry popular with the rural and barely literate populations they are religious, mythological, and environmental in theme. The educated middle classes also enjoy romantic, patriotic, and polemical genres in addition to the folk forms. Those interested or invested in poetry but not trained in the field as such, like me, piece together all these various sprinklings from here and there to develop an understanding of this literature that the chaotic teachings in school doesn't necessarily help with. And that I am not well versed or even entirely sure about my claims about Bangla poetry is also proof of not studying Bangla literature in college or beyond. The language in which I do literary analysis and criticism is, unironically, only English.

There are many moving pieces and variables to the individual experiences of mine: would I feel less of a contrast if I read both literatures simultaneously since I started reading? Would the transition be smoother if my first and second language did not have a colonial-postcolonial or first and third world divide? Would my experience feel less significant if my personal and intellectual journey to individuality did not coincide with my language switch? Or did my personal and intellectual struggles to distinguish myself push me more towards the foreign lingua-franca and further away from my 'mother tongue'? Some factors that set me off on this lonely, independent journey can just be attributed to good old going off to college. I was in a new private-college environment after graduating from twelve years of Bangla-medium public schooling that took place in the same premises with the same peers[1]. I was the misfit in the English department from a Bangla-medium background, who claimed to be good in literature and English separately, because I had not read a single book of literature in English before my undergrads to have claimed to be good in English literature. I was allowed in the program despite being laughed at by the interview board during admissions, but the bullying from the students

from English-medium backgrounds never stopped. Although I had to abandon reading in Bangla entirely to fully immerse in English to comprehend the majority of course materials and lectures, I was performing well. But I was entirely alone in my journey of working really hard—frantically taking notes during class, rereading materials over and over again, keeping multiple dictionaries in hand (third world problem) to write down meanings of English words (in Bangla) I didn't know in the margins to remember them the next time and so on and so forth. In short, the struggle was real. However, despite these struggles, when I was in courses on feminism and postcolonialism, I knew shit that hadn't been said in class or the texts yet or I hadn't read before. Or, I would read something and think to myself: Oh, this thing I have thought about for so long has been written about! I am not alone? There are/were others in the world that had the same thoughts? Entire traditions and schools of thought? I found my place for the first time ever. Postcolonial feminism set me off on my journey into belonging in the traditions of literature and critical theory, which expanded into broader areas afterwards.

Then there's the speculation that none of these issues are/were that 'big of a deal' to a mind that's not on the overthinking train of the ADHD-Autism spectrum. All my perspectives, experiences, literacy and literary recollections might just be figments of my ADHD imagination. All these possibilities of my realities might be true in some capacity and overlapped to create this Franken-academic, who has taken up this project to write about poems I live with; now, in the USA, in English. Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* and *Citizen: An American Lyric* are poems I have been living with since this leg of my journey began. As a literature graduate student, I imagine 'living with' to take the forms of reading, researching, writing about, returning to, and thinking about for a prolonged period. Amidst the absolute chaos of moving to the USA, going through layers upon layers of struggles to adjust to the new

systems, feelings of alienation and overwhelm all at the same time, all the time, I found solace in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*. Although it might seem like an odd book to find comfort in, the voice in these poems was speaking a language I understood, going through struggles I'd experienced, feeling feelings I recognized and giving voice to thoughts I hadn't shared with others before. I kept breaking down in tears at the campus cafeteria, reading each page, sometimes each line, over and over again. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* made me feel seen and validated by the poet for the first time since landing in the USA. Existential dread, gut reactions to sad and stressful events, loneliness, inability to accept death or injustice:

> I felt it too.
>
> The loneliness?
>
> I let it happen.
>
> By feeling?
>
> By not not feeling. (*Lonely*, 58)

My empath-senses, my affective disposition, my overwhelmed core made up of a lifetime of ADHD-induced emotional dysregulation, my vague memories of numerous unsuccessful suicide attempts, PTSD from personal and social grief—all were represented, addressed, and given voice by Rankine. Time and again, her speaker spilled out unspoken thoughts, unshared memories, and unrealized affects I had buried away.

> That's too much . . .
>
> Like dying?
>
> Or death is second.
>
> Second to what?
>
> To loneliness. (*Lonely*, 58)

Rankine wanted to write poetry "from the moment of expression rather than having to lead the reader there through events."[2] She hoped her readers experienced "an authentic rush of feeling" from reading her work, just the way she felt when reading her favorite poets and authors. She emphasizes that "what makes you understand and identify with those poets is that you have had that feeling – you are in the emotion, not the life". That's exactly what she achieved with me; the intimacy I felt made me trust Rankine on a personal level. I related to her immediately and believed that she'd know me much better than those who surround me in real life. Her work got the insecurities out of my mind about my scholarly and human value. I rediscovered my postcolonial feminist space in English literature, evolved now into an international woman of color scholar in this new academic environment. Thereafter, every time I felt low and out of place, I would reread pages from her book and feel better.

> Define loneliness?
>
> Yes.
>
> It's what we can't do for each other.
>
> What do we mean to each other?
>
> What does a life mean?
>
> Why are we here if not for each other? (*Lonely*, 62)

However, that's not what I wrote about in my first short response paper on Rankine during my graduate coursework. I did not think the personal affective connection I built with her was an academic-enough topic to write about, despite my course's focus being memory and affect. My paper titled "Affected Subjectivities in Rankine's Poetry" discussed how "Rankine's poetry is steeped in an ever-lasting sense of loss," with *Citizen* (2014) poses questions about "black subjectivity in the collective cultural memory of the US," *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* (2004) reflects

on “the politics of life, subject formation and the perception of reality.” As the scope of this weekly response was very structured, I applied multiple essays from the *Affect Theory Reader* to show instances of the narrators in her poems being “continually haunted by affects,” “struggling to find meaning in life or living.” (Habib, 2015)

Once I was able to recover from the affects produced in me by the affective dimensions of Rankine’s linguistic style and lyric expressions, I recognized that her books were also providing detailed commentary on the Black Lives Matter movement(s): in 2004 as a communal fear and injustice (*Don’t Let Me Be Lonely*); in 2014, as a national crisis (*Citizen*). They were educating me on the intricacies of historical build-ups behind specific events, drawing multiple intertextual analyses together to critique the state of the issue from a holistic perspective. But even when *Citizen* became the academic ambassador of the movement, I was as a first-year international student in the U.S.A., too timid and inadequate in my spatial and temporal literacies to write about all of Rankine’s affectivities effectively. I am censoring and editing down this piece even now to make it more readable, still considering whether I need to put trigger warnings about repeated mentions of suicide/self-harm and depression in this essay. But since I know that Claudia Rankine’s poetry and the news of more black people getting killed or frequent mass shootings in the USA do not pop up with trigger warnings, my essay shouldn’t need it either.

I am aware that my piece can read as chaotic to readers who are used to neuro-typical, conventional, Western, predominantly white, mainstream writing only. I am not sure if I want to/am able to undo the unsettling aspects of my writing. Even if I can, should I cut it out, and how much should I edit and censor? Because after a point, it does not remain me anymore. I lose my self and my writing-self in the process of making myself comprehensible. But even in that version, I remain unrelatable and off-putting to the majority any way. So, I should, in fact,

continue writing the way that feels the most authentic to me, shouldn't I? That is the suggestion I would give a student or colleague if they posed these questions to me. Aren't the Rankine poems I live with themselves considered obscure and too difficult to comprehend? What does it mean, if not unrelatable and off-putting? Well, my intentions are aligned with Rankine's theme of standing out in collective otherness.

> Here . . . Here both recognizes and demands recognition. I see you, or here . . . In order for something to be handed over a hand must extend and a hand must receive. We must both be here in this world in this life in this place indicating the presence of. (*Lonely*, 130-131)

My third year in the US, I tried working on Rankine's poetry again in a seminar that was meant to help us come up with a presentable paper for an upcoming 90s poetry conference. This time, I read all of Rankine's published work to trace her poetic arc and immersed myself in accounts of police killings of Black men, the Black communities living in constant fear of losing their men and the critique of whiteness as recurrent themes. This was the first time I withdrew from presenting in a conference. As I look back to what made my project unachievable, a lot of personal and academic stressors come up. My paper was too ambitious for the time I had to complete it and the scope of it was not yet fully realized. The conference coincided with the next big move of my life, so a lot of parting woes and moving anxieties were conflicting with my academic goals. The seminar itself altered my confidence again as the other presenters were all working on white poets that they are very passionate about, had years of training on and experience with. The class discussions around those projects were lively, interactive, and interesting. My project was depressing, unfamiliar and unproductive for class discussions because nobody else there read these books or cared to pay attention to the international brown

accent that stood out like an odd sound even when she didn't speak. The interpersonal dynamics of this space got the best of me (which is a common theme in my classroom experiences in the US) and my paper got sacrificed in the process. Is this a rant, or a review of my life with Rankine's poems? Can I live with Claudia Rankine's poetry without thinking through the embodied and imagined experiences that make up my life or Rankine's work?

> Anyway, tell me something, you have
> lived in this country many years? . . .
> Well yes, then. So tell me this, have you
> noticed these white people, they think
> they are better than everyone else?
> Have I noticed? Are you joking? You're
> not joking. Where are you from? (*Lonely*, 89)

That fall, I felt prepared to return to Rankine in a comparative literature coursework setting. However, this Euro-Centric course wasn't really prepared to welcome its international students of color, so it strategically instilled a demoralizing sense of otherness in all these aliens. Selected readings from *The Lyric Theory Reader* (2014) were forming theoretical cores of this course, without adequate discussion of one of its primary premises that the "lyric fictions," or the false tracings of an Anglo-American tradition of the undefinable genre of lyric, "were products of the special interpretive community of the [modern, American] classroom" (5). Despite a complete breakdown of communication with the professor and the most aggressive physical confrontations with white supremacist gaslighting in an academic setting, I submitted my final paper proposal for "*Citizen, Don't Let Me Be Lonely*: Claudia Rankine's American Lyric(s)". On our final day of class, when every student was supposed to go around and share with the class

what their project was, my turn was skipped. But by now, I had learned to not let classroom dynamics result in non-existent papers; although the overall quality was highly compromised. As the oldest woman of color and veteran international student in that class, I felt a moral duty in the depths of my skin to strike back with a paper written about the skins of people that also expands the skin of the genre: lyric. It was my desperate attempt at showing what lyric, and specifically the American lyric looked like at the time of this course; so I argued,

> Placing these two words next to one another (*American Lyric*), Claudia Rankine demonstrates not only an awareness of the individual baggage the terms 'American' and 'lyric' carry, but also adds another layer of complexity to their implications. This paper claims that these two books [*Don't Let Me Be Lonely* and *Citizen*] function as a set to provide Rankine's commentary on the discourses of American Lyric, simultaneously situating her identity within these exigencies. (Habib, 2016)

It was not a well-edited paper, because of the usual demons: anxiety, affective impacts of all the piled up negative feedback received throughout the term, and multiple term paper deadlines at once. Right after finals week though, I felt free from the course constraints and the pressures of submission (of both the paper and my—self) enough to edit this paper into a version that I was satisfied with for the time being. So much so that I presented a version of it at a conference on campus and had been accepted for publication in the post-conference journal issue. However, between the presentation and the praise, I was undone by the Q&A session, where a white presenter from outside the US, asked if *Citizen* is only about American citizens. The short answer was yes, although I gave the longer answer too about how it speaks to and about so much more than that. But this question awakened a different consciousness in me about

my work on Rankine and brought back all the insecurities about whether I was 'doing justice' to this project. I internalized this audience member's question, who was not familiar with Claudia Rankine's poetry, or poetry in general. But this German (read: not American, not a citizen of the U.S.A.) scholar's seemingly innocent question in this multidisciplinary conference convinced me that my engagement with *Citizen*, and Rankine's work in general, was inadequate. I was unexpectedly displaced by my own subject position that alienates me from being an active participant in the conversations about *Citizen*, underprepared to insert myself into the scenes that *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* gave me ample access to, but *Citizen* restricted.

