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The Ghosts that Visit Us as We Dream

and

Figurative Homelands: Second-generation Immigrant Experiences in North American Contemporary Poetry

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PhD in Creative Writing
The University of Edinburgh
2020

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr Alan Gillis, for his essential guidance and feedback on this project. Many thanks also to my secondary supervisor, Dr Miriam Gamble, for her kindness and support.

Thank you to my mentor, Garrett Hongo, who first encouraged this project, and whose teaching has been vital in forming my critical and creative voice. And, thank you to my MFA cohort for their continued encouragement of my writing over the years.

I am grateful to my dear friend, Jay G Ying, who provided feedback on both sections of this project. Thank you for all the invigorating discussions.

Warm gratitude to Dr Sandeep Parmar and Dr Larissa Lai for their generous advice on this, and other, projects.

Nicole Lachat and Laura Schoenberg, any acknowledgements page would be incomplete without you.

To my PhD cohort, Alyson Kissner, Jilly Luke, Rachel Chung, Miriam Huxley, and Dorothy Lawrenson: thank you for being on this journey with me from the beginning. And, thank you to my creative writing peers at the University of Edinburgh for our weekly workshops, a genuine highlight of my experience.

Thank you to the Calgary Arts Development for their endless support of my creative projects, and for making my research trip to Tanzania in 2019 a reality.

A special, heartfelt thanks to my partner, Timothy Phillips, and to my family: Alnoor Pirmohamed, Shellina Datoo, Reena Sangha and Shazna Pirmohamed. Thank you for believing in me.

And finally, thank you to everyone who has provided feedback on these poems, including my peers at the Banff Emerging Writers Residency, the Vermont Studio Center Artist Residency, and the Scottish BAME Writers Network.

I respectfully acknowledge that the lands which inspired so many of these poems are the Treaty 6 and Treaty 7 regions of Turtle Island, and the traditional territories and homes for Indigenous Peoples.

Abstracts

The Ghosts That Visit Us as We Dream is a poetic manuscript that observes my family's immigration from Tanzania to Canada. The poems are voiced from a variety of familial perspectives to capture how identity reforms and transforms throughout generations. Several of the poems were written as part of my research trip to Tanzania in January 2019, while others meditate on my experiences of growing up in Alberta, Canada. This manuscript principally employs repetitions and figurations of the natural world to reflect on wider themes of womanhood, belonging, cultural dissonance, loss, homeland, and spirituality. Water, in all its forms, becomes one of the collection's major metaphors, representing liminality, crossings, and time as recursive. My work traverses the borders between the imaginary, the inherited, and the present moment.

Figurative Homelands: Second-generation Immigrant Experiences in North American Contemporary Poetry examines how second-generation immigrants figuratively represent their North American and ancestral homelands in poetry. It includes a critical analysis of the poetic works of South Asian, Muslim second-generation immigrants, Kazim Ali, Fatimah Asghar and Tarfia Faizullah, and evaluates how they fuse the literal with the figurative in order to explore, give expression to, and take ownership of multidimensional identities. It examines the poetics of diaspora, specifically considering second-generation immigrant diasporic identities, from a multidirectional approach. Moreover, it builds upon the framework of what Sadia Abbas calls the "new Islam," and examines how figurative homelands are constructed within the context of conflictual experiences arising from Islamophobia in the period following 9/11. This research also evaluates how second-generation immigrants craft figurative homelands using intergenerational storytelling and childhood remembrances. Additionally, it examines how loss manifests for writers who live in liminality, and how contradictory experiences or multiplicity are illustrated by gaps in both a poem's formal structure and its conceptual landscape.

Lay Summaries

The Ghosts That Visit Us as We Dream is a poetic manuscript that observes my family's immigration from Tanzania to Canada. The poems are voiced from a variety of familial perspectives to capture how identity reforms and transforms throughout generations. Several of the poems were written as part of my research trip to Tanzania in January 2019, while others meditate on my experiences of growing up in Alberta, Canada. This manuscript reflects on themes of womanhood, belonging, cultural dissonance, loss, homeland, and spirituality. Water, in all its forms, becomes one of the collection's major metaphors, representing hybridity, crossings, and time as recursive. My work traverses the borders between the imaginary, the inherited, and the present moment.

Figurative Homelands: Second-generation Immigrant Experiences in North American Contemporary Poetry examines how second-generation immigrants figuratively represent their North American and ancestral homelands in poetry. It looks at the work of three South Asian, Muslim second-generation immigrant writers, Tarfia Faizullah, Fatimah Asghar and Kazim Ali, and examines the poetics of diaspora from a multidirectional approach. It reflects on how figurative homelands are constructed within the context of conflictual experiences arising from Islamophobia following 9/11. This study also evaluates how second-generation immigrants craft figurative homelands through intergenerational storytelling and childhood remembrances, and how contradictory experiences are illustrated by gaps in both a poem's formal structure and its conceptual landscape.

This Creative Writing PhD manuscript contains 100% of the critical manuscript and 20% of the creative manuscript. This difference is recognised by HEFCE, and in making a percentage of the creative manuscript available via open access, this manuscript is in line with HEFCE guidelines. The full manuscript is available in hard copy at the Edinburgh University Library.

Contents

Acknowledgements ... i
Abstracts ... ii
Lay Summaries ... iii
Contents ... v
The Ghosts That Visit Us as We Dream ... 1
  Faded ... 2
  Self-Portrait With Fish Eyes ... 3
  You Know It but It Don't Know You ... 4
  House of Prayer ... 8
  My Body Is a Forest ... 9
  Elsewhere ... 11
  Self-Portrait as a Lost Language ... 12
  Hinge ... 14
  Love Poem with Elk and Punctuation ... 15
  Ode to My Mother's Hair ... 16
  Self-Addressed ... 17
  When the Wolves Appear ... 18
Figurative Homelands: Second-generation Immigrant Experiences in North American Contemporary Poetry ... 19
  Introduction ... 20
    Diaspora: "the image of a journey" ... 20
    Second-generation, Muslim, South Asian Americans ... 24
    The Figurative Homeland ... 27
    Overview ... 29
  Chapter One: Remnant Cores: Intergenerational storytelling and inherited memory ... 31
  Chapter Two: The impact of misrecognition on homeland in post-9/11 America ... 52
  Chapter Three: Fragmentations and divides: Metaphorical gaps in the figurative homelands of second-generation immigrant poets ... 72
  Closing Comments ... 95
  Works Cited ... 98

The Ghosts That Visit Us as We Dream

Alycia Pirmohamed

Faded

Say the word dark
translates to how I fold my body

like a fig
against a stippled moon.

Pull a string of sorrows from
my mouth.

Remind me that I am not a swan—

I am a long night of rain
with my mother's eyes.

Hold my tasbih to my heart.

Imagine we are
elk walking into tall grass.

This dream is the sky opening.

This dream is a river of faces.

This dream is all of the pine trees
replaced with smoke.

I call out to the water and the wind
scatters my thoughts,

fashions distances within me.

I call out *Allah*—

if I look up, I see a ghost
in the canopy.

Self-Portrait With Fish Eyes

I am a woman who is *longdark*
language

a woman who eats fish eyes
to feel close to mother

a woman who loves whole milk
whole figs and single dimensions—

I am a woman with *this* many faces
this being not a number

but a rhizome of turmeric
eyelashes sweeping

against the smoke
a lily's open mouth

my voice   such tall spruce

I am a woman that carried
my first heartache

before I was born—
a woman whose irises are

split open seams
spilling a *longdark* bloodline—

a woman disguised as a healed
wound

a daughter splintered by every
memory crossed

You Know It but It Don't Know You
after Tako Taal's artwork by the same name

i.

she places the silverware
one thumb slip   beyond the edge

beyond the pattern that repeats and repeats—

beyond the sun
coloured spade

beyond the petiole   's slant that repeats

into / the next world.

ii.

[Baduja]

Even with the backs of wild rowan
behind her.

Even when the wind calls out a
different name.

Even with smoke ebbing from every
mistranslation.

Even as the tree splits neatly into its
metaphors.

Even though they only meet at the
centrefold of a photograph.

Even as the metaphor splits into its
likened parts.

Even though a landscape can change a
body.

Even with the inherited memory of
water between past and present.

Even though her body is riven with
departures.

Even when the deer bounds across a
grove toward the next in line.

[ ]

~~Because this is a version of a version~~
~~of rainfall.~~

~~Because she is told they mirror the~~
~~same face.~~

~~Because they do not meet beyond a~~
~~border of glass.~~

~~Because a tongue splits through a~~
~~throng of trees.~~

~~Because his image is made truer by the~~
~~fabric of her dreams.~~

~~Because the two of them are likened~~
~~parts.~~

~~Because she plots a seed in every~~
~~conditional space.~~

~~Because she crosses water and because~~
~~water is the tether back.~~

~~Because she follows herself until she~~
~~is tender.~~

~~Because time gathers behind her like a~~
~~V of birds.~~

iii.

:: Notice how maroon is a colour that deepens
with every pour

:: Formerly a constellation of spring in her palm

:: See also: the hand that swept along a spine
of berries x years ago

:: The past streams from a pitcher like thirst
into the present tense

:: She is made in his image therefore she is
counter-memory

:: See also: inherited memory of [er's fa e]

:: Today the maroon skin of her fingertip
is an imprint of yesterday's pour

:: She is made in his image therefore she is
a sieve

:: Inevitably the future sifts through

:: Sieve is another word for counter-memory

:: In both cases the daughter fills in what
remembrance leaves out

:: Liquid decants from the metal carafe until the
bowl is full

Inheritance is the possession of second sight ::

iv.

This body
unravels its

cacophony

across
time

country

wound the great sea.

This body is a body of water is the unsaid page. It unravels its invisible sheaves. A flood of light glistens into a cacophony of sea birds. I look through the viewfinder with my dominant eye. I look across the endless water. Sometimes my eye is a stanza with only one long line attempting to reach you. When does a country become a window? All morning I am a metonymic slide. This body reaches only as far as it needs to. There is no irrigating a wound if that wound is the great sea.