> If I am present in a subject position what responsibility do I have to the content. To the truth value, of the words themselves? Is I even me or am "I" a gearshift to get from one sentence to the next? Should I say we? Is the voice not various if I take responsibility for it? What does my subject mean to me? (*Lonely*, 54)

Don't Let Me Be Lonely already evokes a sense of seeking company in its title. If I am keeping these poems company, I am also being accompanied by them. *Citizen*, however, cannot accompany me the same way; in its successful motive of attending to hypervisible and invisible citizenship dynamics, it is a constant reminder of my non-citizen status. It makes me feel lonely in my identification with the lyric 'you' in the poems, because the Black, African American 'you' of the poems does not know me, let alone identify with me. My allyship, my empathy and my intellectual oneness with the 'you' addressed by these poems is neither reciprocated, nor desired.

> Language that feels hurtful is intended to exploit all the ways that you are present. Your alertness, your openness, and your desire to engage actually demand your

> presence, your looking up, your talking back, and as insane as it is, saying please. (*Citizen*, 49)

These are American lyrics, after all. I am not an American—no matter how many dissertations I write, or classes I teach on American literature, politics, and media; how many insights I bring from the outside or how many years I spend here. My accent, my skin, my 'culturally other' views on whiteness differentiates me from those Rankine addresses in *Citizen*, even though she herself might intellectually recognize my identification with them. Intersectionality is a bitch, and international intersectionality is not even an academic or intellectual conversation in 'America'. As I think through my skin about poems I live with, I doubt whether I have the right to live with *Citizen*. It becomes a quiet complaint just like all the discriminations and microaggressions I have faced in the US from Black citizens but am not supposed to talk about, like all the feelings of inadequacy most of my African American friends give me and the reason why my closest black friends are African, not Black or African American[3]. "Here . . . In order for something to be handed over a hand must extend and a hand must receive. We must both be here in this world in this life in this place indicating the presence of. (*Lonely*, 130-131)"

These thoughts aren't products of isolated echo chambers; they are fed by similar conversations about Rankine herself being an immigrant, voiced by concerned African Americans. As I read more of criticisms of Rankine or overhear conversations, I can't unsee the biases against herself, where those she is attempting to represent do not find her to be capable of representing them because she has not come out of the African American experience. "Because Oprah has trained Americans to say anything anywhere," (*Lonely*, 53), Rankine's authority to write about the citizen experience is undermined and criticized. She herself is let/led to be lonely, the 'you's of *Citizen* abandon her, leaving the I of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* mumbling-

> Am I often troubled by constipation? Have I ever vomited love or coughed up blame? Is anything wrong with my mind? (*Lonely*, 40)

Such moral conflicts around the core frameworks of my project made me abandon that almost publishable paper and the publication opportunity. Once again, I got affected by the socio-cultural exigencies of both my realities and Claudia Rankine's poetry that kept getting more and more entangled with each other over the years. But neither of us left the other. I realized how lonely Rankine herself was in the tradition, in her reception, in the alienations. The microaggressions her Black voices in *Citizen* encounter from white folks, Rankine might be experiencing not only from the white colleagues and audiences, but also from Black Americans that consider her less-than, because of her African-Americanness. There is, of course, no direct academic or published piece where Rankine is being othered by a Black scholar/reader as an outsider. However, there are pieces that emphasize her immigrant status[4] and others who refer to her as a "naturalized citizen[5,6]." Rankine herself writes about "invisible racisms" and the intimacy of violence committed by colleagues and friends, which we can assume to have intra-racial underpinnings during communal encounters[7].

Claudia Rankine's interviews, poetry readings, and other events get populated with infuriating questions from white folx that she keeps answering with impeccable calm and unshakeable patience. Over and over, and over again. Until that time when she does not and writes about it also in her introduction to *The White Card: A Play*. A "white, middle-aged man" asks her at a reading of *Citizen*: "What can I do for you? How can I help you?" (vii). Rankine decided to answer his question "*personally* without the distancing scaffold of referential-speak" (vii) for the first time ever and responded with "I think the question you should be asking is what *you* can do for *you*." (viii) What transpired is a condescending, angry response from this man

who Rankine goes in depth to explain as “the afterlife of white supremacy” which “exists in the depths of repression of American complicity with structural antiblack racism.” (viii) All these examples of well-intentioned, willing/genuine misunderstanding or lack of understanding shown towards concerns of race, racism and Rankine opened up my eyes to the general mind-blowing white-supremacist ignorance of our audiences again. They already don’t/won’t understand the contents of Rankine’s poetry, and to complicate that equation, here’s me—international brown woman with thick accent, affective personality, and nervous energy, trying to work with Rankine’s poetry. This is what white-fragility nightmares are made of! We make the best combo to knock down at once with a single hit of established tools of white passive aggression. Then it clicked that the failures of my projects on Claudia Rankine were not isolated, personal incidents, they were systematically orchestrated obstacles for this work to be discontinued. Putting me down and being a-holes to me was the easiest way for these people to attack Rankine and the contents of her poetry. I was just the catalyst and medium of transfer. My subjectivity itself was coming in the way of engagement with Rankine's poetry and reception, unless, I made my own subjectivity the foundation of my engagement with Rankine's poetry and its reception.

So, when it was time to narrow down my qualifying exam fields and dissertation topic, I had to reevaluate my relationship to Rankine’s work and my place in it. I realized that I had to approach her work personally and affectively, “without the distancing scaffold of referential-speak”[8]. It was finally time to read her poetry as affectively written pieces of literature out of lived experiences and living affects that blur the artificial boundaries between personal anecdotes and critical theory. I taught myself to write about her affective contents, concerns, voices, and styles. I had to assert and insert my own self into this project as an affective reader, remembering and returning to them because of their affective resonance with me. In my readings and writing

since, my own memories, affectivities, and subjectivities had to play as big a role as the poet's intended representations and/or affectations. I am calling my approach an affective orientation; I am thinking through the skin of myself, my poet, her poetry and our comparative affectivities. "Our very being exposes us to the address of another . . . We suffer from the condition of being addressable[9]." (*Citizen*, 49) So here we are today. This liver is still functioning (however poorly that may be) and hasn't overdosed on Claudia Rankine's poems yet. Now I am living like never before, and better than ever: reading her, writing about her, teaching on her, and attempting to publish a piece in a collection of essays on "poems we live with." "Alive? . . . Indeed it is surprising, given the noxious chemicals the liver is exposed to . . ." (*Lonely*, 53-54)

Chapter 3

From Subtle to Toxic: The Affective Curry Traits of Bollywood and Beyond

Affective Cinema

In this chapter of my dissertation, I am proposing that the affectivity of cinema (nonorganic technology) becomes the knowledge of the senses experienced by the affective bodies (organic felt-vitality) of its spectators. I am coining the terms, *affective cinema* to denote cinema with such affective characteristics, and *affective spectatorship* or *affective audience* to connote the spectrum of viewership with varying levels of pre-individual bodily capacities to act, engage, and connect, i.e., to affect and be affected. The power of affective cinema lies within its focus on "the economic circulation" of affects "in the domain of biopolitical control." (Clough, 2) This except from my chapter continues to demonstrate *affective orientation*[1] at play through affective close readings of one Hindi and one Bengali movie from India. As established in my previous chapters, my affective perspectives are shaped by my own histories with and processes of thinking through the *affective skin*.[2]

The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses by Laura U. Marks emphasizes "the way film signifies through its materiality, through a contact between perceiver and object represented." (xi) Marks theorizes how "vision itself can be tactile, as though one were touching a film with one's eyes." (xi) She describes these affective processes of viewing movies as "haptic visuality" (xi). She argues that film is "impressionable and conductive, like skin," and "the very circulation of film among different viewers is like a series

[1] My emphasis. Concept coined and established in first chapter.
[2] My emphasis. Concept established in first chapter.

of skin contacts that leave mutual traces." (xii) Although Marks theorizes "intercultural cinema", she posits that films appeal to "the knowledge of the senses," and are informed by "embodied spectatorship" in most non-Western cinema that "stresses the *social* character of embodied experience," affecting individual and cultural memory.

Patricia Clough's affective turn theorizes affect "in relation to technologies that are allowing us both to "see" affect and to produce affective bodily capacities beyond the body's organic physiological constraints." (2) She discusses how the "technoscientific experimentation with affect" "traverses the opposition of the organic and nonorganic . . . [and] inserts the technical into felt-vitality, the felt aliveness given in the pre-individual bodily capacities to act, engage, and connect—to affect and be affected. (2)

I combine these two theorists' perspectives to define and introduce affective cinema and affective spectatorship to expand in this chapter.

Subtle Curry Traits

The *subtle curry traits* in/of Bollywood movies are, as I see them, not only situated in the movies themselves, but, are also constructed by and reflective of its audiences' traits. I am using the phrase, "curry traits" loosely based off of a Facebook group called "Subtle Curry Traits," which opened in October of 2018, and has over 1M members as of now.[3] This group is primarily for South Asians from all over the world, but might also have other 'brown', 'Asian', or nonwhite allies invited by other curry members and approved by the curry admins of the group. This group's posts are on relatable curry traits that can be stereotypical, or hypothetical. It is a

[3] The description for this group is: "CurryTraits - Healing with humor. Welcome to the world's largest 'curry' closed group on FB. Have a laugh and share the love!"

sarcastic group, as the description clarifies, so even the most toxic and traditional 'traits' of the target cultures/generations are presented through humor. It is self-reflexive and introspective that way and can be considered a platform to share inside jokes among contemporary South Asians, who can make fun of their own traditional and cultural heritages. These slights are often directed toward older generations and their conventions that affect the younger generations' lives in sometimes laughable, often toxic ways. That is why the group is a closed one, as it tries to be a gatekeeper between the racist, insensitive, non-curry Facebook users, and the curry ones with the legitimate right to criticize their own inherent conventions. As someone becomes a regular follower of the group and try posting or commenting critically in the post, they realize that the admins are policing the curry views shared and critiqued within the group. The admins are all Australian-born Indians, who have a set standard of what they allow to be said and how in the group. Anything else that does not align with their views, beliefs, and level of (or the lack of) progressiveness or sense of humor, gets shut down immediately. In this process, the "subtle curry traits" initiators themselves create their own web of subtle curry traits: an affective mechanism of control and currency that gatekeeps the criticism of certain curry traits, while protecting and promoting others. As noted by Clough, like all other affective mechanisms, even this lighthearted social media group's affective network projects traits of biopolitical control, even if their original intentions were to build a sense of affective community.

A lot of the issues of toxicity displayed in Bollywood movies through romantic and familial relationships feel like "subtle curry traits" that I can recognize because of my indulgent curry background. Just like the group's internal politics, the movies that claim to undo specific harms or patterns of representations themselves end up romanticizing and/or falling short in criticizing other deep-rooted curry traits. Only victims of such curry toxicities seem to identify

the potential dangers of the subtleties of these underhanded portrayals. These recurring themes and loopholes in Bollywood representation made me organically start using the term "curry" to refer to those recognizable South Asian patterns of behaviors not only in the characters and plot development, but also in the storytelling and conceptual shortsightedness. Through affective analyses of the complex internal and external metanarratives the movies are a part of, I will now discuss three Bollywood movies by three different directors and production houses that depict the complex nexuses of toxic relationships from slightly different points of view, when reviewed from affectively gendered perspectives. I argue that the power differentials between the parents and their daughters, the heterosexual romantic companionships and the interparental conflicts in all these movies are so subtly problematic that a non-discerning audience cannot fully decipher those, even if they are critical of the melodramatic or cinematographic choices of the movies. The subtle toxicities of these movies seem to operate as an undertone throughout the movies, which its regular curry audience is uncritical of. This is how the affective representations of these toxic traits unconsciously enter the imagination at best and reenactment at worst of its affective audience, making them spread and reinforce in the form of affective curry traits. My affective perspectives here are an attempt at unearthing the subtle affectivities that are mostly unaddressed by the mainstream viewers and critiques of these movies, allowing the control mechanisms of this media platform to succeed in constructing prescribed affective subjectivities and socialities.

Affective Bollywood for Bangladeshis

In *Consuming Cultural Hegemony: Bollywood in Bangladesh*, Harisur Rahman proposes the concept of "cultural subscription" to denote how the audience "consumes, compiles, admires, endorses, and supports specific types of content." (5) He suggests,

> Cultural subscription refers to cultural consumption, cultural appropriation, cultural tastes and lifestyle preferences through which individuals in a social class distinguish themselves and establish their social and cultural positions, preferences and behaviors. The consumption of cultural products worth high symbolic values contributes to the formation of class identity, inequality, power and status in a society. (5)

He draws from Bourdieu's ideas that, consumer tastes or preferences are not "inherent, universal and individualistic choices of the human intellect", these are rather "socially conditioned" "markers of social hierarchy" that classify the classifier. (5-6) Thus, Rahman establishes that cultural consumption, subscription, and hegemony are interrelated in ways that classify the consumers' place in the society. (7) Bangladesh's cultural subscription to Bollywood and other Indian media or cultural products is rationalized by Rahman as the "perception and practice of modernity among the Bangladeshi middle-class audience." Through the consumption of Indian Hindi films, their mediated culture, fashion and lifestyle, "cultural hegemony creates the perception of modernity that becomes an ideological and motivational force for many to believe in. (10-11)" Rahman finds this affective symptom of mobilization to be the ultimate alternative, hybrid, parallel response to Western modernity on regional levels. He argues that films are expressions of such regional versions of cultural progressiveness and to "the middle-class audience in Bangladesh, Bollywood films have been that "phantasmagoria of modernity"" (170)

Purnima Mankekar describes the affective popularity of Bollywood movies in South Asia along the same lines, in her book, *Unsettling India: Affect, Temporality, Transnationality*. She suggests,

> Media like Bollywood cinema, satellite television, and . . . the circulation of commodities enable the reterritorialization of space through the construction of a phantasmic India that cannot, ultimately, be located in a specific place. Thus, for instance, transnational public cultures participate in the production of phantasmic notions of India in both the homeland and diaspora by generating a range of affects spanning nostalgia and longing, as well as disaffection, alienation, and, at times, antagonism . . . (15)

The affective resonance of Bollywood cinema or affective cinema in general thus transcends the boundaries of space and time to circulate affect. Mankekar locates affect within the realms of unsettlement; navigating its own complex space between "individual agency" and "social action," (13) blurring the boundaries of "private feelings and public sentiments." (14) For Mankekar, foregrounding "the temporality of affect and the affectivity of temporality is particularly useful in understanding the dynamism of subject formation. (17)" She provides insights into affectivity in ways that explains how a Bangladeshi viewer of Bollywood cinema like me can grow up watching these movies affectively, to the point of seeing reflections of myself and my corporeal surroundings in them, despite being from an adjacent, butt different socio-political background. The linguistic barrier is blurred by the affective acquisition of the language through extensive exposure from an early age. The cultural boundaries are faded by the shared history and affective cultural subscriptions passed down by the previous generations that either grew up in undivided India themselves or were affected by the partitions (both the decolonization of India and independence of Bangladesh). So, for the Bollywood audience in Bangladesh, in addition to ideological interpolation, mediation needs to be considered in understanding "how media produce us as subjects in ways that problematize schisms between

body and mind, mind versus heart, cognition versus corporeality, and passion versus reason." (Mankekar, 17) Mankekar is interested in the "ethical dimensions of affect, in how (mediated) affects enable us to situate ourselves in the world and, equally in how we are imbricated in processes of change." (17) This would explain Bangladeshis viewing themselves as just another demographic that watches Bollywood movies primarily, and not the local ones. Rahman elaborated how the Bangladeshi film industry was not producing any movies that the middle classes could identify with, so Bollywood's resonance on this population must have felt affective enough to remain effective as their primary mode of visual entertainment. In Mankekar's words, affect "underscores how our understandings of subject formation and social process may take into account movement, passage, and potentiality rather than stasis and arrival." (17) Affect is "about the capacity to navigate the world, about worldmaking and about worlding," but these "processes are contingent on temporalizing regimes" (Mankekar, 17) as well. Conceiving of "affect and temporality as particular kinds of regimes" is "imbricated in institutions of power such as family and kinship, class formation, caste, state policies, and, last but not least, media." (Mankekar, 17-18) The Bangladeshi consciousness as viewers of Indian Cinema remains constituted by and consistent with the changing dynamics of relations between the two countries' differences and alliances. Their affective consumption of the movies, however, remains unaffected by these consciousnesses, because,

> The temporality of affect is shaped by the fact that it is transitive and cannot be located in any one place or location; it is generated when signs, takes, bodies, and objects rap of one another to create feedback loops . . . affect is economic: it acquires social force through circulation . . . circulation can occur in seconds or over years; it happens over time.(Mankekar, 16-17)

Affective Curry Traits

I am using Mankekar's conceptualization of affect to define "subtle curry traits" as an affective signifier and regime, which "entails the circulation of intensities across spatially and temporally located [curry] subjects." (15) Mankekar emphasizes that "Subjects are not where affect originates; rather, affect produces subjects through the traces it leaves upon them." (13) From this articulation, it can be claimed that curry traits are traces of a transnational curryness, the affects of which have produced the curry subjects, as well as their affective relationalities to curry traits. From a celebration of curryness, to an ambiguous or even agnostic relationship with it, any subject with any affective exposure to curry traits can recognize them. Just the way Mankekar proposes an Indianness that Indians carry in their hearts globally, curry traits are carried (and curried) around by a larger, more nuanced population. Some curry traits are just stereotypically Asian, some universally non-White, yet more specifically and idiosyncratically located in/originated from South Asian descents. Bollywood's affective economies and affective circulations have granted it the cultural hegemony it established over global curry populations, as well as the affective intensities to mediate and propagate transnational curry traits.

Mankekar lays out the "affective potency of temporality" extensively throughout her book by demonstrating how "time has affectivity", time is "phenomenologically experienced", and "time shapes subject formation and social process." (18) Time is thus affective, and affective temporality phenomenological. These notions are important in *thinking through the affective skin*[4] because it suggests that affectivities can change with our age and experiences. It pertains to my work specifically in how I discuss my subjects and subjectivities in the present versus how I

[4] My emphasis. Concept established in Chapter 1.

recall and revisit those from the past. These instances show how my affective subjectivities have evolved over time due to various lived, embodied, and/or imagined socialities. The movies I am engaging with in this chapter were originally released between pre-puberty and mid-teens for me. Since then, I have watched them multiple times with different sets of affective responses. As I affectively analyze them now, I have a plethora of different observations, reactions, and critiques.

From Subtle to Toxic Curry Traits: Close Reading and Affective Analyses

The first movie I am affectively engaging with is *दिलवाले दुल्हनिया ले जायेंगे* (*Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge*, 1995), which according to YouTube subtitles, translates as "The Lover Will Take His Bride Away." Directed by the debutant director of Yash Raj Films, son of director/producer Yash Chopra, *DDLJ* broke all the previous records of Bollywood's blockbuster success, especially overseas, turning its lead actor(s) into overnight stars. The plot of the movie is simple. Raj and Simran are London-based Non-Resident Indians, who fall somewhat in love during a Europe trip. Simran's father Baldev Singh (Ba(b)uji to her) overhears Simran sharing her feelings about Raj to her mother, Lajwanti. He decides to leave for Punjab, India with his family immediately, to marry Simran off to his friend's son, Kuljeet who was already promised Simran's hand. Simran leaves behind a note for Raj, and he shows up in Punjab to win Simran/her father over and take his bride away. Raj wins over the entire extended family and even potential in-laws of Simran, posing as an investor in India, and befriending Kuljeet, Simran's fiancé. Raj is adamant about not wanting to run away with Simran and confident in convincing her father to give Simran away to him willingly. Although we never find out what the final strokes of this master plan is, right before the wedding day, the couple gets caught and Raj is asked to leave. At the station, however, before Raj leaves, Ba(b)uji lets go of Simran's hand

and asks her to "जी ले अपनी जिंदगी" (live up your life) with Raj because apparently nobody could love her more than him.

Purnima Mankekar dedicates an entire chapter of her book to *DDLJ*, titled, "Reconceptualizing Indianness in *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge*." Here, she discusses various affective temporalities of the movie to rationalize its long-standing success and affective resonances it created for its multi-generational, transnational viewers. Under the section, "Moving Bodies: Indianness, Sexuality and Nationalist Affect," Mankekar demystifies the gendered male subjectivity imparted on to NRIs, as diasporic Indian men were being courted by the Indian government for their capital at this time:

> "The guardians of the heroine's sexual purity and, therefore, her cultural purity are NRI males. The authentic Indianness of DDLJ's NRI hero is manifest in his respect for Indian codes of modesty and in his reverence for the sexual purity of Indian women. NRI women are seemingly unable to manage their sexuality to protect their own honor." (60)

In this scene, Simran's mother Lajwanti (Maa for Simran, Maa Jee for Raj) brings Raj and Simran into her bedroom and closes the doors after catching a glimpse of them feeding each other the night before. She quietly packs up all her precious jewelry, hands those over to Simran and asks the couple to run away from there. She tells them that she knows what's going on between the two and is aware that Raj loves her daughter very much. But "यहां तुम्हारे प्यार को समझने वाला कोई नहीं है" (nobody here is going to understand your [their] love), so she wants them to elope. As tears start forming in Simran's eyes, with signs of confusion and concern visible on her face, Raj sits the mother-daughter down and speaks directly to Maa Jee. He tells her that he lost his own mother at a very young age, although she has made him who he is today (laughable, debatable, unexplained). His mother used to tell him that at every crossroad in life, two paths will be available to him: one right and the other wrong. He tells her, "अगर मुझे सिमरनको भगाके ही ले जाना था, तो मैं तो वो यूरोप में भी कर सकता था"(If I had to run away with Simran, I could've done so even when we were in Europe), which is not technically true; like

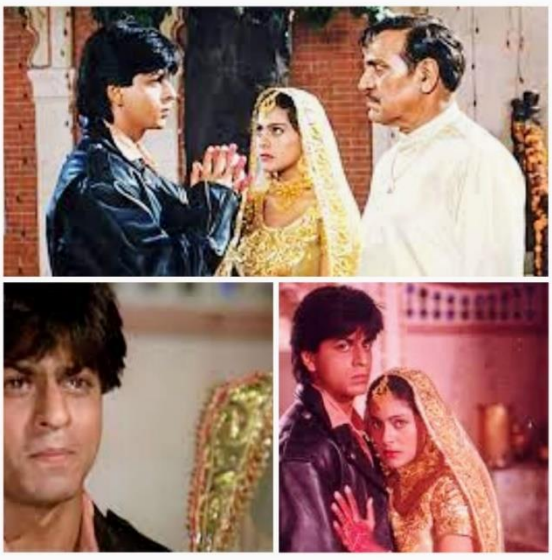
many of Raj's other affirmations. But Raj continues sharing how his heart does not give him permission to take Simran away without her entire family's consent and blessings. He would only marry Simran if/when her father himself would hand her over to him. He then asks Maa Jee if his ambitions seem right or wrong to her. After Maa Jee approves of his intentions, she clarifies that "तुम मेरे पति को नहीं जानते" (you do not know my husband), which Raj promptly challenges with, "और आप के पति मुझे नहीं जानते" (and your husband does not know me). This seems to lighten up the mood and convince both Simran and her mother that Raj knows what he is doing. When the mother-daughter hug and share some tears of relief/compassion/connecting to each other, Raj interjects jokingly, asking Maa Jee if the problem of the tears is hereditary and they all laugh together about it. Mankekar addresses this scene writing,

> At one point Simran's mother begs her to elope with Raj because, she claims, she does not want her daughter to follow in her footsteps and sacrifice her happiness. Significantly, Raj is steadfast in his loyalty to the law of the father. Despite Simran's mother's repeated pleas that he elope with Simran, Raj insists that he will wait until he can marry her "the proper way." Evidently, the fact that Simran's mother has consented to their marriage is irrelevant to Raj; only when Baldev consent can the marriage acquire legitimacy and be deemed honorable. (60)

In addition to disregarding Simran's mother's emotions and suggestions, what this scene also establishes is that Raj's mother knew better than Simran's mother, because although dead, she is the mother of a son. Lajwanti, burdened with two daughters, could not have known any better, or be more righteous than the mother of Raj. The scene also proves that Raj knows Ba(b)uji better than Babuji's wife and daughter. The fact that at the end of the movie, Baldev sets Simran free to

live up her life with Raj, proves Simran and her mother's fears about Babuji wrong. It shows instead that Raj is actually the stronger, more stubborn player between the two men (Raj and Baldev) and he wins Ba(b)uji over through the means that he deemed suitable, and not the ones recommended by the mother-daughter pair.