House of Prayer

I walk into the beads of thirty-three *alhamdulillahs,*
I walk into my childhood mouth, repeat *alhamdulillah.*

Four decades ago, father too walked into this prayer,
his body nested in the oblong Boeing, his *alhamdulillah*

humming deep until it matched the scale of the engine.
It was during that first crossing from one *alhamdulillah*

to another home, that my father crushed open the chasm
he has since passed down to every poem I write: [ ]

the hollow, the forgotten Qur'an lodged deep in the night
of an unopened drawer. My quest to belong. *Alhamdulillah*,

forgive me, forgive me. I praise once again and symmetry
like the wings of a migrating bird, I repeat *alhamdulillah*

and rinse and repeat and rinse and repeat, like the *rokrok*
of an egret. I hold this tasbih to count my *alhamdulillahs*

thirty-three times, ninety-nine times: the key is to walk
again and again into the holy, repeating *alhamdulillah,*

alhamdulillah, alhamdullilah, until the skyward calm. Father,
what did you hope for when you uttered *alhamdulillah,*

when you rinsed over the Atlantic in that giant bird?
When the egg cracked open and the yolk of *alhamdullilah*

spilled onto a new coast? Was it travelling homeward
or away from homeland? I have learned that *alhamdulillah*

does not resemble a border, but it is a house of its own.
Alhamdulillah glints beyond language: praise be to God.

My western tongue holds the syllables, unhooks the praise in
my own last name: *h-m-d*. Always, I recite *alhamdulillah*.

My Body Is a Forest

There is a face in the trees—

I lost a language
to the gap-toothed birch.

Even the pine has learned how to swoon
when the wind
deposits a secret.

A country is born knowing what it means
to waver.

A lost country is made by its daughters

and shame begins as a seed
that blossoms perennial

throughout generations.

Clove keeps the cha bitter— for every dark
cross

I apologise

because I could not read the recipe
written in my grandmother's neat script.

I added cinnamon crushed anise mountain
slope

and too many quartered
Canadas—

once I watched a mule deer unfold her limbs
and vanish

among the haloed trees

fog uncoiling at her heels a ghost
inviting her

into its loosened borders.

In the blood of every migrant
there is a map pointing home this body

is an ode to the scattered landscapes
that have marbled my neck

with dark
hairs   and sharp   coarse

longings.
              Ask me how I remember her—

Not a face   but a movement

          legs stotting into a slip of boreal green.

A swatch of colour
           in the shape of a lost country.

A daughter   which is to say   an inherited
vanishing

              through the slit of a dream.

Elsewhere

She did not know the shape of
this country—   wide   darkjagged

bend in the river, rock elm withering,
everything withering

into unfamiliar dark, needled forest.
She was searching for the water and the water

was a heartache tongued by wild deer.

In northern Alberta, she was a line of crows
edging into the unknown,

a woman caught between fennels of a dream
and long mouths of birch.

Even the key of her body—
        jaggedlong   gentledark—

could not unlock this landscape.

Sometimes there is a fog thick enough
to hide the trees

and she imagines this country unwithers,
becomes a different land,

where her body is shaped like the river
and the river

                        is shaped like belonging.

Self-Portrait as a Lost Language

We name our bodies / anything that means *to gather* / flock
& clique

into belonging / into the tamarack wood / into the mouths
of January

the month I buy a bag of sweet / seedless / plum tamarind
& leave

the fruit to rust / we stumble into our blood / wild animals
yoking together

an inheritance / this country of unrest / where loss is shade
beneath

every cracked tree / a frisson of terror / each time lightning
embosses

the fields / the circumpolar boreal / & commodious prairie
rippling

smaller on my tongue / we name our bodies / before they
are unnamed

by the grassland smoke / & the feckless eyes / of those who
mark us

with an *x* / this winter country / its season of amaranthine
oranges

& tender mangoes / I eat the pith & boil the rinds / I hope
the ghosts

of mother tongues / transpire in the vapour / I am drawn
to every scattering

syllable / stammerings of Kutchi / & coifs of clove to split
the sweet

of this memory / this version / an imagined Dar es Salaam
in a story

passed down / we collect the fragments / gather together
blanks

& birch / judge our own belonging / this dream is a basin
of other

dreams / longing slips through like words / my tongue is
a sieve.

Hinge

Tonight, I am all joint and animal dark. My heel blots out the moon,
vanishes the small nod of light. And yes,
I prayed today, verging into my *bismillah* before settling
on the broken.

I stoop into my longings, plot a seed in every corner. Last week,
I titled another page with my body
and surrendered every bending, splitting line of myself
to the making.

When we refer to plants, we call this positive phototropism,
a body rivering toward the light.
I want to river toward the light. I want to lean my neck toward
a thing until I, too, become ism,

scientific and named into truth.
Today, I walked through a dream that wasn't mine, and I
thought of you waiting at the end of it,
as if to gather me,

and maybe that's just the kind of woman I am—no matter
how many times I halve the moon, or find myself in a room
without a window, I know Allah
sees everything, every hand planting something new,

every metaphor for the tree it becomes. And, yes,
I prayed today, but planting my palms together has never
felt like blossoming up the side of a mountain.
The only time these hands have ever flowered,

have ever been used for something good,
was that spring at Yamnuska, where we found a clear,
blue door of glacial water, and I walked right through
your reflection.

Love Poem with Elk and Punctuation

To taste water
on the surface of a mirror—

to love, even briefly, the elk of your own tongue.

We become a myth that will cleave in the middle.

I admire spooling lotus after lotus after.
Fragment of my body:

brown edges, the whorl of a question mark
and you? Night's quiet exclaim.

We become a bridge that crosses the chasm.

It takes a moon or two, a slivering, to chapter.
I look at the fringe

and watch evening kick her feet right through.

We, too, become hoofs of light and feel our way
around tenderness—

this is a dream and we are the ruminants in it.

I want to know the ellipsoidal of you.
How you move

from polygon to speckle, rectangle to unravel.

In the water, I stretch out until I am lagoon
and you are the coral

reef at my toes,
until I am the lotus that blossoms after!

Ode to My Mother's Hair

I hear *Navroz* and I picture roses every time.

A word the shape of things I cannot say

or cannot think to say. All of the ways I am reminded
of you:

ache and root and chasm—

It is spring again and I am holding the watering can

        at your edge, willing

each of your nephrons to bud and flower anew.
It is spring again—

Navroz—meaning your hair, clipped now, will entrance

with its vivid darkness once more. Mother,

you are the silhouette of every spring I have gulped down.
It was such a long

winter, your body filled with dead seeds.

And all along, there was also this—every poem filled
with the shade of you,

even this ode to spring.

Self-Addressed

Into the tall dark,
into the tamarack wood,
into a city, which at this hour
could be the shape
of any migrating bird.

This is me, driving straight
into my own life
past the river frozen over
slick, the chokecherry's saw
toothed edges—

into the roughage
of memories that surface slow
and tired, memories so alike
the stars enacting
what is already gone.

I am grasping at
the things easiest to love:
Anas acuta, *Pinus resinosa*,
Anthaxia inornata, the language
of the prairies,

syntax that I have held
like a dog with birch in her
mouth, a landscape that runs
through a body,
is a body—

into the boiling ginger,
into the neck of a loved one
folded like a leveret,
folded like a letter closing with
I wish you were here,

I wish you were here—

When the Wolves Appear

When the wolves appear, I know I am dreaming.
Give me back my dark. They call out in Gujarati & no howling
could terrify me as much. The wolf-eyes look like eyes in family photographs.
They follow me. I run & don't look back.
I am terrified of the land. In the sea, my body is a vase
filled with ovate black stones. I sink
I sink I sink. Where have the wolves gone & where is the voice
that held the whorls of my fingers in its clay?
Is it fair to wish for them now? They don't belong in this version of a version
of India that wets my hair & deposits my skin onto the shore—
to get to the bone. To get to the language.
I want to say *yes.* I want to become a stream of skimmed milk,
& wash through the aquifers. To pick up dark clusters of stars along the way.
I want to carry my dark with me. Stretch out legs of jasmine vine &
call out to the deep space between the moons. Every night I open my mouth.
Every night, my mouth is an orbiting, elliptical *no.*

Figurative Homelands: Second-generation Immigrant Experiences in North American Contemporary Poetry

Introduction

My study examines how second-generation Muslim, South Asian American poets construct figurative homelands in their work. This introduction first explores definitions of diaspora from the 1980s until now, guided by Avtar Brah, Robin Cohen, Jessica Retis and Roza Tsagarousianou, and also by the poem, "Your Own Palm" by Tarfia Faizullah (*Registers of Illuminated Villages*). It considers diaspora from a multidirectional approach rather than a *looking back* toward homeland. It also considers the effect of digital and media technologies on diasporic identity, especially for second-generation immigrants, who may never have visited their parents' countries "of origin" and thus, navigate both real and imagined communities. Next, I more thoroughly explore the second-generation experience of homeland. I review the term "Asian American," then look at the intersections and differences between three poets, Kazim Ali, Fatimah Asghar, and Tarfia Faizullah, to illustrate precisely why I have selected their work for this study. Lastly, I look closely at various definitions of the term "figurative homeland," and how different migrant identities inhabit this space. My conceptualisation of figurative homelands is informed by Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's rhizome concept, Sun Yung Shin's exploration of migrant identity in *Unbearable Splendor*, Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, and Sandeep Parmar and Bhanu Kapil's "fourth space" as outlined in *Threads*.

Diaspora: "the image of a journey"

> …I left that country with a palmful
> of seeds I've thrown across
> this dry, hard Texas. Allah
> has blessed me with this vine
> that coils upward. I care
> so little for what others say, ask
> your mother. That nose ring
> doesn't suit you, by the way.
> Once, you were small enough
> to cradle. There was a coil

> in that clock made of metal . . . O,
> that something so small can matter . . .
>   No daughter, I
> don't need a glass of water. Look,
> this will grow into maatir neeche aloo.
> In the spring, you see, its purple leaves
> will be the size of your own palm. (Faizullah, *Registers,* 58).

I am drawn to Avtar Brah's broad statement in *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, where she writes, "at the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of a journey" (179). Brah constantly puts pressure on the concept of diaspora, considering the socioeconomic, political, and cultural conditions that mark its trajectories. But, in this instance, these contexts are framed around the image of a journey. The journey is fundamental. What is noteworthy is that Brah does not only refer to physical displacement; she refers also to the *image* of a journey. This emphasises diaspora as transnational while also dismantling the idea of an originary center. An image, much like a diasporic identity, crosses time and space. The *image* of a journey is multidirectional – it can be constantly reimagined and transformed as it collects new meanings and understandings. It is elicited through storytelling. It is both memory and experience, representing the physically dispersed and the metaphorically displaced. Through an image, you can even embark on simultaneous journeys at once.

An image is representational, and therefore, imbued with the contexts of those who encounter it. This quality is exemplified through poetry, where the speaker (and reader) of a poem live within the imagistic experiences of the piece. Brah further explores imagery, stating that "the same image can elicit a diversity of meanings, signalling the effects of personal biography and cultural context on processes of meaning production" (192). Several journeys thread through Tarfia Faizullah's poem, "Your Own Palm" (*Registers,* 2019). The poem is a web wherein a father's physical displacement is represented by intersecting images: a palmful of seeds, the vine coiling upwards, a synthesis of languages, a village in the past. The poem is framed as an anecdote passed down from father to daughter, and while the father's journey is literal ("I left

that country…"), the daughter is displaced asynchronously to this physical movement. She, too, experiences this journey, but through the sequence of images presented to her, which are then likely reimagined and reconstructed, or interwoven with images from other stories and her own personal knowledge. For Faizullah, a second-generation immigrant born in America, the diasporic experience is largely navigated through the *image* of a journey that she has never taken herself. Her journey, then, is multidirectional, pointing toward the West and the father's village, the past and present, simultaneously. In either case, both characters are part of "the diaspora" despite these different modes of travel.

Over the last four decades, the term "diaspora" has been subject to changing criteria. In contrast to Brah's idea of the journey, "at the heart of the older versions of diaspora [is] the idea of homeland" (Robin Cohen, 4). Earliest definitions narrowly conceptualised diaspora as "dispersals of people from an originary, geographical "national" center, a homeland," though interpretations have since accommodated more nuanced approaches to diasporic phenomena (Roza Tsagarousianou, "Beyond the Concept of Diaspora," 78). Tsagarousianou critiques these early definitions, put forward by Gabriel Sheffer (1986) and William Safran (1991), which categorise diasporic identity as driven by nostalgia and the belief of a future return to homeland. She argues they "effectively [dissolve] diaspora into the concept of ethnicity" (78). Even in "Your Own Palm," it is apparent that *looking back* is only one aspect of the diasporic identity. The poem reaches vertically ("this vine / that coils upwards"), and into the future ("In the spring, you see, its purple leaves / will be the size of your own palm"), challenging a singular, nostalgic, representation of diaspora. Additionally, both moments simulate a sense of hope and belonging; the leaves come to symbolise the daughter, through the likeness of her palm, and their growth represents her own. This emphasises diaspora's twofold character: "[diaspora] involves both feeling attached to one's "roots" and a sense of shared history and stable community but also future-orientation, transformations, and new intercultural 'routes'" (Cadidatu et al., 42). Similarly, Cohen evaluates the "explosion" of the use of the word diaspora from the 1980s until

2017, and on the broadness of its use, writes, "concepts that are too precise become too prosaic, obvious and boring" (4). He accepts that the term is not "particularly coherent," but suggests that coherence has "been traded for imagination, audaciousness and strategic use," calling this a worthwhile exchange (Ibid).

In an increasingly globalised world, the term diaspora is becoming more of an interest in digital and media studies. This was predicted by Brah in 1996:

> The diasporas proliferating at the end of the twentieth century will be experienced quite differently, in some respects, in this age of new technologies and rapid communications compared with the time when it took months to travel or communicate across the seas (191).

Jessica Retis and Roza Tsagarousianou explore how in this globalised context, concepts of "the nation, national culture and national identity" must be reconsidered to recognise that diasporic cultures

> straddle uncomfortably the divide between national and the postnational, remaining fluent in the idiom derived from the territorially bounded universe of the former while embracing the fluid and deterritorialised terrain of the latter (4).

Much like the *image* of the journey, diasporic medias allow diasporic identities to figuratively inhabit multiple spaces simultaneously. They are space- and time-distancing technologies, and their use has significant implications on "the ways in which diasporas are imagining themselves and situate themselves in space" (5). For one, they create "new spaces" where "experiences generated and shared by their inhabitants come together and become synchronised and related to each other" (Ibid). "Your Own Palm," for example, is published on *The Academy of American Poets* website. It is widely accessible across the globe, which undoubtedly creates a sense of community among similarly displaced individuals. This illustrates how poetry provides a terrain on which digital media's "new spaces" might be realised. This is most noticeably exhibited through the

second (and subsequent) generations, who may rely more heavily on digital medias to gain an understanding of their non-Western homelands.

Second-generation, Muslim, South Asian Americans

Despite the changing criteria of the term "diaspora," what endures is the interplay between "homeland" and the new country, and the emphasis on (the image of) physical movement, displacement, and borders. However, this poses a new question for second-generation immigrants in the West who uniquely inhabit the diasporic identity, particularly in their altered experience of "homeland" and the ambiguity of the phrase "new country." Edward Said writes: "Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and the plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions" (186). Unlike exiles, second-generation immigrants have never been principally aware of *one* culture, *one* setting, and *one* home in their lifetimes. They are born into their diasporas and have always been profoundly affected by plurality. In contrast to the generation before, whose diasporic identity is the result of their own physical displacement, and even the generation after, whose parents may have never visited the first-generation's country of origin, the second-generation immigrant sits uniquely at an intersection of nations. This unique position is determined by both their proximity to and distance from physical displacement. As a result, both the ancestral nation and the Western nation may be simultaneously considered their homeland. Neither is an "originary center."

However, this argument does not intend to suggest a notion of "two" cultures ("American" and "non-American"). Although there are general differences between generations, prompted by major changes in, for example, social position (Brah, 42), the experience of one diasporic identity does not translate exactly to another. In *Minor Feelings: A Reckoning on Race and the Asian Condition,* Cathy Park Hong navigates racialisation and whiteness from the vantage point of the "Asian Condition." Hong is ambivalent about the term "Asian American," stating that "in

the popular imagination, Asian Americans inhabit a vague purgatorial status; not white enough nor black enough" (9). However, despite this ambivalence, she puts forward what she calls a uniquely Asian condition:

> It's a unique condition that's distinctly Asian, in that some of us are economically doing better than any other minority group but we barely exist anywhere in the public eye (19).

Dorothy Wang also emphasises the specific Asian American experience, particularly in relation to the English language:

> Asian Americans in particular have been singled out in US history as *constitutively* and immutably foreign and "non-native" to American culture and the body politic – threatening the very idea of "Americanness" – a pernicious and unwavering ideological characterisation that has been inseparable from the belief that 'Orientals' are also *constitutively* nonnative speakers of English. (26)

Both Wang and Hong propose convincing arguments to the specific experience of Asian American diaspora and provide critical reasoning for this study's similar focus. However, although Hong's ambivalence toward "Asian American" is partly due to all the groups nested within, both texts focus acutely on East Asian American experience. Wang provides an insightful examination of work by prolific East Asian American poets – perhaps those closest to being invited to the canon – and Hong, a Korean American, intertwines her analysis with personal essay. In this and other contexts, "Asian American" tends to nod toward East Asian American. For example, historically, Asian American anthologies have been edited by (and therefore skewed toward) East Asian American writers, and groups like Kundiman have represented a high proportion of East Asian authors. This prompts the following questions: are South Asian poets still too far removed from the mainstream? And, do South Asian Americans inhabit a doubly purgatorial status – not white enough, not black enough, not Asian enough?

This study zeroes in on the broad category of "Asian American," to look at three South Asian American poets: Kazim Ali, Fatimah Asghar, and Tarfia Faizullah. Brah states that the

multiplicity within "South Asian diaspora" itself "may configure into one journey via a confluence of narratives as it is lived and re-lived, produced, reproduced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory" (180). Thus, this study is further narrowed to focus on *Muslim* South Asian American poets, all of whom are second-generation immigrants. These authors published their debut poetry collections after 9/11, and thus, their poetic works have only ever existed in a post-9/11 context. Furthermore, their recent collections were published in proximity, between 2018 and 2019. This unique positionality provides insight to how Muslim-American identities interact, internalise, and reproduce content in relation to a heightened culture of Islamophobia in America.

Kazim Ali, a queer, Indian American Muslim writer, was born in the UK, and raised in the US (*Granta*). Since 2005, Ali has published six collections of poetry, as well as books in other genres. He has had a longstanding publishing career in America, one that precedes the shift seen now, where minority writers are more frequently encountered in the mainstream. Unlike the work of Fatimah Asghar and Tarfia Faizullah, who entered poetry publishing later, Ali's first collection was one of few published works by a Muslim, Asian American author at its time. In an interview with Kaveh Akbar, Ali states: "I think I may have been one of the very very few younger Muslim poets writing and publishing, and now there are many, so many … And for me in the beginning, there wasn't anybody else doing that kind of work." Given this context, it is interesting to read Ali, a poet who helped pave the way for young, Muslim, South Asian American poets, alongside Asghar and Faizullah, both of whom he mentions by name in the same interview.

In 2014, almost a decade later, Faizullah published her debut collection *Seam*. Faizullah was born in Brooklyn and raised in West Texas by Bangladeshi parents (*Poets & Writers*), and in 2019, she published her second collection, *Registers of Illuminated Villages*. Faizullah illustrates the movement of Muslim, South Asian American writers into the mainstream through her numerous prestigious awards: three Pushcart prizes, a Ruth Lily and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Prize, and

a Fulbright Fellowship. *Seam* includes a sequence of poems that witness East Pakistan's 1971 War of Independence through the voices of the birangonas – women who were raped during the War and proclaimed by the government of Bangladesh as war heroines (25). These voices are central to the collection, though framed around them are Faizullah's personal observations.