That is no surprise to viewers like me, after the prolonged "getting to know each other" sessions Raj and Baldev had every morning in the field. Raj and Simran do not seem to have as many one-on-one, talking-through issues kind of sessions as Raj and Ba(b)uji. In fact, there is a playful demonstration of Raj dating the father in the morning and the daughter at night, both behind everybody else's back. He is shown to almost work a triple shift; the one-on-one sessions with the father and daughter, threaded through the people pleasing chores of the day. At no point during the Raj-Simran conversations do we see Raj sharing his detailed plans with Simran, nor sharing with her that he was secretly courting her father each morning. Raj never reveals his great plans to Simran and does not have to either, because they get caught before that. Did he really have an alternate plan? Did it matter? We would never know.



In this scene, Raj is caught and surrounded while waiting to elope with Simran. Babuji has a photo of Raj and Simran from their Europe tour and is staring at Raj, the extended family is gathered to watch the great confrontation. Babuji begins to slap Raj repeatedly, calling out loud every lie and what he assumes to be false cultural values preached by Raj. The simplified assumption here is that because Raj hid his identity and was romancing Simran behind the family's back, none of his cultural values or knowledge can be trusted. After a few slaps, Simran shows up, runs towards Raj asking Babuji to stop hitting him. She embraces Raj to block his body from Babuji with her own. Then she starts her own set of complaints about how she was right about needing to elope sooner and that she had told Raj that nobody was going to understand their love there. Raj takes Simran's hands off himself and puts them in his own in almost an arresting grip. After shushing and telling her that she was still wrong, Raj ignores Simran's staring eyes completely to look straight into Babuji's eyes. Then he begins his preaching again about how our parents know what is best for us. If he had wanted to run away with Simran, he could've done that a long time back, but if Babuji does not think he is the best husband for his daughter, then he must have his reasons. Raj maintains eye contact with Babuji and starts walking towards him while continuing to speak about how they could never be happy if they hurt their parents' feelings. When he gets close enough to Babuji and is done with his speech affirming that Babuji is right, he hands Simran over to Babuji, once again ignoring Simran's attempt to hold onto him. Then he leaves.

Now, this is another scene where between standing up for Simran and standing behind Babuji, Raj chooses the latter. He breaks the assumptive equivalence made between him being in love with Simran and his lack of cultural values. He upholds the stereotypical patriarchal morals and presents those to Babuji (and the crowd) like a messiah. In this process, he not only has to let

go of the woman he supposedly loves, but also pretend to accept defeat to Babuji. In order to establish Babuji's superiority, his patriarchal possession of the familial position of "father" is made to feel supreme in ways that even Babuji himself had not perceived perhaps. His ego is bolstered beyond his expectations and ornamented with an artificial sense of responsibility that will perhaps force him to make the right decision for his daughter. Raj, in this scene, is not only manipulating Babuji and the extended family's emotions once again, but also throwing Simran under the bus and into the sacrificial pyre in a trial by fire (agni-pareeksha) like the Hindu myth of Seeta, publicly. Simran has to be sacrificed and left under Babuji's control entirely in order for Raj to gain his complete trust.

The 2023 Netflix docuseries, *The Romantics*, is a tribute to and celebration of Yash Raj Films, the production company behind *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge*. After a glorious collection of artists' commemoration of the legacy of the founder, Yash Chopra, this docuseries becomes the return performance of Aditya Chopra (Adi), the director of *DDLJ*. His narrative of taking over the production company and launching its studio can be paralleled to his simplified vision of *DDLJ*'s plot. Adi shares *DDLJ*'s conception story saying that until *DDLJ*, every love story he watched was rebellious. In these movies, all the lovers were eloping to be together because their parents wouldn't approve of their love. Adi proudly adds that he comes from "a very secure upbringing". So, he thought, "if I loved someone and her father didn't like me, I would win him over. I wouldn't run away with her."[5] That's how he conceived *DDLJ*; from the perspective of the male-lead, where the plot is instrumentalized by the conflict between him and

[5] This claim of Adi that no hero before *DDLJ* sought his beloved's father's approval for marriage is also inaccurate. Prem, in one of the biggest Bollywood love stories, *Maine Pyar Kiya* (1989), wins over Suman's father through extensive hard work and struggles.

the father of his lover. The lover in this scenario becomes an instrument, not perceived as a person, from the start. This vision, of course, is what we see in motion in the movie.

Among the star-studded interviews for the docuseries, appears one representative of the Indian diaspora: Lilly Singh. This Indian-Canadian comedian is one of the highest paid YouTubers and the first South Asian to host a late night talk show on NBC. Singh shares that her "DNA is embedded in Bollywood cinema". *DDLJ* was the story of every Indian and especially NRIs; it was their whole life, she added. She remembers her whole life as a South Asian daughter, wanting something that she was not allowed "for whatever reason". So, "deep inside" she really seeks "parental approval" even now. That is why the ending of *DDLJ* meant so much to her, she emphasized. While all these reactions and memories are affective for Singh, what is evident is the naturalization of the gendered, patriarchal, familial conflicts, without critical or even affective enquiry. If even a progressive, queer icon of women empowerment cannot see how *DDLJ* portrayed and perpetuated generations of women's toxic silencing, then the non-discerning viewers cannot be expected to see it at all.

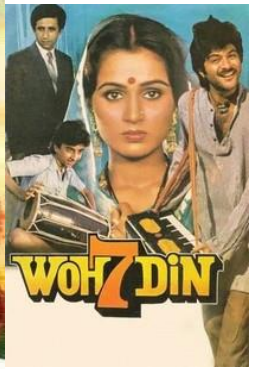
The way the Chopra women get voice and are featured in the docuseries can also shed some light on how male-centric and patriarchal the Yash Raj banner's worldviews and business models remain. Pamela Chopra, mother of Aditya and Uday Chopra, wife of Yash Chopra, shares her piece on initially rejecting and then attracting her husband Yash, although matched by a traditional arranged-marriage protocol. Her success and contributions behind the movie कभी-कभी (*Kabhie Kabhie)* and in life in general, comes off as the typical narrative of the woman behind the success of Yash Chopra even in this platform. Pam Chopra seems to be a chapter in the book on Yash Chopra's life and career. She is portrayed as the pillar of strength, relentlessly standing behind two widely successful men, and even the not-so-successful son; who, of course,

was the closest to her. Similarly, Rani Mukerji, a successful Bollywood actress herself and wife of Adi Chopra seems to have been asked about her relationship with her husband and narrates (or is edited down to) a half story about a movie called "Bride" that never got made. This story of a Yash Raj film that never got made, that could perhaps be seen as an aborted or failed project, does not get any more details in the docuseries. Rani, however, contributes to the story of Yash Raj productions, and the world of Aditya Chopra, however minimally it might be. Adi, however, is not asked or shown to have had anything to say about his wife, the actress her married, Rani Mukerji. She goes in the background of the Yash Raj success story, adding character and glamor to it, without interrupting it, just like Simran and her mother in *DDLJ*. This microcosm of representation of the Yash Raj empire thus provides enough insights into the roles of women conceived and lived in the world of Aditya Chopra, which is very much reflected in his films. The women characters are written and played out as accessories to the main plot, revolving around the hero's conflict with other men in the story.[6]

The next movie I am analyzing is हम दिल दे चुके सनम (*Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, 1999), the title of which can be loosely translated as "I Have Given My Heart Already, Love". The affective assaults of this movie begin with its plagiarized conception and reluctance to give recognition to its source materials. The Indian audience at large is mostly aware of the fact that this movie is a direct retelling of the 1983 Hindi movie, वो सात दिन (*Woh Saat Din; Those 7 Days)*, which was a remake of the 1981 Tamil movie, அந்த ஏழு நாட்கள் (*Antha Ezhu Natkal; Those 7 Days*). Bengalis know that all these stories/plots are inspired by *ন হন্যতে* (*Na*

[6] Because *DDLJ* is one of the biggest and most popular Bollywood movies of all time, my analysis of it is the lengthiest. Similar detailed affective close readings are possible for the other Bollywood movies as well, but I will not go into this much detail with those here.

Hanyate), Maiyetri Devi's 1974 Bengali novel that she translated into English and published as *It Does Not Die* or her Romanian lover Mircea Eliad's 1933 novel, *La Nuit Bengali*, which was translated and published in English in 1993 as *Mayitreyi, Bengal Nights*. Coming full circle, *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* (*HDDCS*) was adopted by Bangladeshi Cinema in 2000 as *এই মন চায় যে..!* (This Heart Desires/Wants). Of all the movie versions, Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Bollywood version, *HDDCS,* is closest to Devi or Eliad's books. Bhansali still insisted on the originality of the story brought to him by Pratap Karvat, and of course, accredited himself the creativity and mastery of details that he added on to the storyline during the making of the movie. The duo also received multiple awards for the story of *HDDCS*.



If we keep these deceptive conception stories aside, then the plot of the story is the good old curry staple: pre-marital romantic love versus arranged marriage. Nandini is the daughter of a classical music maestro based in the Gujarat-Rajasthan border area. Sameer, an Italian Indian man, visits them to learn classical music from this Pundit.[7] Nandini and Sameer fall in love while her arranged marriage is getting fixed with Vanraj, a lawyer, whose astrological chart is a 36 out of 36 match for Nandini. After Nandini and Sameer get caught, Sameer is asked to leave

[7] Side note: Sameer speaks to his deceased Indian father throughout the movie and directs all his demands, complaints and frustrations at him and claims that his father is a good friend of God. Bhansali claims to do this himself, so he gave Sameer's character this personal touch that he perhaps finds cute or charming.

immediately, Nandini's father quits singing, and Nandini is married off to Vanraj after surviving a slit wrist quietly. Vanraj catches Nandini reading Sameer's old letters, yells at her, drags her through the house and down the stairs, then asks her to leave his home. After calming down, Vanraj decides to take Nandini to Italy to reunite her with her lover. While hitchhiking in Italy, Nandini casually survives a gunshot injury to her neck, thanks to her loving husband's care. According to the nurse. During this limited mobility period for Nandini, Vanraj helps her put on the सिन्दुर (vermillion) and that hints at the ending of the movie in true curry style. When Nandini finally meets Sameer, she tells him that she has learnt what true love is from her husband and returns to Vanraj.

Notably, Bhansali's depiction is the only one where the husband is violent and aggressive towards his wife, under the guise of being short-tempered and incapable of accepting lies. Most viewers of the movie will not recall the image of a violent husband, because of how acceptable the portrayal was to its curry audience. Instead of remembering Vanraj shouting at Nandini on the wedding night for not consummating their marriage, people remember the larger picture of his attempts to reunite her with her lover. In place of thinking about the scene where he drags his wife through the palace-like house and down the stairs, the audience will recall him taking care of her when she was shot and hospitalized. Not only are these affective curry traits of what

leaves marks behind in the curry viewers' minds, but also the effect of another affective device: the song sequence, which I will briefly discuss in a latter section of this chapter.