Similarly, Asghar structures her debut collection *If They Come for Us* (2018) around the conflict of Partition as an imagined witness. Asghar, an orphan who lost her parents at 5-years-old, accesses her second-generation diaspora differently than either Ali or Faizullah in some ways. The accounts of Partition intersecting with narratives of her parents are born from community storytelling, imagination, and her own research (*Dazed*). Asghar's parents were from Kashmir and Pakistan, and Asghar identifies as a queer, Pakistani, Kashmiri, Muslim American writer (*The Poetry Foundation*). While *If They Come for Us* is her first poetry collection, Asghar also authored a chapbook, titled *After*, and wrote and created the Emmy-nominated web series, *Brown Girls*. Her work, and its numerous awards, also markedly illustrates the rise of Muslim South Asian poetry into the mainstream.

The Figurative Homeland

Second-generation immigrant writers fuse the literal with the figurative in order to give expression to multiple awarenesses. In this way, their work is an act of becoming-homeland – more specifically, a figurative homeland that overcomes the physical limitation of singular space. Mahmoud Darwish said of history, "[it] does not reduce itself to a compensation for the lost geography. It's also a place of observation between shadows, between the self and the Other, known in more complex human ways" (qtd in Ali, "Hurricane's Eye," 188). The figurative homeland disrupts linearity and the notion of diaspora as a lamentation for the country of origin. Instead, it is a network of the past, present, future, and even of the *possibility* of these periods, and does not rely on a linear conceptualisation of migration. Conventionally, homeland has been understood as a fixed point, what Deleuze and Guattari describe as a tracing or root (7).

However, the figurative homeland lacks any single originary point; it is a confluence of multiplicity, existing across all time and space. It more closely resembles Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome model, not a fixed point but a *map:*

> [The map] is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real … it constructs the unconscious … [It] is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification … A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back 'to the same' (12).

On a similar note, Sun Yung Shin writes, "to many immigrants, exiles, and pseudo-exiles, *back* becomes a manifold; space and time—an asymmetrical nonevent" (4). She highlights the limitations of physical space and linear time for a displaced person. The figurative homeland overcomes these limitations. It is a wholly new, emergent, space – or map – created by the intersections between a simultaneity of multiple histories. In *Threads,* Sandeep Parmar refers to Rosi Braidotti's figuration of "nomadic consciousness," which rejects binaries and fixed points (13). For the second-generation immigrant, who may not have ever undergone physical displacement, the nomadic consciousness may be represented through, or reside within, the figurative homeland. Braidotti's nomadic consciousness is resonant with Édouard Glissant's "errant," as both reject "arrowlike" movement and a desire for settlement, and are, instead, "directed by relation." Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* can also be used to conceptualise the figurative homeland, particularly through his image of the archipelagos in the Caribbean as "a new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry" (34).

Through a series of poetic responses, Parmar and Bhanu Kapil carve out a "fourth space," which they define as "…not a where but a for/u/m for overlapping voices that wasn't tied to the three continents we share" (*Threads,* 15). The fourth space may also be conceptualised as a figurative homeland. Given Shin's, Parmar's, and Kapil's orientation to different lines of the experience of migration, it is important to emphasise that the figurative homeland is, in itself, not

a concept for second-generation immigrants alone. Instead, the second-generation immigrant navigates the figurative homeland in certain ways, accessing ancestral and Western homelands through specific degrees of removal and re-imaginings.

Overview

Chapter One explores the emergence of figurative homelands through intergenerational storytelling and remembrances of childhood. In Kazim Ali's work, I look at how these remembrances interweave symbols of Islam with characterisations of a father figure, and examine the underlying tensions between familial inheritance, faith, and Ali's queer identity. In Tarfia Faizullah's collection, *Seam*, I look at how the poet reimagines her mother's and grandmother's experiences of the 1971 War of Independence, allowing her to figuratively inhabit its history. And, in Fatimah Asghar's debut collection *If They Come for Us*, I examine how intergenerational storytelling and imagined depictions of ancestors/parental figures are employed to create a sense of community and, therefore, belonging in America.

Chapter Two addresses the complication of identifying America as homeland for Muslim, South Asian second-generation immigrants, a racialised and religious minority, through an examination of misrecognition as a method of unhoming. It looks at work by Ali, Asghar, and Faizullah that is directly in response to misrecognition, and often, explicitly about 9/11. It turns to Sadia Abbas' articulation of a "new Islam" to interrogate who is a "stranger" versus who constitutes a "we" in post-9/11 America. This chapter examines how poets construct figurative homelands that reclaim or reject their Western/ancestral identities by interrogating "them" vs. "us" binaries or creating notions of the "we" on which they belong.

Chapter Three considers how figurative homelands represent gaps in knowledge and/or experience. At the point of confluence of multiple physical locations or temporalities, another "space," an unknowable moment(s), is formed. When applied to figurative homelands in the work of Ali, Asghar, and Faizullah, these spaces are aspects of ancestral/Western homelands

that, for whatever reason, elude the poet. This chapter examines how articulating recollections in poetry also inherently denotes fragmentations and divides within hybridised, racialised identities by depicting how these authors metaphorically represent loss.

Finally, I provide a brief discussion of my findings to conclude my study on figurative homelands in Ali's, Asghar's and Faizullah's work.

Chapter One: Remnant Cores: Intergenerational storytelling and inherited memory

In "Faith and Silence," Kazim Ali prompts us to think of silence not as elision or erasure, but an indication that there is something *underneath,* something that haunts the page. On Jane Cooper, he writes, "her poetry always acknowledges that there is something that cannot be said, questions about existence that will not or cannot be answered" and, of faith more generally, he continues, "talking to God is always essentially talking to Someone Who isn't going to answer" (7). In writing poetry and in reciting prayer, the utterances suggest adjacent silences, but rely on the trust that something resides underneath. Ali captures this when he writes, "we cannot know the truth of our faith. And if we can then there's no 'faith' to it" (Ibid). The relationship between faith and silence is deeply present in his own poetic work. In "Marble Hill," the opening prose-poem of his collection *Bright Felon: Autobiography and Cities* (2009), Ali uses the image of a veil to symbolise this relationship: "The veil also between what you want to see and cannot see, what you / wish to have heard but did not hear" (1).

This idea that there is something unsaid haunting the page is often extended metaphorically to represent diasporic consciousness. Sun Yung Shin explores this notion when, in a piece that graphs migration as a star, she interweaves her own meditations on assimilation and cultural identity with quotations from NASA Science: "when a massive star dies, it leaves behind a small, dense remnant core" (4). What is the dense, remnant core that is left behind during the act of migration? In ongoing acts of displacement from the ancestral homeland to the new country, particularly to places where Western consciousness and whiteness hold power, what are the social, historical, and political contexts that underscore future lived experiences? Furthermore, for the second-generation immigrant, that "remnant core" Shin refers to may be inherited and thus not the product of physical migration itself. When Kazim Ali, a second-

generation immigrant, invokes his Muslim faith in his work, how much of this identity is an ancestral inheritance?

Eva Hoffman conceptualises the second-generation as the "hinge generation," the generation "in which received, transferred knowledge of events is being transmuted into history, or into myth" (qtd. in Hirsch, 103). Hoffman's proposal provides a helpful framework for understanding how second-generation diasporic identities access and interpret, and eventually reproduce, the first-generation's displacement from an ancestral homeland. It also suggests that history is the continual transfer of cultural memory rather than a fixed point before the present. Ali alludes to this as well: "The human body must live through linear time but the human mind … exists at all points in time, present and past and future at once. It's just another short leap to realise it is possible the mind can actually experience and know things the body hasn't reached to or gotten to yet" (Ali and John Fry). This is resonant with Sara Ahmed's argument that history must be thought of as "not the continuous line of the emergence of a people, but a series of discontinuous encounters between nations, cultures, and other others" (*Strange Encounters,* 11). If the second-generation's inherited experience is (dis)continually transmuted into history, if they are in a constant state of experience outside the physical body, the act of articulating these experiences through poetry is an opportunity to assert emergent identities and therefore contribute to a sense of belonging in America. These articulations uncover the socio-political context, the remnant core, of the second-generation immigrant's lived experience.

One act of reproducing inherited experiences is by constructing "figurative homelands" in poetry. These are homelands that overcome the physical limitations, such as literal location and linear time, posed by traditional definitions of homeland as a singular space. Homi K. Bhabha writes that it is

> politically crucial … to think beyond the narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood (*The Location of Culture,* 2).

How do racialised second-generation immigrant writers inhabit Bhabha's "in-between" spaces? These writers, by the nature of their ancestry, have been profoundly affected by plurality for the entirety of their lifetimes. Within the framework of Shin's "remnant cores" and Hoffman's assertion of the second-generation as the "hinge" generation, I will look closely at works by second-generation immigrants to explore this question. This study will examine works by Kazim Ali, Tarfia Faizullah, and Fatimah Asghar, three Muslim American writers of South Asian descent, and examine the in-between spaces, represented as figurative homelands, within their poetry. For these writers, the very act of writing poetry unavoidably articulates cultural differences. They are often navigating multiple histories and cultural memories: those of their Western homeland, where they were raised, and those of an ancestral homeland, from where their parents migrated, and which was then passed down to them. Additionally, the work of all three poets is in conversation with their Muslim upbringing, a religion often regarded in opposition to the West, particularly after 9/11. Unable to identify wholly with their American homeland, nor wholly with their ancestral origins, figurative homelands more adequately reflect the specific strand of liminality for these authors.