The other subplot that most audience members will either not pay enough attention to or not remember, is a Bhansali original that is absent in any prior written or movie variations. This suggests the importance of this side plot in delivering the messages of this movie. It is Nandini's cousin sister Anupama's (Anu) story, the proximity of which presents and foreshadows the upcoming choices for Nandini. Nandini helps Anu run away with her lover after she left her husband and in-laws' home forever. However, Nandini does not make similar choices for herself; she cannot run away from her own marriage. The variables that are different in Nandini's case are stackable: she does not get horribly beaten by her in-laws like Anu and is instead loved and respected by them. Nandini starts liking Vanraj, including their brief embrace chanced upon on the train, with "बिजली" (a current) running through the body, a sign of love her grandmother convinced her of. Finally, Nandini's family is not involved in the decision Vanraj makes about reuniting her with Sameer. She seems to have no agency in this decision and goes along with Vanraj's plan. Once married, her rebelliousness is expressed only through denying sexual intimacy with Vanraj, refusing to get dressed up as the new bride and picking up fights with Vanraj while distressed. Her sense of defeat partially comes from accepting the marriage, and the

rest from feeling abandoned by Sameer, who just like Raj, obeyed Nandini's father's commands over fighting for his love.

Anu's elopement is the crisis that unraveled the family dynamics between Nandini's father and his siblings, who seemed to have resented the Pundit for his authority and choices as the oldest brother quietly until then. The very same day that Nandini and Sameer get caught, Sameer is asked to leave. Nandini confides in Amrita, her mother, and begs her to convince her father to accept Sameer, but Amrita fails. She tells Nandini that her husband did not listen to her at all and she could not advocate for Sameer and Nandini. Here again, we see the mother, who presents herself with a lot of confidence and authority, fall short on speaking to her husband and standing up for her daughter. Whether her attempts were genuine or performative, she does not appear to sympathize with her daughter as much as she empathized with her husband; that her daughter tries killing herself in the next song sequence seems to bother her less than her husband quitting singing. Amrita visits Nandini in her husband's home, only to remind her of her duties and to tell her how good her husband and in-laws are. During this visit, we see that the iconic fake smile Nandini flaunts, is also taught by her mother, who does the same smile in public while dealing with conflicts and distress privately. She, thus, trains Nandini to become just like her and that is what we see in Nandini's transformation towards the end of the movie.

The other dynamic the Anu episode unleashed is that of Vitthal Kaka, the servant figure who raised Anu and Nandini, who gets beaten up by Anu's father because he assumably aided in Anu's escape. This is why he did not support Sameer's attempts of reaching out to Nandini after leaving their house and hid the letters Sameer gave him for Nandu. He eventually delivers those to Nandini at her in-laws' and requests her to burn those. He explains why he was scared[8] and shares that he knows it is too late now, so suggests the letters get burned. Thus, Vitthal Kaka, the two girls' real ally, got intimidated by the drama following Anu's escape, altering the plot of the movie and Nandini's circumstances for good. Because he was the servant of the house, he was the only one Anu's father could cruelly beat up. This is a class and caste-based curry trait that I hope to tackle in a different affective curry traits paper another time.

Now, what does it mean for Nandini to choose Vanraj? In toxic curry traits, it means that the charts and parents' choice was the right one for her, and that her father was also right when he accused his brother of not raising Anu right. After Anu eloped, Punditjee told his brother,

> "इसमें दोष तुम्हारा ही है! अपने बच्चों को इस घर की रिवायतें सिखा ना सके, समझा ना सके . . ." (This is your fault. You could not teach your children the traditions of this household.)

By choosing Vanraj, Nandini becomes complicit in vilifying Anu retrospectively, even though she actively supported and took part in Anu's elopement. By staying in her marriage, she also proved that her father was right in claiming that his brother failed to instill the family values in Anu, which he was able to raise Nandini with. Nandini chose traditions, her father's teachings,

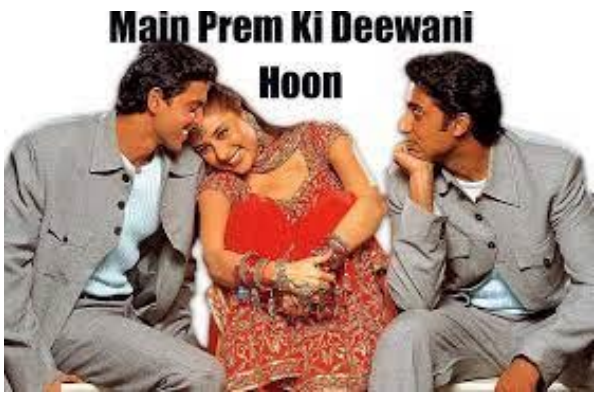
[8]This seems like a plot-hole not resolved about why Sameer wrote her letters while being away from their house, even though he promised Nandini's father that he would not try to contact her.

and her family's pride through choosing Vanraj, who she claimed to have learnt how to love from. Would Nandini remain with Vanraj if she was also continually abused by him and her in-laws? Would she remain with him if she felt like a corpse in bed with her husband like Anu did? The movie does not leave space for these speculations.

While these two movies establish the overpowering, toxic dominance of the father figures within the families and their affective economies, the next movie, मैं प्रेम की दीवानी हूं (*Main Prem Ki Deewani Hoon,* 2003) highlights the toxic mother's relationship with her daughter that prescribes her daughter's marital and romantic choices. The title can be loosely translated as, "I am Crazy about Love", where the Hindi word for Love, "Prem" is both the male protagonists' first names. Aptly criticized, this confusion about the name of the 'hero' leads to the turning point of the movie.[9] Unlike the blockbuster hits above, this movie remains mostly obscure, except for its newly unearthed meme-ability and ridicules of overacting, cinematographic choices that did not translate well for the young urban audiences and irrelevant CGI interventions that the movie could absolutely do without. Among these popular critiques of *MPKDH,* what have got lost are the affective representations of the almost-ideal, responsible daughter brought up by a supportive loving father and a goal-oriented traditional mother. This representation of the practical mother figure has also existed since modern South Asian cultures and literatures proliferated, just like the fathers in the previous movies. However, what *Main Prem Ki Deewani Hoon* does differently is the extent to which it shows the mother's toxic behaviors and the daughter's oppression in the process, while she continues to protect her mother's image. Director Sooraj Barjatya has represented the toxicity and irrationality of mother figures blinded by the

[9] Prem is not only the name of both the 'heroes' in this movie, but the name of the 'hero' in every movie by this director, Sooraj Barjatya.

love for their children and their potential gains to the point of hurting and harming others in other movies as well (*Hum Saath Saath Hain*, 1999; *Vivah*, 2006). So, it seems to be an important depiction for him. Himani Shivpuri, the actor that played the mother in *MPKDH*, shares how challenging it was for her to act as this mother that she personally did not agree with.



This movie is another take on the love interest versus arranged marriage struggle, curated and complicated this time by the mother of the marriageable daughter, Sanjana. She encourages Sanjana to get into a romantic relationship with the 'wrong' Prem, with the end goal of becoming his wife. As Sanjana falls in love with him, the mother realizes that it was the less wealthy Prem (Kishan; a predominantly lower caste surname), an employee of the 'jackpot' Prem (Kumar; a surname mostly belonging to higher castes). Sanjana's mother then asks Sanjana to cut off her existing relationship with Prem Kishan, and to get ready to marry Prem Kumar. While the two Prems remain out of the loop about the complications of Sanjana and her families' intentions and aspirations with them, Sanjana gets pushed into having to stand up for herself, without throwing her mother under the bus. In true curry spirit, when Prem Kishan finds out what is going on, he decides to show his loyalty to his boss, Prem Kumar, instead of Sanjana. So, he does not show up when Sanjana had planned to come clean to Prem Kumar's family about being in love with this Prem instead. At her engagement ceremony with Prem Kumar, Sanjana walks up to Prem

Kishan, slaps him, uncovers his Sanjana-tattoo that would speak for itself, then breaks into a cry embracing him. Reading the room, Prem Kumar, and his mother, hand over Sanjana to Prem Kishan. Sanjana's mother is assured of the nobility of no-jackpot Prem by everybody, so she finally gives them her blessings.

Before the marriage proposal comes at play, Sanjana's relationship with her parents is established by showing how her mother is strict and restrictive in true curry style. As Lilly Singh mentions in her interview above, most South Asian children grow up with a lot of restrictions, with or without reason. Some households have one strict parent, where the other parent allows the children to have small joys and victories. Households with both strict parents or the lenient parent being scared of the strict parent, raise children with more conflicts and negativity. In both *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* and *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, the fathers are strict and the mothers mostly give in to the decisions of the fathers, only allowing small leniencies and allyship to their daughters. They themselves have limited agency in the family structure, so they end up teaching the daughters obedience in the status quo. In *Main Prem Ki Deewani Hoon*, however, the father remains a true ally to Sanjana, supporting and protecting her as much as he can every step of the way. He does not speak up until closer to the conflict resolution, suggesting that he had endured enough and had reached his breaking point. He tells his wife, Susheela, that he had to spend his life compromising, being married to her. But, he will not let the same happen to his

daughter. He assures Sanjana that her parents will accept whatever decision she makes for herself:

> देखो, सुशीला, मैने तो तुम्हारे साथ समझोता करके जिंदगी गुजार ली है, लेकिन मैं अपनी बेटी को उसकी जिंदगी के साथ समझौता नहीं करने दूंगा। बेटा संजना, जो भी तुम्हारा फैसला होगा, वो सही होगा। और हम उसे मानेंगे।

This slight towards his wife seems to be the culmination of his frustrations, although he calls out her rude and mean actions prior to this scene as well. Sanjana's mother is shown to lie, misbehave, insult, and manipulate Sanjana and others constantly, but her father is shown to be righteous, truthful, genuine and an overall good person. Sanjana obviously takes to her father, and with her father's support, is able to fight for her right to marry who she loves. Although conflicted and emotionally exhausted by her mother's manipulations and the disappearance of her lover, she remains determined to do the right thing. Could mothers of Anjali and Nandini take such drastic stances against their husbands to support their children? Were they bound by their gendered, social roles, or the roles their scripts conceptualized? These are the subtle curry traits that remain unengaged in Bollywood critiques still and continue to be represented, reproduced and reenacted to the degree of toxicity, trauma and retaliation. In Mankekar's words,

> affect is socially consequential . . . affective investments in ideologies of public and private have particular consequences for gender, sexuality, and, indeed, feminism. In hegemonic discourses of gender, affect is often associated with femininity; yet . . . discourses of masculinity are affectively charged in important ways. (14)

Song and Dance Sequence: Affective Anchors

A discussion of Bollywood's affective qualities would remain incomplete without an acknowledgement of its biggest affective anchor: the song and dance sequence.[10] This unique characteristic of Bollywood movies pulls on the heart strings of its audience through their love of music. The way affective memories about poetry are often only a few lines,[11] for Bollywood's affective spectators, a lot of the affectivities are tied only to the songs from the movies, which may not have watched even. Most Bollywood productions start by recording a song, where "storywriters weave the lyrics of the songs into the stories as productions progress." Much before the shooting of a movie is completed, songs are released in the market; one song at a time at first, and eventually the entire music album of the movie. Radio stations begin to play these songs, and if/when they start getting popular, they play in every shop, public rides, people's personal devices, etc. all the time, sometimes for years. Dance sequences are then shot to picturize the songs. The producers then take the reels of these choreographed songs to distributors.

> Based on the success and popularity of the songs and the visual appeal of the dance and song sequences, producers attract monies from distributors and complete their films. Songs determine the fate of a movie. Few films succeed without successful music, and even fewer without any songs or dances (Rao).