More specifically, this essay will explore how figurative homelands, and therefore emergent identities, are established through articulations of inherited memory. How are the remnant cores of migration passed down to later generations, and how does poetry uncover and bring them to the surface? As noted by Hoffman, in comparison to the previous generation, second-generation immigrants' experiences of their ancestral homelands are at various degrees of removal. I will look at articulations, both literal and imagined, framed within intergenerational storytelling and remembrances of childhood. In Ali's work, I will examine how these remembrances interweave symbols of Islam with characterisations of a father figure, and examine underlying tensions between familial inheritance, faith, and Ali's queer identity. In Faizullah's collection, *Seam*, I will look at how the poet reimagines her mother's experiences of the 1971 War of Independence,

allowing her to figuratively inhabit its history. And, in Asghar's collection *If They Come for Us*, I will consider how intergenerational storytelling and imagined depictions of ancestors/parental figures are employed to create a sense of community and, therefore, belonging in America.

Ali's poetry constantly navigates the reality of his Western homeland, whether the UK (where he was born) or America (where he was raised), and the inheritance of his ancestral homeland, whether expressed as India or Islam. Many of his poems situate themselves in American landscapes; revelations within the work are prompted by how identity is informed by experiences in certain physical locations. This is most evident in the collection *Bright Felon* (2009) where every prose-poem is named after a city Ali has lived in. "Beacon," for example, attempts to root itself in the concreteness of place and routine:

> When I first arrived, I quickly constructed my life, visiting the post
> office, the bank, the coffee shop, the yoga studio, the used bookstore,
> all nearly every day (14).

Although he physically navigates his Western homeland, his poems anchored in their rivers and cityscapes, there are times when his sense of belonging ruptures. In his essay "Poetry and Space," Ali writes, "even my own body is a space I do not own; three times in New York City at a weekend conference, I was mistaken for another Indian poet who does not resemble me in the least" (10). He also recalls occasions at airports after 9/11, where both his Muslim body and name triggered invasive questioning and physical searches. "We don't own our bodies … we certainly don't own what others will think of them" (Ibid). And, it is not only his Western homeland that prompts such disembodiments. When meditating on his queerness, Ali calls his body "tricky," because it was "raised in Islam, but [turned] in all of its complicated desires another way" (Ibid). At one point, he also imagines himself as another body, asking what it would be like "suddenly finding that the conditions of [his] body's flowering and self-realisation were no longer illegal according to the laws of [his] parents' religion" (10-11).

How, then, does poetry provide a figurative homeland for Ali to simultaneously embody his faith and his queerness? *Bright Felon*'s final poem is titled "Home," and it precisely illustrates this complexity. *Bright Felon* is "an act of coming out" (Ali and Fry), and contains underlying tensions between Ali's familial relationships, queer identity, and Muslim faith. It is interesting that in his essay, Ali specifies Islam as his "parents' religion." This emphasises not only the generational impact – the inheritance of his faith – but also suggests that perhaps when he invokes Islam, he is invoking, too, the figures of his parents, of their histories. It is important to note that this argument does not suggest queerness as Western. Rather, it is framed around the notion that queerness is antithetical to Ali's parents' practice of Islam, signalling one of the major differences between generations. In "Home," Ali invokes his faith through the story of Isaac and Abraham, who mirror the relationship of Ali and his father. This is evident in how the poem weaves the pairs together, "father" carrying depictions of both Abraham's sacrifice and the private moments between Ali and his own father:

> When Abraham took Isaac up into the thicket his son did not know
> where he was being led.
>
> When his father bound him and took up the knife he was shocked.
>
> And said, 'Father, where is the ram?'
>
> Though from Abraham's perspective he was asked by God to sacrifice
> his son and he proved his love by taking up the knife.
>
> …
>
> My father's hands have fortune-lines in them cut deeply and dramatic.
>
> The day I left his house for the last time I asked him if I could hold his
> hand before I left.
>
> There are two different ways of going about this.
>
> If you have known this for years why didn't you ask for help, he
> asked me (87-88).

The poem's title suggests that Ali is stitching together a home. However, the line, "the day I left his house for the last time" emphasises that this home is no longer (entirely) with his father. Consequently, his faith (his "parents' religion") must similarly transform. Near the end of the poem, Ali writes, "You hope like anything that though others consider you unclean God / will still welcome you" (90). In the figurative homeland, Ali can illustrate how his inheritance, his faith – his hope – is in tandem with his queer identity, not in opposition to it. "Islam is a religion of plurality and always has been," he writes in a recent interview (2018). "You must find what truth is in it for you and what place it has in your own life. That too has fluctuated and changed for me throughout my life" (Ali and Domenica Ghanem).

Bright Felon is preceded by two other collections, *The Far Mosque* (2005) and *The Fortieth Day* (2008). When Ali evokes Islam, it is often articulated through characterisations and figurations of his father. For example, in "Thicket," Ali writes: "It's the father who believes in God. / The son believes in the father" (*Mosque,* 46). So deeply ingrained is Islam with the figure of Ali's father, that when this relationship is threatened, so is the relationship between Ali and his faith. As a result, and as shown in "Home," his faith must change shape in order to extend toward his queer identity (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology,* 67). Eventually, his queerness and his practice of Islam reside together in the figurative homeland.

The association between the father figure and how Ali accesses his faith is a reoccurring theme. In "Quiz," the father figure is a symbol of connectivity. This is portrayed imagistically when Ali describes his father's hand as a road:

my father's hand	a tune carried around in the skin
the road of devotion	how a sirocco unwraps itself
the surface of water	dear lantern dear cup
three miracles	a spider weaving a web across
when will you come back	the moon splits in half (*Fortieth Day,* 35).

The father's hand can lead the speaker to devotion, but it is also a road complicated by gaps and white space. The construction of this poem depicts a series of in-between spaces, emphasised further by fragmentation and narrative nonlinearity. Together, the image of the hand and the poem's structure recall the "fortune-lines" cut "deeply and dramatic" on the father's palm in *Bright Felon*. These separations and lines indicate both a liminal identity and moments of silence between articulations. The father is representative of the figurative homeland: his hand as a road metaphorically connects the two columns of text. Also, the "road of devotion" opens the opportunity for "miracles," one of which is the spider that weaves a web across symbolic borders. "Quiz" portrays how identity, or homeland, is split and fragmented, and it is the poem's power to bring those pieces together.

In "Rope," the rope is a symbol of connectivity between literal spaces, imagined worlds and multiple temporalities:

> The wintered plot concludes in a chapter he refuses to translate
>
> The lyre is a liar, a string of gut pulled taut
>
> As a newborn his father whispered into his ears the call to prayer
>
> Each strand of his father's voice a shaft of light from Heaven
>
> A rope thrown down to rescue him
>
> He wants to grab hold, climb up, disappear (*Fortieth Day,* 18).

There is the literal landscape, interpreted as the Western homeland because it is where the speaker is a newborn. There are also other worlds: Heaven and an in-between space, represented by metaphors of taut string. In "Rope," the call to prayer is first and foremost connected to the figure of the father, and the son's faith is contingent on this moment of passing down between generations: "his father whispered into his ears the call to prayer." Through the call to prayer,

and specifically through its articulation by his father, Ali constructs a rope that is thrown down into one world and connected to another. Because of the pattern of figuration between the father, the call to prayer, and the rope, Ali can reside firmly in a figurative homeland that encompasses his inherited homeland, and the Western homeland (perhaps "the wintered plot"), he was born into. The figuration is crafted such that the strands of the father's voice *are* the call to prayer. The two are inextricable; one cannot conceive of the call to prayer without the father's utterance. The call to prayer/father's voice then becomes a shaft of light from Heaven, and then also a rope that connects Heaven and earth to the father's voice. Meanwhile, the son "wants to grab hold." *Wants* is a deliberate choice here; it emphasises that the rope does not exist to replace one homeland with another. Though he *wants* to disappear into the symbol of his ancestral homeland, he does not. Instead, the figurative homeland, his liminality, is addressed through the rope itself and not solely by the worlds on either side.

In the later collection *Sky Ward* (2013), Ali expresses how a divided relationship with his father, and his father's consequent silence, suggest displacement from his ancestral homeland:

> My father's silence I cannot brook. By now he must know I live and well.
> My heart is a nickel, unearthed and sent. We are a manmade catastrophe.
> Unable to forgive, deeply mine this earthly light that swells sickly inside.
> Like wind I drift westward and profane when the doors of ice slide open (70).

The father's silence in the poem "Hymn" contrasts the sounds of prayer in "Rope." Again, the silence Ali constructs is not a void. It suggests an undercurrent of conflict that might be interpreted as a rift in the relationship between father and son. This is especially apparent in the overarching narrative of Ali's work, such as in *Bright Felon,* where he states he leaves his father's house "for the last time." The rift in this relationship exemplifies the dissonances between the inherited, ancestral homeland, and the Western homeland. As a result, in "Hymn," Ali is unable to construct a road, or a rope, to brook the silence, and thus, "like wind, [he] drifts westward."

The palpable power of intergenerational inheritance is referenced by Marianne Hirsch in her analysis of "postmemory:"

> Postmemory describes … experiences that [the second-generation] 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right (106-107).

When Ali writes, for example, "The son believes in the father," and expresses the depth of which he has inherited his faith, he is working within postmemory. It is a useful term to describe the inherited displacement for the second-generation immigrant who, like Ali, navigates racial and social tensions. However, Hirsch further examines postmemory as specifically shaped by trauma: "[Postmemory] is a *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience" (107). Tarfia Faizullah's first collection, *Seam* (2014), aligns with this narrower analysis. It grapples with the question of inherited displacement through the lens of the 1971 War of Independence. Faizullah's postmemory is shaped by her recollection of the War's specific trauma through others' accounts. As a second-generation immigrant in America, born after the war, it was impossible for her to physically inhabit Bangladesh in 1971. Consequently, although these poems navigate the ancestral homeland through her parents' and grandparents' memories, there is evidence that Faizullah's witnessing is different to theirs. Her poems serve as a figurative homeland, a place where she can recollect the War not as she personally experienced, but as passed on by the first-generation immigrant women in her family. *Seam* opens with a sequence poem of five parts, titled "1971," and the following epigraph:

> On March 26, 1971, West Pakistan launched a military operation in East Pakistan against Bengali civilians, students, intelligentsia, and armed personnel who were demanding separation of the East from the West. The war resulted in the secession of East Pakistan, which became the independent nation of Bangladesh. According to Bangladeshi sources, two hundred thousand women were raped, and over 3 million people were killed (1).

In “1971,” Faizullah accesses her postmemories through a reimagining, and at times, an embodiment, of the memories passed down to her by her mother. However, these articulations are complicated by Faizullah’s Western positionality – her physical, temporal, and generational remove from her ancestral homeland. Although part i reimagines Faizullah’s mother as a child in Bangladesh, our gaze begins in the West, in Texas. This deliberately constructs every instance afterward, despite being placed in Bangladesh, with an awareness of the Western homeland:

> In west Texas, oil froths
> luxurious from hard ground
> while across Bangladesh,
>
> bayoneted women stain
> pond water blossom. Your
> mother, age eight, follows
>
> your grandmother down worn
> stone steps to the old pond,
> waits breathless for her
>
> to finish untwining from
> herself the simple cotton
> sari to wade alone into green
>
> water… (1).

In the poem, Faizullah is simultaneously in Texas and Bangladesh at once. It is particularly the transition, “while,” which suggests that, temporally, these instances are concurrent. And, through both structure and imagery, Faizullah weaves together the two locations so that the poem might inhabit both. “Oil froths / luxurious from the hard ground” is connected to Bangladesh through the lingering image of “bayoneted women stain / pond water blossom.” The image of spilled blood intertwines with the oil, heightening a sense of violence in the latter. This intermingling also suggests that the “pond water blossoms” linger, too, on the Texan landscape; just like the migrant herself, they also reach the Western homeland, and their trauma is passed down to later generations.

Through the poem's initial interweaving of images, the Western homeland and Bangladesh are both, in a sense, deterritorialised. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe deterritorialisation as the displacement and dislocation of identities, persons, and meanings. It locates the "moment of alienation and exile in language and literature. In one sense, it describes the effects of radical distanciation between signifier and signified. Meaning and utterances become estranged" (Caren Kaplan, 188). When Faizullah constructs the image "pond water blossom," we recall the frothing oil; this moment where the two utterances recall the same, intertwined meaning, enable a figurative homeland – a state of becoming. As a result, when "Your mother," appears immediately afterward, her figure, too, resides in a state of becoming. That is, she enters a space that is neither solely Texas nor Bangladesh. She is a figure representing displacement from either location at any given moment. It is not until the next few lines, particularly the emphasis on the mother's age, that the reader is aware they are inhabiting a memory. There are several key indications that the poem is an inherited recollection. By framing the mother as *your* mother, Faizullah introduces a character on the periphery of the poem's imagistic landscape. There is the suggestion that this experience is transferred through the passing down of stories, which Faizullah replicates by the poem's sense of narration: "Your mother, age eight, follows …" Once situated in memory, the mother reterritorialises Bangladesh. On Reterritorialisation, Deleuze and Guattari write:

> Reterritorialization must not be confused with a return to a primitive or older territoriality: it necessarily implies a set of artifices by which one element, itself deterritorialized, serves as a new territoriality for another, which has lost its territoriality as well (174).

This is illustrated in how the Bangladesh inhabited by the mother's figure in the poem is not entirely the ancestral homeland. It is imbued with images of the Western homeland (also previously deterritorialised), and, additionally, it can only exist in relation to the daughter's interpretation of a moment in the past that she did not experience.

Faizullah also makes the deliberate choice to write the poem in the second-person point of view. Although this might be read as a conflated you/I, there is a certain degree of removal when she writes "your mother" in contrast to "my mother." One effect of this choice is that the author disembodies herself from what would have otherwise been the lyric subjectivity of the poem. As noted earlier, this accentuates the narration of the poem, drawing in the reader as an active listener. It doubly removes Faizullah from the poem's terrain, contributing to her role as an observer and thus, further detached from the ancestral homeland in an instance she could not physically inhabit. Furthermore, the second-person point of view loosens the obligation to stay true to fact. Inherited memories, and in this case, inherited trauma, cannot possibly be remembered exactly as they occurred. For the second-generation immigrant, authentic memories of the ancestral homeland rely as much on imagined experience as they do on factual occurrences. In this way, poetry lends itself well to the medium of articulated difference because, as Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge, the act of writing mirrors this problem: "in order to designate something exactly, anexact expressions are utterly unavoidable" (20). Faizullah's "you" further extends the realm of imagination, or anexactitudes.

The impact of the second-person point of view in part i of "1971" is highlighted through the contrast in part ii, where there is neither an explicit "you" or "I:"

Gather these materials:

slivers of wet soap, hair

swirling pond water, black oil.

Amar peet ta duye de na,

Grandmother says, so Mother

palms the pink soap, slides

it between her small hands

before arcing its jasmine-

scented froth across her

back. Gather these materials:

the afternoon's undrowned

ceremonies, the nattering

of cicadas—*yes, yes, yes*—

Mother watches Grandmother

disappear into water: light:

many-leafed, like bits of bomb-

shells gleaming like rose petals

upturned in wet grass, like

the long river in red twilight— (3-4).

Removing the overt presence of a speaker suggests that the poem is recreating the ancestral homeland as it *exactly* existed in the 70s. This view of Bangladesh is not illustrated directly through the lens of a daughter; it cinematically captures a recreated moment. There is no explicit speaker directing each movement or shift in the poem, and thus, the reader feels more powerfully placed in the scene. "My mother" prompts us to consider the daughter who inherits the story, whereas "Mother," places the daughter relatively further from its centre. Faizullah may be attempting to reside as fully as possible in the ancestral homeland, despite entering a figurative space where the Western and ancestral homelands collide. Possibly, she employs this strategy in order to make the trauma, the violence, of the War more present in the striking image that ends the poem: "...like bits of bomb- / shells gleaming like rose petals / upturned in wet grass, like // the long river in red twilight—." Hirsch foresees the impulse to centralise the previous generation's stories in the wake of trauma, suggesting that to inherit trauma is to "grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth

or one's consciousness, [and] to risk having one's own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation" (107).

However, a few instances highlight how this part, too, occupies a figurative homeland – a space of multiplicity and not the fixed-point of 1971 Bangladesh. Part ii reintroduces the reterritorialised ancestral homeland. Because it comes immediately after part i, magnifying the characters of the Mother and Grandmother as two figures in that familiar pond water, the poem appears to be set in the same landscape. But, similarly to the previous section, the images are, almost immediately, stained with "oil" – recalling, again, that vibrant image where "oil froths / luxurious from hard ground" (1). Also, Faizullah emphasises lineage in how the poem straddles three generations – the grandmother, who fuses with the ancestral landscape ("Grandmother / [disappears] into water: light:"), the Mother, who witnesses the violence done unto the landscape, and the daughter, at the edge of the poem, momentarily caught in that instance of "black oil," who exists relationally: in this poem, the Mother is only a Mother if there exists a child who will eventually reproduce the image of "the long river in red twilight."

In part iv, Faizullah questions this desire to walk through memories of a previous generation:

> Why call any of it back? Easy
>   enough to descend with your
>
> mother, down
>   and down hard
>   stone steps—how I loved
> she says, *to watch her*— (7).

This is the first occasion in the sequence where the daughter's voice is clearly present, and through the use of italics, the mother's memory is decentralised. The conflict of the daughter, a symbol of the second-generation, rings loudly in the question *why call any of it back?* The impulse to "call" back echoes with Shin's notion of the remnant core. Though the poem specifically determines an instance of looking back, of re-remembering, it is perhaps more accurate to think

of these recollections as always subconsciously present. For the second-generation immigrant, inherited memories of an ancestral homeland are not confined to the past – rather, they are accessed horizontally, a part of present-day experiences and thus, emergent identities. Tied, even, to future possibilities. On diasporic spaces, Sara Ahmed suggests there is a "migrant orientation," an orientation that "might be described as the lived experience of facing at least two directions: toward a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not yet home" (*Queer Phenomenology,* 9-10). In "1971," Faizullah braids together dissonant locations and temporalities; she portrays a revised Bangladesh, one changed by her own Western gaze, highlighting how she is oriented toward multiple directions simultaneously. The question of recollection occurs in the first poem of the collection, and thus, it aptly frames the broader narrative of *Seam.* Despite asking *why,* the collection intimately navigates the past, and in turn, pulls the past into the present. In one sense, this question is answered by the sheer intensity with which Faizullah explores her inheritance, several poems meditating, for example, on remembrances of her grandmother. Also, sections of *Seam* were written as a result of Faizullah's own travels to Bangladesh, where she interviewed survivors of the War, further stressing the importance she placed on recollecting these experiences. But, perhaps Faizullah best answers the question in the final section, part v, of "1971:"

> …*But tell me,* she asks
> *why couldn't you research the war*
> *from here?* Gather these materials
>
> these undrowned ceremonies—
> tea poured into a cup, a woman
> stepping lightly across green field
>
> into a green pond—but don't tell
> her the country of her birth
> became a veined geography inside
>
> you, another body inside your own— (10).

In an astonishing lyrical moment, Faizullah captures those unsaid feelings – the contexts which follow second-generation immigrants, underlying their experiences in Western homelands. "[The] country of her birth / became a veined geography inside / you, another body inside your own." While second-generation immigrants might physically inhabit the West, they embody, too, the histories of the generations before them. Thus, to "call any of it back," more accurately means to rearticulate, to contextualise the geographies already inhabited, already present.

Similarly, the notion that inherited geographies are expressed through and within the body is present in Fatimah Asghar's collection *If They Come for Us* (2019). For example, "Partition," conceptualises this ancestral heritage with illustrations of the body:

> I pluck my ancestors eyes
> from their faces
> & fasten them to mine.
>
> Widowed tree,
> roads caravanned with cars
> browned date plants, trampled… (89).