Because "hit songs become self-complete units, with their lyrics and melody, offering an emotionally satisfying experience that does not require any images," (Rehman) an affective memory of a song or a few tracks from an album is sometimes enough for Bollywood fans to

[10] This, however, is changing with the movies using less of the song and dance tactics, releasing movies on the OTTs, etc. as discussed by Sangita Gopal in "The Audible Past, or What Remains of the Song-Sequence in New Bollywood Cinema." The movies discussed in this paper, however, are from the time when Hindi Film music could make or break the movies.

[11] Discussed in previous chapter.

remember the movies by. Hit movies like *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* and *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* have been immortalized by their songs, and much of the popularity of those movies can be attributed to their sound tracks' successes. Most movies also started including the titles of the movies in their songs, having a title track or tune associated with the movie's affective memories forever. In the case of some "not-so-successful movies, their titles are remembered only because their songs have remained popular and assumed lives of their own." (Rehman) The sound tracks even help the producers "sell other rights like satellite rights, DVD rights, etc." (Sidner) Regardless of whether a movie "actually does well at the box office or not," "if the music starts by doing well" it might be a potential "hit in terms of revenues from the other sources." (Sidner)

If the picturization and songs released on satellite television or used in movie trailers are not appealing to the audience, they already have a negative response to the music and would not go to the theater to watch that movie. Sometimes movies can recover from the first impression or a few failed songs by eventually releasing more songs that grab the audience's attention affectively. However, for *Main Prem Ki Deewani Hoon*, that never happened and the lack of affectivity of its songs and their filmography contributed to the failure of the movie. Gopal and Sen, in their article, "Inside and Out: Song and Dance in Bollywood Cinema" do an in-depth analysis of the affective roles and mechanisms (my wording) of Bollywood's song and dance sequence within the structure of the movie. They share that these sequences provide "a space inside which the characters of the text can be more deeply individualized than what the narrative would allow." (152) Although, I find *MPKDH* to have been successful in creating these spaces and adding narrative details through their songs within the scope of the movie, their appeal lacked in the affective anchoring aspect during the promotional stages of the movie, leading not many people to have affective memories associated with those songs. I would like to write and

publish a separate paper on the affective curry traits in action in the song and dance sequence of Hindi movies, but for the purposes of this chapter, just this nod to this affective aspect of Bollywood will have to do.

The following section from Gopal and Sen's article frames the basic plotline of all the Hindi movies I have discussed above. I would like to end this section of the paper with this quote as a reminder of the subtle to toxic curry traits that have been normalized through mainstream Bollywood, where the children and their life choices as individuals are constantly pitted against the honor, desires and aspirations of their parents, rooted in pseudo-cultural norms, implicit biases and social expectations based on hierarchical, upward mobilizing motives. Gopal and Sen put it very well in plain descriptive language, devoid of affectivity and judgement, giving the readers a contrasting glimpse into how effectively and non-affectively the Bollywood movies I read affectively can be presented—

> Most Hindi film stories involve a struggle about love . . . parental approval always casts its shadow upon romantic love: lovers often meet each other as little children pushed into friendship by their parents; or they fall in love with exactly the person their parents wanted in the first place, or the nobility of the loved one convinces a reluctant parent that this love ought to be blessed. Whatever the strategy, the narrative always flows towards parental consent, because the text is always bisected into a half that projects freedom, desire and individuality and another which brings into play societal forces structured around family and convention. (152)

Affective Curry Traits outside Bollywood

For this section, I am switching gears to address slightly different articulations of affective curry traits in *মাছের ঝোল* (*Maacher Jhol, Le Curry De Poisson*, 2017), a Bengali-language film industry movie from West Bengal, India. Released in the theaters of India simultaneously, this Netflix original is directed by Pratim T. Gupta: Bollywood film critic turned Tollywood[12] director. Shot between Paris and Kolkata, this movie uses an adequate amount of French to quasi-authentically portray the immigrant life of the Bengali chef, Dev D., in France. *Maacher Jhol*'s Netflix overview shares: "On his first visit to his home city of Kolkata in 13 years, a Paris-based chef is faced with a cooking challenge that will change his life forever." Although the plot only gestures at a renewed sense of life and does not develop a plotline of radical shift in the chef's life post the 'cooking challenge', the experiment with and experience of cooking the aspirational fish curry is central to its narrative. Director Gupta insists that "food is the hero of the movie," while other actors play their roles in it. To that end, the movie repurposes a lot of food-TV-tropes to capture the centrality of food in its plot, as well as to tell the story of the chef through his relationship with and memories of food. My affective reading of this movie brings in aspects of cultural studies and popular media, with unacknowledged food-TV influences in *Maacher Jhol* that have discrepancies in the motives and their incorporation into the plot. Analyzing the representation of curry and the women in this movie, I also argue that it is conceptualized and executed from an outdated curry perspective. Its attempt at sharing a grand narrative of Bengaliness ends up exposing toxic curry traits of the Bengali film industry it is produced by.

[12] Tollywood is the popular name of the Indian film industry of the West Bengal, located in Tollygunge, Kolkata. Tollywood of course is a play on the words Tollygunge and Hollywood.

The movie begins at Dev D's Paris restaurant, Botanique, where he serves dishes like coq au vin the way "grandmothers used to serve it." He throws in Bengali expressions like "যা ভেবেছিলাম। এদিকে এসো" (Just as I thought. Come here.) or "কেমন?" (How is it?) casually during conversations with his French employees. As Debdutta Sen (full Bengali name of Dev D) visits India, he gets caught on the roads by fans from multiple generations: the mothers tell him that they've tried cooking his recipes, while the daughters want selfies with him. After establishing how typical his Bengali household and upbringing was in Kolkata, Dev D shares how he kept practicing Bengali over the years, even when he did not have anybody else to speak it with.

Director Pratim T. Gupta describes his project emphatically as that of a masterchef's "search for his identity", "a rediscovery of his roots." He adds,

> As is evident from the title it is a very Bengali film. It celebrates Bengaliness, it celebrates the Bengali's love for food, it celebrates relationships, family... it's a very intimate film... an emotional relationship drama.

Gupta recalls a 2015 trip to Europe as his inspiration behind this movie, where he apparently "found out that in every restaurant, in every trattoria, they celebrate the food of grandmothers and mothers." He was fascinated by the dichotomy between India and Italy's approach to traditional food: "While here we go out to eat exotic fare, there they celebrate home food in restaurants." He was immediately reminded of the maacher jhol (fish curry) his mother used to cook for him and "knew there was a film somewhere"—

> all that food as memory is a major part of the film. Mothers can make many kinds of maacher jhol, many kinds of dishes that get ingrained within us through our growing-up years. That also in many ways makes us who we are.

Gupta believes that “Maacher Jhol” had to be the quintessential title for a Bengali film on food because it “represents Bengali food in more ways than one . . . It encapsulates Bengaliness and food.” A lot of the reviewers seem to tap on this nostalgic and intrinsic connection between মাছের ঝোল (fish curry) and বাঙ্গালিয়ানা (Bangaliana/Bengaliness). “মাছে ভাতে বাঙালি” (Fish and rice make Bangalis/the Bengalis) is undoubtedly one of the oldest proverbs about what it means to be Bangali. There is no question about the statement this movie makes about this connection and that it traces the chef’s roots back to Bengal and his mother (who is also, of course, symbolic of the motherland) through this fish dish.

Dev D’s background is revealed through flashbacks as when he visits his hometown, Kolkata, India after 12/13 years, to be there for his mother. His mother was admitted to the hospital due to having seizures, caused by a small tumor in her brain that is surgically removed by the end of the movie. The viewers come to know that Dev D. does not get along with his strict, old-fashioned father, and that he left his then-wife, Sreela behind, when he left for France to pursue his dreams of becoming a chef. He runs into Sreela at the hospital, shocked to see that she is in good terms with the rest of his family and still in touch with them. As the movie progresses, both Dev D.’s mother and Sreela appear to be very strong, rational women, who confidently take life decisions for themselves, while suggesting others (especially Dev D.) to do the same. At no point do they seem to mourn the life they could have had or regret the choices they were able to make, or others made in ways that affected their lives. In contrast, Dev D and his father struggle with emotional availability that affects their relationship with each other negatively, as well as with the women in their lives.


Dev D's mother[13] puts his idealistic memory and nostalgia about the fish curry to test, which symbolically redefines his relationship with Bengaliness as well. She tricked him to cook the first fish curry he ever made for her at the age of thirteen/fourteen, when she fell sick. Dev D recalls cooking instinctively at that age, out of passion for his mother and to cure her of her ailment. He did not have a recipe because most Indian mothers and grandmothers never used written recipes. This was his first experience in the kitchen that he believes to have worked for his sick mother. She praised his cooking by telling him, ডাক্তারি, ইঞ্জিনিয়ারিং জানি না, যদি মানুষকে রেঁধে খাওয়াস, তাহলে একদিন অনেক আশীর্বাদ কামাবি। (Whether you become a doctor/engineer or not, you'll earn a lot of blessings if you cook for people.) With her encouragement, Dev D left his career as an engineer to pursue cooking as a career. While his father despised and shamed his choice, his mother assured him that he had the right to make his own decisions and follow his heart no matter what. He acknowledges that he would not have been the chef he was now, if it were not for that first fish curry he made for his mother.

When Dev D made multiple dishes from his memory to serve his mother this time around, she repeatedly gave him the feedback that these curries "সেই আগের মতন হয়নি!" (have not

[13] She does not have a name in the movie; it's a subtle curry mother trait!

turned out like the old one!) The camera zooms into focusing on to the dishes served to her in these scenes, in a food-Tv like presentation. Through her critiques, his mother pushes him to try different preparations of the fish curry, until he improvises it into a nontraditional fish curry, adding oranges to it. This is the so-called "cooking challenge" that is the turning point of the movie and the chef's life. However, I would argue that the real challenges in this movie lie elsewhere; the cooking and the curry only distract the audience from focusing on those.

When Dev D conducts a competition among the hotel chefs in Kolkata, the winner, Maggie, gets the opportunity to work with/under him. This unpaid internship-like work experience even includes "playfully" entering Dev D.'s parental house in disguise to steal an ingredient from there. This power dynamic between the established male chef and his young female sous-chef/intern is highly objectionable and unethical altogether. The ways he exploits her emotions and labor are not entirely sexual, but the interactions are sexualized, making Maggie the Bengali eye-candy in the movie. Maggie once makes a chocolate mousse and channels all the food-TV charms of a sexualized woman chef making a scrumptious chocolate dessert in the setting of a hotel room, with a famous chef to seduce in the periphery. The actor Gupta chose for this role happens to be a model turned actor, which of course, is not a coincidence. Maggie had to play the young, contemporary, successful, creative, and sex-positive woman's role in Kolkata to spice it up for the otherwise bland, curry life of Dev D. Gupta's crew and audience are all aware of the way media associates women's bodies with sex and consumption (food) and the movie reproduces it through camera angles, zooming onto her body parts and playing sensual background music during these scenes, without any hesitance. When Maggie attempts to kiss Dev D., he gets the opportunity to prove himself as the moral and professional man, equating sexual fidelity and self-control with tradition; a very toxic masculine

curry trait, often the result of the same curry masculine imagination (in this case, the director). Dev D.'s rejection of the kiss contrasts his traditional curry moralities with Maggie's nontraditional sexual advances and availability.

Gupta's subtle curry traits are highlighted in the singular, idealistic narrative of the Indian/Bengali mother that is a housemaker and cooks at home, but is also supportive of both her son's independence and her husband's traditional roles at the same time. She even gets along with and keeps the secret of his son's ex-wife (technically his wife still because he was asked to begin the process of getting a divorce by the end of the movie, had not executed it still), while being understanding of Dev D.'s live-in girlfriend in France. Not only does her old-fashioned husband disregard her opinions, but even Dev D does not consider consulting her for advice or her opinions, except for when he needed to quit his job. We do not see the parent couple in the same shot until the penultimate moment of the movie. Even when she's in the hospital bed and her husband and son are fighting over what to do with her tumor, it did not occur to Dev D to ask her what she wanted to do, until Sreela asked, "মা কি চান?" (What does mother want?). When Dev D. shared that she does not know about it, Sreela smirked and pointed out to him that "এটা তো সেই অ্যামেরিকায় উইমেন্স ম্যাটেরনিটি কেয়ার নিয়ে সব ডিসিশন হোয়াইট হাউসের কিছু পুরুষরা নিজেদের মধ্যে ঠিক করে নেওয়ার মত হল ব্যাপারটা!" (This sounds just like how a few men in the White House in America took all the decisions about women's maternity care.) Dev D's mother would not have any agency over the decision about her body, if Sreela did not intervene.


Dev D, who is supposed to represent the younger, newer generation and reduce the generation gap between his father's traditional ways and his own, does not act much differently when it comes to the women in his life. He treats his French girlfriend, Simone, in a dismissive way, does not tell her about having a wife (and a son) in India and shares no vulnerabilities with her. Simone's characterization is that of a gullible, loving, not-good-at-cooking, exotic white woman. During his trip to Kolkata, Dev D consults his (ex)wife in moments of disillusionment and celebrates good times with Maggie, while only giving commands to Simone over the phone to consult a doctor in France about his mother's condition. He is irritable with her and never exchanges any kind, loving words with her while away. Despite his emigration to France and settling there, Dev D's success and unconventional routes could not change his curry core. It almost seems like Sreela would not have put up with what Simone is putting up with, which is why Simone is a better match for Dev D. Sreela is too mature and assertive for Dev D. He is dominant with Simone and Maggie, but more careful and submissive with Sreela. The two younger women are shown to be impulsive, joyful, and very expressive throughout the movie, while Sreela is shown as stern and serious, without a smile on her face ever.

The mother-son relationship is the only one where we see an emotional investment for Dev D, however inadequate that investment might be. Traditional curry mothers are infamous for being biased toward their sons, and discriminating, even being abusive toward the daughters in

comparison. That it is Dev D's story, and that he does not have any other siblings, especially no sisters, works out very well for the narrative's idealistic, male-centric perspectives. What adds to the mixture is that Dev D has also fathered a son, giving the family its perfect heir (even if he does not get to exercise paternal rights on his son). His mother neither has an complaints against him, nor does she hold him accountable for irresponsible actions of leaving pregnant Sreela behind without divorcing her and being in a relationship with Simone. She is happy to see her "বাবু" (baby) that she did not think she would ever see again. Her motherly love for him seems unaffected by their differences in realities and moralities in life; she has a one-on-one relationship with him just as mother and son.

We do not know what would happen if Sreela hadn't shown Dev D. his place. He does not make the choice between Sreela and Simone, in fact, after learning about having a son with Sreela, he acts as if he would not leave her behind if he knew she was pregnant. He even asks her, "মানে, আমার ছেলের ওপর আমার কোন অধিকার নেই?" (Do you mean that I have no right on my son?) to which, Sreela replies with, "কিছু স্পারম সেলস থেকেই কি অধিকার জন্মায়?" (Do these rights arise from just some sperm cells?) She then asks him for an official divorce so that he can move on with his life with Simone. Without Sreela setting firm boundaries, we do not know what fate Dev D.'s romantic/marital relationships would have, because he was not shy in displaying his sense of entitlement in Sreela's life and space by showing up at her work and home whenever he desired or felt the need for. All these intrinsically toxic male curry traits remain unnoticed by its audience or get sanctioned as the journey of the flawed chef featured in the movie. As a Netflix original, and possibly being of particular interest to the French audience (because of its setting and casting of their moderately known actor, Kaya Blocksage), *Maacher Jhol* could very well draw the picture of an undesirably 'savage' curry man. That is how it affects a curry viewer like

me, so the non-curry audience could easily be left with a distaste for curry men and curry chefs like Dev D.

The stereotypical representation of Dev D's Indian/Bengali mother feels as outdated as his original fish curries. The curry in Dev D's memory and the curry mother in Gupta's ideology are both stuck in time. Hence the curryness of Bengal that the movie is idolizing also feels late by a decade or two; it is dated for the generation it is attempting to give voice to. If the traditional curryness keeps getting all the space and attention, the new curryness (that is fighting traditional curryness from the inside) has to compete for the same space when there is already a scarcity of curry space (on Netflix in particular, or global media in general). *Maacher Jhol* seems to be made for and appealing to a specific group of nuanced and nostalgic Tollywood audience, so it does not translate well to the global Netflix viewership. While current Netflix food shows like *Chef's Table* and *Ugly Delicious* are trying to reeducate the Western market on the diversity of Indian food, tracing Bengaliness/Indianness back to a curry is not helping the movements to un-curry Indian cuisine. With the singular narrative of the quintessential Bengal/India and Bengali/Indian man's idealistic, romantic journey with no explanations for a non-Indian

audience, this movie is re-currying India to the foreign eyes. It had the potential to address greater issues of migration and food, the role of immigrants in the restaurant industry, the emigration or immigration story of the chef, and the emotional tale of his trip to a home that he is in self-exile from. But it falls short on delivering any such powerful messages, only to romanticize sentiments like "বাঙালি তো ওই এক বাটি মাছের ঝোলে ডুবতেই বাড়ি ফেরে!" (Bangalis return home to inundate their face in a bowl of that fish curry!) Thus, amidst the floating contents of traceless livestreaming, *Maacher Jhol* seems to be recurrying the uncurry movement of Indian cuisine and serving the world Indian cinema with store-bought curry powder that is past its expiration date.

Postcolonial South Asian Affect

This dichotomy of gendered affectivities constructed around problematic notions of masculinity and femininity for South Asians even today, is, in fact, a long-standing postcolonial affect. Partha Chatterjee details the origins and political agendas behind these discrepancies in his essay, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question." He establishes how during colonial India's nationalist campaign to introduce India's own version of modernization, the nationalist campaign came up with a gendered dichotomy that separated the nation's material aspects from its spiritual ones:

> The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility of protecting and nurturing this quality. No matter what the changes in the external conditions of life for women, they must not lose their essentially spiritual [i.e. feminine) virtues; they must not, in other words, become essentially westernized. (243)

In order for the nation to maintain its traditional cores, women were delegated the role of preservers of the culture, while the men's external activities in the material world were allowed to adopt Western ways. This was the ideological framework in which the nationalist schema succeeded to continue to push the women's agenda inside the home, keeping the spiritual dimensions of the East intact through institutions like the family and religion. Women's position in colonial India thus became more domesticized and preserved in a time-capsule, whereas the men were prepared to work and compete in the world, making a name for the nation. Chatterjee further discusses how from the middle of the nineteenth century right up to the present day, "the everyday life of the 'modern' woman - her dress, food, manners, education, her role in organizing life at home, her role outside the home" started getting scrutinized and policed. Although the "content of the resolution was neither predetermined nor unchanging," "the 'new' woman defined in this way was subjected to a new patriarchy." (243-244)

These are still the roles of Indian women that we see reflected in movies like *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* and *Maacher Jhol*. Even if the women are aware of the power differentials and their lack of agency, they seem to go along with the decisions made for them by the men in their lives. Simran and her mother show moments of defiance, but do not seem to know how to pursue their rebelliousness. Dev D's mother and Sreela have distinct opinions about their preferred lives, but are subjected to life decisions imposed on them by the men they were married to. This is the irony of the nationalist resolution's success: the Indian women, home or abroad, still choose to be governed by their localized patriarchies, as opposed to standing up for their rights, which they deem to be Westernization. Between the two patriarchies, they choose their own, instead of the foreign one. This is what Sara Suleri pointed out as the condition of the doubly colonized "postcolonial women" in her essay, "Woman Skin Deep:

Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition." In both these movies, we see these women in India and abroad stuck between their identities of gender and race, both oppressive categories bidding to claim and affect their lived and embodied experiences differently. With an illusion of choice, but no real agency; we see a split consciousness that pits these women's own sense of individuality and righteousness against their culturally constructed roles as preservers of national traditions.

In case of Dev D.'s French girlfriend, we see the Fanonian postcolonial complexes play out. Simone's hand in marriage is the ultimate ask in the movie for him, which the rest of the story builds up to. Dev D. returns to his life and career in France, emboldened by his newly found freedom and senses of accomplishment. Simone is the final bridge to cross in a similar fashion to how Fanon wrote,

> By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love . . . Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization…I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. (Fanon, 63)

These lines reveal Frantz Fanon's study of the psycho-sexual desire of the "man of color" for the woman of the "superior race", as explored in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Though he claims that his observations apply mainly to the 'black' men of Antille, similar internalized sentiments can be observed in many postcolonial men of color. However, the significance and manifestation of this desire in their lives depend on their circumstances, positions, and exposure; Dev D. conquered all of which in *Maacher Jhol*. The postcolonial Freudian Oedipal drama is also carried out in both the movies through the storylines emphasizing the power struggles between the postcolonial father and son figures. The mother figures maintain non-confrontational relationships with both,

ignorant of the extent to the rift and confrontations between the men, unable to support their daughter figures in any meaningful way other than moral support. The Indian families therefore vary in their execution of the Oedipal drama, showing possessive, traditionalist fathers acting out against their offspring. The mothers are the emotional support system for all parties and submitting to the status quo in the end.

These are my *affective analyses* of these movies that I have thought through my affective skin for many years. I think more than my previous chapters, this chapter shows how thinking through the affective skin is a valid mode of academic and theoretical engagement that can give rise to new insights and nuanced observations of the affective scholar. Affectivities do not unplug our abilities to theorize or rationalize, rather it enables us with additional perspectives and tools to theorize and analyze our affective texts.

Conclusion: Affective Aspirations

I hope that the multiplicity of approaches of my dissertation, "Thinking through the Skin: Affective Literacy and Literary Orientations," is able to highlight the necessary orientation to affectivity in literacy, literatures, media, and discourses of all sorts. Through this project, I wanted to return our attention to how affect became a buzzword in almost every field in the nineties, but discussions of affect still hovered over aspects of feelings and emotions, ignoring affectivity as a cognitive function as well. The affective turn had been introduced to critical theory in the early 2000s in order to move past dualistic visions of the mind and body. However, these false distinctions and hierarchization between subjects in the sciences and humanities remain an alarming concern for higher education. Even the liberal arts models and equitable professional outlooks have not been able to make amends to these artificially constructed measures of analytical abilities and their intellectual worth. References to affect, even in the humanities, within graduate-level courses and equivalent discourses, remain tangential and treat affect as an internal, atheoretical faculty with inadequate scope for academic engagement still. Personal feelings, emotional struggles, or real-life events are discussed through affect, where affect is perceived as an interruption to academic success. My dissertation attempts to establish affect, i.e. affectivities, as integral to study—any study. Thus, it brings affectivities to the background and forefront of thought, showcasing lines of thought, intelligence and intellect only possible despite or because of and through affect. Without the incorporation of affectivities into the thinking skin and without its interjection into critical thought, such theorization and their application would not have existed. Affective intelligence, in these circumstances, is ontologically and essentially ingrained into their genealogy. My dissertation, therefore, projects affect's potential to be an effective cognitive tool for affective modes of discourse.