Asghar illustrates poetry's ability to inhabit multiple dimensions – how she might access her ancestry and redefine it in the present moment. For example, once plucked from her ancestors, these "new/old" eyes are able to witness "the war no one calls war." That is, war, and its more personal illustrations, are both temporally and geographically available because of how she has employed the image of ancestral eyes. Here, Partition ("the war no one calls war") refers to the Partition of India in 1947, the conflict of which frames her collection, and after which several poems are named. Like Faizullah, Asghar observes the trauma of a conflict that she did not physically witness and explores how its history intertwines with her own. In *If They Come for Us,* inherited recollections of Partition intersect with memories of childhood – many of which reflect achingly on experiences of discrimination or feeling out of place in predominantly white spaces. However, Asghar's thread of inheritance deviates in some ways from Kazim Ali and Tarfia Faizullah's. Though she is a second-generation immigrant, born in America to parents from

Kashmir and Pakistan, her parents passed away when she was five years old (Fatimah Asghar and Corinne Segal). Thus, those poems embedded with childhood remembrance, with stories passed down, open figurative homelands in a slightly alternative way: through a communal inheritance that contributes to remembrances of her parents' lives that are sometimes wholly imagined. This is unlike Ali and Faizullah, who might convey literal conversations with their parents in their work. However, this sense of remove might also be likened to the calling back that is incited by immigration itself. In an interview, Asghar considers being an orphan alongside her diasporic identity:

> Being a part of any kind of diaspora is such a beautifully haunting and strange experience, to kind of constantly be working back toward a place where your family has left, or were exiled from, or can't go back to… that's a kind of orphaning in its own self (Ibid).

Turning to one of the longer poems in Asghar's collection, "How We Left: Film Treatment," we see, directly, the conscious "working back toward a place" that she refers to.

> [Establishing Shot]
> Here's the image Auntie P gave me: the street a pool
> of spilled light & all the neighborhood children
> at my grandfather's knee. Kids: turbaned or taqiyahed
> or tilakaad or not. How Jammu smelled of jasmine (15).

Asghar's removal from the initial scenes are immediately clear by her use of "[Establishing Shot]" as the first line. Though, it seems almost inaccurate to call this a line, the brackets causing it to recede into the background. And perhaps it isn't. Asghar is the writer and co-creator of the web series *Brown Girls*; she speaks candidly about how her work crosses genre, and it is likely she has pulled from her experience with film to inform her writing practice: "I've always been very interested in hybridity, the ways that writing can exist within and out of genre" (Asghar and Tyree Daye, 27). We may perceive the poem, instead, like Faizullah's "1971" – a sequence poem that, in transitioning from one part to the next, establishes a shift, geographically, temporally, or

otherwise. After all, each bracketed line is capitalised as if serving as a new "part" of a whole. The sequence poem is used often in Faizullah's and Asghar's work, denoted in different ways (as explicit parts, by separation through blank pages, using subtitles, and so on). When discussing *Bright Felon,* Kazim Ali also reveals his "uneasy" relationship to genre, and at one point, even calls the entire collection "a long poem" (Ali and Fry). This tendency to break the typical constraints of genre, as well as fragment longer narratives by constructing them as sequences, may reflect the similar "uneasiness" of poetry that grapples with multiplicity – poetry that mimics how stories are passed on from one generation to the next. In sequence poems, there exists also the breadth for silences, what remains unsaid, or perhaps what cannot be known, between each part.

So, the *sequence* begins with the "establishing shot." Intuitively, and through context, the establishing shot is understood as the image given to the speaker (a version of Asghar) by "Auntie P." However, it is interesting to note how the Columbia Film Language Glossary defines the term:

> An establishing shot is a long shot at the start of a scene (or sequence) that shows things from a distance. Often an aerial shot, it is intended to help identify and orient the location or time for the scene and action that follow.

Asghar is doubly removed from the scene – first, by establishing the memory is at "a distance," an aerial shot that is observed rather than inhabited. Secondly, by directly stating that the memory is passed down. It is not merely an aspect of her ancestral homeland that is passively orated to her. It is *given.* This deliberate choice of word actively transfers the memory from Auntie P to Asghar. Thus, the images in the shot, the "spilled light" and "neighborhood children," are reformed. They come to belong to both Auntie P, the orator of the ancestral homeland, and Asghar, who listens to the story while physically in the West. This entanglement of inherited memory, and the suggestion that it belongs to both characters, is represented in the poem's title: "How *We* Left: Film Treatment." Thus, the poem becomes a figurative homeland,

on which both belongings can exist – where Asghar also leaves the ancestral homeland as if she, too, underwent physical displacement.

> [Secondary Research]
> My mom's clean, lean legs pounding the ground. Kirpans
> catching light, limbs lost in long grass. Her hand above, searching
> for someone's to hold. The red rain falling on the leaves.
> The ground: a rose river begging her to swim (16).

As noted earlier, Asghar's parental inheritance involves lines of flight – rupturing – as a result of their early passing. Therefore, "[Secondary Research]" is a fitting title for the imagistic scene which follows her mother in the ancestral homeland. In contrast, an earlier section titled "[Primary Research]" includes reiterations of Ullu's (Asghar's uncle) memories as they were told to the speaker directly. Through this contrast, we can acknowledge how the scene imagining the mother figure is a story passed down, and thus inherited, but one that is not recorded directly from mother to daughter. Perhaps it was relayed to Auntie P or Ullu first, or it was pieced together through different accounts of Partition from her other family and community. By naming the section "[Secondary Research]," Asghar clearly tells her audience that she is removed from this memory, that it was told and recorded by someone else before reaching her. However, it is in poetry's re-articulation that this moment is reconstructed in the present. Although framed in the West by the section's title, which serves as a reminder that this is *research*, an act of unearthing ancestry, the section also lives in a Kashmir that is not entirely a Kashmir of the past. It is one that straddles multiple dimensions. The poem achieves this through its strong rhythm and its resonating sounds. The rhythm pulls the past into the present – it evokes a powerful sense of activity. The music in "My mom's *clean, lean* legs *pounding* the *ground*" creates an urgency, a vibration which is felt viscerally. Thus, the kirpans, which come immediately afterward, appear to catch light in the present tense. And their violence – the trauma they symbolise – reaches forward, too. There are several other stunning moments which reveal the hybridity of the moment, particularly through the mother's body: "limbs lost in long grass" has undertones of

violence. Additionally, the "long grass" represents the landscape of Kashmir – Kashmir as ancestral homeland – and visually we lose sight of the mother within them. Meanwhile, the mother's hands are above the long grass, "searching for someone to hold." The hands, in contrast to those other limbs, are observed by Asghar, and so, exist multi-dimensionally in the past and present, in Kashmir and in America. "How We Left: Film Treatment" is a figurative homeland where those lines of flight can be reconnected, where a mother's story, even when removed on multiple levels, is inherited. A figurative homeland where Asghar is, in some readings of the metaphor, the hand that reaches back.

Throughout this long poem, reader, author, and the poem's characters, are continuously reoriented. From "[Establishing Shot]" to "[Narrative Device: Flashback]" to "[Narrative Device: Flashforward]" and so on, we are turned toward a new scene with new implications, at times moving forward then backward again. It is interesting how reorienting the space of the poem, and the reader's gaze, contributes to what constitutes the figurative homeland. Asghar deliberately orients us toward or around specific memories and instances. In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed writes that to become oriented

> you might suppose that we must first experience disorientation. When we are oriented, we might not even notice that we are oriented … When we experience disorientation, we might notice orientation as something we do not have (5-6).

Furthermore, she suggests migration could be "described as a process of disorientation and reorientation" where bodies "move away" as well as "arrive" (9). For the second-generation immigrant, there is perhaps no sense of physical displacement. Still, the moving away and the arriving are felt in the body. This was illustrated in Ali's, Faizullah's and Asghar's experiences – whether represented imagistically, or through a means of misrecognition and disembodiment. And, much of the disorientation is inherited: passed down from one generation to the next or captured in instances of childhood remembrance. The figurative homelands that these three writers create shape worlds where all their incongruous experiences not only simultaneously

exist, but also wholly belong. Where these writers might become strangers in both the West and in their ancestral homelands, through disembodiment, racialisation, displacement, and so on, the figurative homeland is a creation in which one might reorient space and time as an extension of all memories, lived experiences, and inheritances. The figurative homeland is, in essence, a space that "un-strangers" the body, a created landscape that extends fully into habitable space.

Chapter Two: The impact of misrecognition on homeland in post-9/11 America

Typically, "homeland" is understood as one's "native land," or the place where one was born (Cambridge Dictionary). For second-generation immigrants, this common definition is challenged by concrete ties to the ancestry of a place in which they were not born and may never have physically visited. In this case, the definition of homeland is disrupted by internal factors, such as one's sociopolitical and historical contexts. External factors, such as present-day political discourses within Western communities, further complicate definitions of homeland. According to Homi K. Bhabha: "To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres"' (*The Location of Culture,* 13). Bhabha's assertion is further expressed in recent studies on the figure of "the stranger" in relation to "the nation." The nation, as defined by Benedict Anderson, is a political community imagined as limited and sovereign, and sustained by a shared sense of community and commonality (7). However, such a definition neglects marginalised groups who exist on the fringes of "commonality." In contrast, Sara Ahmed argues that nations are instead "invented as familiar spaces," while the stranger contains "that which the nation is not … as a way of allowing the nation to be" (*Strange Encounters*, 97). In essence, the stranger (the marginalised person) is unhomed: not by existing outside of the nation's geopolitical construct (homelessness), but by the nation's inherent boundary of the unfamiliar and familiar. The stranger is seen as alien, as outside the nation's community. In America, where difference and alienation are primarily responses to sites of whiteness and Western/European culture, even the second-generation immigrant, who was born in the nation at question, becomes "the stranger." What is familiar, and thus unfamiliar, is of course relative. But, as stated by Ahmed: "Strangers are not simply those who are not known in this dwelling, but those who are, in their very proximity, already recognised as not belonging, as being out of place" (21).