My project thus fills in the gap between affect as an aspect of discourse and affectivity as the mode of discourse. I am introducing the phrase *affective orientation* to refer to a paradigm shift that can reconcile such arbitrary associations with the intellectualization of matters, scientific or humanistic. Affective orientation, proposed through my research, shifts affect's analysis as an object of study to affect as study and analysis. It should be acknowledged that people with a predisposition to getting affected and affecting others would be considered to have a preindividual affective orientation advantage or a privilege of its application. However, as a theoretical approach, an affective orientation is to have an affective lens to engage with the objects of study. It is a holistic perspective that traces the presence of simultaneous affectivities in our minds and bodies: all encompassed by layers of affective skins. The analogy of the skin erases the mind-body duality to refer to affectivity as an open layer over or beyond corporeality and embodiment. Affectivity as an encompassing model, is in encounters, markings, impressions, and touching; while also in being touched by other bodies, matters, surfaces, and so on. Thinking through the affective skin allows all these affectivities as its point of entry to thought and all thought as a point of reference for affectivity. It proposes new ways of orientating our thoughts and skins to other thoughts and skins; from literacy practices to literary analyses, and from media consumption to subjectivity formation.

Historically, underprivileged, and underrepresented communities have been further marginalized through an exclusion of their affective realities in discourse. I propose that an affective orientation to representation, organization and pedagogy is the much-needed intervention that can empower and center oppressed minorities in an equitable, empathetic approach in the academic and professional world. My multi-disciplinary project brings writing and composition studies, literature, cultural and media studies, affect theory, gender and

postcolonial theory into conversation. My general observations and suggestions about affective inclusion, labor, and orientation can also be applied to any field in the humanities, social sciences, arts, and sciences. I aspire to expand these conversations into the realms of queer theory, critical race theory, disability studies, translation studies, and many more in the near future. I believe that proposing affective engagement and analyses can create a stir in the academy as a current, equitable framework that embraces the voices of the academic 'others' within the academia, making itself marketable as an inherently anti-oppressive orientation to pedagogy and professionalism. I, therefore, suggest that an affective orientation can embolden the affective voices of underrepresented groups in an inclusive and accessible way in contemporary academic and professional spaces with unforeseen levels of success.

I wrote a genre-bending dissertation, demonstrating affectivity and affective engagement in various capacities. It employs the skills I acquired from my multicultural background in literature, media, and cultural studies through the incorporation of close-reading, literary criticism and analysis, theory and creative writing. It is autoethnographic, which is almost essential for affective writing, also demonstrating the application of the orientation I proposed. I hope that through this dissertation, I have successfully exemplified some ways through which thinking through the affective skin can be introduced as an affective orientation within the academy.

Alexander G. Weheliye, in his book, *Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, points out the shortcomings of the Western, cis-white "bare life and biopolitics discourse." (1) He shows how "these concepts, seen individually and taken as a group, neglect and/or actively dispute the existence of alternative modes of life alongside the violence, subjection, exploitation, and racialization that define the modern human." (1-2)

Weheliye then suggests “alternate ways of conceptualizing the place of race, or racializing assemblages, within the dominion of modern politics.” (1) I think that an understanding of *affective assemblages*, theorized through my conceptualization of thinking through the affective skin, perfectly fits the expansion of this discussion. In future projects, I want to explore this idea of affective assemblages, through a detailed conversation with Weheliye’s book that can synthesize the language of the affective turn with that of racializing assemblages.

In another project of possibilities, I would like to bring Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* in conversation with thinking through the affective skin. In her book, Ahmed redefines what it means to be oriented, and what a phenomenology of orientation looks like. She asks,

> “What does it mean to be oriented?” . . . “What difference does it make “what” we are oriented toward?” . . . “What does it mean for sexuality to be lived as oriented? What difference does it make “what” or “who” we are oriented toward in the very direction of our desire?” (Ahmed 1)

I want to engage with this set of questions of Ahmed’s through an affective orientation set of answers, queering the phenomenology of thinking through the affective skin. I want to then pursue the lines of inquiry around postcolonial affectivities that I began to formulate in my third chapter. In future projects on that topic, I want to argue how an affective understanding of the body can explain cultural difference and postcolonial affectivities manifesting in our very bodies as *affectively different bodies*. The postcolonial South Asian affective bodies can be argued to have evolved differently through the nonorganic life, media and technology procreated affectivities for generations through fostering a specific form of postcolonial, patriarchal affective cinema and affective spectatorship relationship, unique to this community. In this

affective construction of new South Asian and South Asian Diasporic identities, the relationships between these various groups and their influences on one another have also been affectively altered, which I want to engage with further. I want to demonstrate how prolonged colonization and globalization have affected and produced various forms of postcolonial subjectivities. Even though my research so far focuses on South Asian subjectivities, I envision expanding these investigations into other postcolonialities like Asian subjectivities, postcolonial masculinities, postcolonial feminisms and so on.

I am also interested in working on Bangladeshi literature and movies that I could not access in translation or with subtitles for my research thus far. I want to visit Bangladesh to collect those artifacts and archives of research to bring contemporary Bangladesh into the comparative world literature and affect landscape. I am especially interested in the works of Rabindranath Tagore, who I have done previous smaller projects on already. His memoir, My Boyhood Days, was also part of my undergraduate thesis, which I want to revisit from an affective orientation. I also have extensive plans to work on the popular Bangladeshi author, Humayun Ahmed's work, whose novels, and short stories I grew up reading, while watching plays and movies written and directed by him. In my transmedial involvement with his work, I want to do an affective analysis of his representation of women, feminist characters, and ideologies.

My dissertation has also peaked my investment in undiagnosed neurodiversity, neurodivergence, and chronic illnesses in Asian populations, especially in women, and the affectivities of this phenomenon. I envision a cross-disciplinary investigation of this subject in collaboration with a social science or even medical science scholar in the future. In a smaller scale, I am also interested in the roles of media, nature, and animals in affecting and interacting

with neurodivergence. I want to translate my own work on affect, neurodivergence, and chronic illnesses into Bengali to reach the populations that inspired my research and could benefit from my findings. I foresee some of this work taking the routes of social media and creative nonfiction to attract the attention of my target audience. I am excited and looking forward to getting to these transnational, multilingual endeavors through journal publications and book-length projects.

I have been and want to further incorporate these research interests into my teaching to share my passions with students that might become torchbearers for some of them after me. Although I scope out some of my future research on Asia and South Asia, they are all also applicable to the United States populations. I will be modifying my teaching and research within the communities and demographics I base at in the U.S.A. Affect, neurodiversity, neurodivergence, and chronic illnesses are under-researched and entirely left out of school curricula and classroom discussions, making them taboo topics to intellectualize around. I want to break that barrier through my research and teaching, bringing in those perspectives as tools for academic analyzes, effectiveness, and eventually, success. Since I started working on affective literacy, I make it a point to emphasize "the affective" in my teaching. Although I have always had reflective assignments in my sequences, in their reading responses now, I encourage students to pay attention to how the readings are affecting them and why some texts are affective for them. I also share a lot of personal experiences of/with affectivities to model for them as a mentor that practices what they teach. In their reflective papers, students often share their gratitude for these experiences and for being able to ask questions about difficult topics without receiving judgement and getting detailed answers from an instructor that is not scared of or offended by students' lack of exposure or experience with such issues.

Thus, I aspire to normalize affectivities in the classroom and the academia as a valid orientation to literacy and literary practices, not only through my students, but also through my peers and larger audiences through my dissertation, conference presentations or published work. I want to establish the affective orientation as an anti-oppressive, equitable model for the underprivileged, underrepresented, affective subjects within the academy and thus demonstrate the practice of my research in my own career.

Before I end my list of aspirational affectivities, I want to draw attention to the risks involved in proposing and promoting affectivities in the academy and other workplaces. In her article, "Affective Indigestion: Lorde, Fanon, and Gutierrez-Rodriguez on Race and Affective Labor," Shiloh Whitney asks questions about how to understand "the political economy organized around the production and circulation of affects and the racialization and gendering of affective labor." (279) Her work highlights some of the downsides of the "unmanageable by-product" of affective labor that can lead to "affective indigestions" for both the performers of affective labor, as well as the ones that cannot perform it. Whitney calls it an "excess or waste affects whose metabolization is one of the after-hours costs of affective labor for the worker," (279) which can lead to an understandable amount of affective burnout. She cautions against the system of consumerism that can and does take advantage of affective workers and their affective labors as there is no downtime for the affective cycle of care which all affective labor is borne out of. I am very aware and mindful of these warnings as I have struggled through such burnouts all my life. Here again, I want to reinforce my suggestions on an affective orientation that would acknowledge, accommodate and compensate for affective labor in affective recognition and leniency.

Just like labor-based assessment is gaining traction in academic spaces and practices slowly, affect-based labor and affective assessment of such labor can also gain its place. If the whole system becomes orientated through affectivities, no one would be able to take advantage of affective workers and their labor, instead affective mechanisms to accommodate and support that labor will be introduced, I believe. I think that the symptoms of *affective disorders* the academy displays, the *affective violence* of ontological erasure it commits and the *affective reconciliation* it has to work toward for an affective, effective future can only be ensured through an overall affective orientation. A culture of affective resonance needs to be cultivated, in order for the exploitative tendencies of the academy to manipulate its affective populations to be left behind. It is an ask for an affective overhaul for the academy to mend its ways and to reorient itself to thinking through its affective skin: a skin that accept and seeks forgiveness for its exploitative, discriminatory practices and takes charge of its affective rebranding towards an anti-oppressive future.

Appendix

Reciprocation (My Translation of Jasimuddin's “Protidan”)

I fix the houses of those who destroy mine,
To bring back my deserters, shed tears divine.
When they bring me homelessness-
I work hard to earn their grace.
Worry all night laying awake for those that sleep fine;
To have back my deserters, I shed tears divine.

I build dams to keep afloat those that let me drown
I help heal hearts of those only turned me down
Songs of love I sing in response
To the curses that they dispose
From thorns they offer I grow flowers of love benign
To get back my deserters, shed tears divine.

I adorn the graves of their memories with undying love
Hoping they will like the roses or a stone dove
The mouths that utter ugly hate words
I blow loving kisses towards
I decorate kind wreaths of bountiful design
To bring back my deserters, shed tears divine.

Notes

1. I don’t agree with these old times-y randomized romanization quirks of Bangla that don't feel authentic to my linguistic equivalence of ‘a’ and ‘o’. I will Romanize it as “Protidan” and use the romanization that makes sense to me for all the Bangla names of the rest of the poems.

2. Bangladesh has distinct curriculums and modes of instruction for its mainstream Bangla-medium and English-medium schools. Not only are they different in their paradigms and linguistic orientation, their conceptual and philosophical differences are prominent around students’ identity, subjectivity, language, social standing, and relevance. Most Bangla-medium schools are public, and English-mediums are private. I went to a public school with thousands of students per class, and we all completed our elementary to high-school journey of 12 years together (there are of course some students who joined later and/or left for another school due to migration, performance, and other reasons).

3. “Interview with Claudia Rankine” by Jennifer Flescher and Robert N. Caspar. Poetry Daily. 2006.

4. I have Black and African American friends; don’t get me wrong. I just don’t become very close to them due to my internationality/foreignness.

5. For instance, Sally Piper, in her article, “Writers Who Inspire Us . . . “, points out how Rankine grew up with “the natural curiosity” of a first-generation immigrant to America.” She quotes from Rankine’s interview with the Guardian: “I think the way I am in this world is one of the immigrants, someone who has come from another place, understands that there are new rules and in order to negotiate one needs to know, learn, be curious about why people are doing what they’re doing.”

6. See citation information to read the texts for “This Form of Being: Claudia Rankine’s dialogue with America” by Elias Rodriques, and Virginia Jackson’s "“How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?”

7. For broader discussions around the differentiation between Black and African Americans, read “Why I'm Black, Not African American” by John H. McWhorter, “The Changing Definition of African-American” by Ira Berlin and “Goree Island, Barack Obama and Apology for Slavery” by James N. Kariuki.

8. “what goes unfelt, unsaid—what has been duplicated, redacted here, redacted there, altered to hide or disguise,” “The past is a life sentence, a blunt instrument aimed at tomorrow. (Citizen, 69, 72)

9. *The White Card: A Play* by Claudia Rankine; vii.

10. Judith Butler in a Q&A; quoted and reflected on by Rankine.

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