This essay addresses the complication of identifying homeland for Muslim, South Asian second-generation immigrants, a racialised and religious minority, in the context of misrecognition and its unhoming effects. In particular, it looks at literatures written after 9/11, and often directly in response to 9/11, to examine both misrecognition due to racialised "othering," as well as more specifically due to systemic and institutionalised Islamophobia. It turns to Sadia Abbas' articulation of a "new Islam" in the wake of 9/11, one that emphasises "divisions of the world into 'us' and 'them,' in which 'them' is usually populated with some kind of Muslim" (38). In conversation with Ahmed's critique of the nation, Abbas' analysis of a post-9/11 response to Islam continues by interrogating the formation of a "we:" "Who are those it calls into its ambit? Who does it exclude? Is it the 'we' of the nation, or of the liberals? If the 'we' is the United States and its citizens, where do Muslims fit in that continuum? … the exclusion of Muslims from this fellowship, their absence from the 'we,' raises in turn some questions about the constitution of the nation and the imperatives of belonging" (Abbas, 40). As a response, this essay illustrates how Kazim Ali, Fatimah Asghar, and Tarfia Faizullah construct figurative homelands that respond to their hybridity either by way of reclamation or rejection of their Western and/or ancestral identities. These authors might interrogate a "them" vs "us" dichotomy and/or create a figurative landscape, a notion of the "we," in which they belong.

Faizullah's second collection, *Registers of Illuminated Villages,* is in dialogue with political issues faced by ethnic minorities in contemporary America. In "Self-Portrait as Mango," Faizullah confronts the exclusion of minorities from Western society. The title of this poem suggests that the content is at least partly autobiographical and constructs the mango as a representation of self. In Western literary culture, mangoes are often signalled as foreign, imported, or generally from elsewhere. However, "Self-Portrait as Mango" complicates this metaphor through its use of form: a ghazal, where the word "mango" repeats at the end of every couplet. By employing the ghazal, Faizullah can interweave and subvert the obvious metaphor and layer the symbol of the mango with numerous meanings.

Although Tarfia Faizullah was born in America, her poems often illustrate how her identity as an American is in constant flux. "Self-Portrait as Mango" does this in two major ways: firstly, through the misrecognition of her American identity by the other character in the poem, and secondly, through her own reclamation of the mango as a symbol of her ancestry, i.e. her Bangladeshi heritage. The opening stanza of the poem introduces the conflict of misrecognition by others; we are immediately aware of how the speaker is unable to claim America as her singular homeland:

> She says, *Your English is great! How long have you been in our country?*
> I say, *Suck on a mango, bitch, since that's all you think I eat anyway…* (13).

Charles Taylor argues "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, [and] often by the misrecognition of others…" (25). Although the politics of recognition have been critiqued by scholars like Anita Chari and Glen Sean Coulthard, who argue recognition is a flawed and problematic non-solution for structural injustice (because, for example, the discourse of recognition is "dictated largely by the colonizer" (Chari 110)), it is Taylor's notion of *mis*recognition, a conceptualisation influenced greatly by Frantz Fanon, that is important to this essay. In *Black Skin, White Masks,* Fanon articulates how another's gaze contributes to fixing his identity, how it is therefore defined by "the white man, who had woven [him] out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories" (111). He continues: "I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am *fixed*" (116).

"Self-Portrait as Mango" illustrates how the other character fixes Faizullah's identity as non-American and misrecognises the speaker as a foreigner. This is done by immediately creating a "them" versus "us" dichotomy. The dichotomy is particularly obvious in how the speaker is stripped of ownership through the words "*our"* country, a phrase which excludes her. However, the exclusion of the speaker as American is also apparent by the other character's implicit correlation of the English language as the "American language." It is assumed the ability

to speak English is an American trait through the character's implication that this ability means the speaker has lived in America for a longer time. In this stanza, English becomes a symbol of Western identity, and thus, the character shapes the speaker as someone who speaks English well, but is merely "borrowing" the language – and a Western identity – while inhabiting a Western land. Chari argues that "because identity-formation is fundamentally an intersubjective process, human beings are vulnerable to and even constituted by others' perceptions of them" (111). Thus, it is through this instance of misrecognition that the poet's identity, at least for the moment encompassed in the first line, cannot be that of an American. It is a space where she is "other," where the poet is made to be a visitor; it is a space where America cannot exist as the poet's homeland, despite being her physical place of birth.

However, in this stanza, Faizullah also acknowledges how mangoes are often stereotypically associated with South Asians, and this acknowledgement opens a space wherein she can subvert that idea. Although we are immediately set up to read the mango as a symbol for the speaker, the second line undercuts this suggestion: "…*since that's all you think I eat anyway*." Here, Faizullah illustrates how the mango has become an exoticised representation of her identity to a Western/American audience. This idea extends to not only ironise the image of the mango, but other motifs that are often used in North America to represent stereotypical and damaging views of South Asian Muslims:

> …Mangoes
>
> are what margins like me know everything about, right? Doesn't
> a mango just win spelling bees and kiss white boys? Isn't a mango
>
> a placeholder in a poem folded with burkas? (13).

These lines suggest that the speaker's conflict is aligned with the experiences of second-generation immigrants. Although all South Asians in America might be called "margins," or might be misrecognised by white Americans as people who wear burkas, the lines "Doesn't / a

mango just win spelling bees and kiss white boys?" depict stereotypical scenes that are most strongly resonant with growing up as a child in a Western society. However, the mango never disappears. It is repeated and accrues new meanings: the mango is a margin, the mango wins spelling bees, the mango kisses white boys. Though Faizullah constructs a self-aware and ironised symbol of the mango, she also works through repetition to reclaim it. According to Ruth Maxey, writers "use food to illustrate the tension between preserving one's ancestral heritage and the formation of new cultural and social identities" (164). Faizullah's use of the mango is the point of access she uses to explore her hybridity. It becomes a symbol that articulates her displacement: it is both authentically representing her ancestry as it accrues an ironised meaning, as well as serving as a physically tangible aspect of that ancestry in her Western environment.

The hybridity represented by the mango is successful because of the poem's form. As discussed earlier, the ghazal utilizes a repetitive structure to layer the word "mango" with multiple meanings. While at first it represents the "other," or the exoticised person, it progresses to amass meanings of authentic ancestral *and* Western identities. The poem, then, allows Faizullah to respond to the dispossession of her American identity as it occurred by the other character's comment. She replies by figuratively transforming the mango – allowing it to take on authentic characteristics of self:

> … But this one,
> the one I'm going to slice and serve down her throat, is a mango
>
> that remembers jungles jagged with insects, the river's darker thirst.
>
> […]
>
> "Because this 'exotic' fruit
> won't be cracked open to reveal whiteness to you. This mango
>
> isn't alien just because of its gold-green bloodline (13).

The mango, the self, *remembers* her ancestry. The poem, through remembrances which are written down and shared, allows interactions with the other character to occur in America ("our country") while simultaneously articulating the existence of an "'exotic'" self and "gold-green bloodline" that come to represent the speaker through their associations with the mango. As the poem concludes, the mango and the ghazal symbolise a figurative homeland; they exist in a western space but acknowledge an ancestral heritage. Like the fruit, Faizullah recalls a "jungle jagged with insects," and like the fruit, she physically resides in America "waiting to be held and peeled."

"Self-Portrait as Mango" is a poem that directly addresses the white gaze. As such, the poem becomes terrain on which Faizullah is able to reclaim the self by dismantling a Western exoticisation of her body. This occurs through both an ironised hyper-exoticisation and a reclamation of the poem's primary object-metaphor: the mango. Likewise, it must be said that the act of dismantling the assumptions of the white gaze in this poem is, simultaneously, an acknowledgement of the externally determined conceptions white Americans have of non-white bodies. These presumptions contribute to what Robin DiAngelo calls a "cycle of oppression," a cycle that is set in motion by the "*misinformation* about and *misrepresentation* of a minoritized group," or in other words, by the presentation of a minoritized group in "limited, superficial, and negative ways" (65). Following this initial dynamic, DiAngelo describes other factors in the cycle of oppression: the social acceptance of mistreating the minoritised group, such as through the rationalisation and normalisation of misinformation, as well as the internalisation of these misrepresentations by the minoritised group (67). "Self-Portrait as Mango" illustrates how poetry allows a minoritised person to break out of this cycle, particularly by challenging and confronting (in verse) rather than internalising these misperceptions. At the same time, the reclamation of selfhood is parallel to the understanding that Faizullah, as referred to in this poem, has been othered in the context of her surroundings, which is largely engaged in a cycle of oppression.

Systemic and institutionalised Islamophobia, a result of the misrecognition and dehumanisation of Muslims in North America post-9/11, is well-documented by America's "war on terror." Along with legislation and constitutional contexts, this is evident in media output, including literature, from 2001 onward. Naseem L. Aumeerally cites Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2005) and John Updike's *The Terrorist* (2006) and argues these novels "appear to seek comfort in customary orientalist images of violent and irrational Muslim masculinity and binary us vs. them structures (3)." Meanwhile, the work by writers of Muslim heritage have been "significantly absent from collections of 9/11 writings such as *Poetry after 9/11* (Johnson & Meriams, 2002) or *After 9/11* (The New Yorker, 2011) and have generally received little media consideration" (Ibid). Recently, nearly two decades after 9/11, collections by Muslim writers are receiving more attention within the institution of poetry, as shown by anthologies like *Halal if You Hear Me* being featured in mainstream and widely distributed magazines, including the April 2019 issue of *POETRY*. However, this was not before oppressive structures were put in place, cementing deteriorative misrecognitions and ongoing fear of Muslims in the West. Faizullah, Asghar and Ali are poets who have all published their debut poetry collections in a post-9/11 era, from 2005 to 2019; all three have published a poetry collection recently, between 2018 - 2019, and I discuss these most recent collections in this essay. These works continue to grapple with misrecognitions of Muslims as a result of the Islamophobia present in post-9/11 narratives. Each of these poets emphasise their own authenticity, their own individual identities, through articulation in poetry, and their collections function "as a powerful and creative platform to 'write back' to the systematic demonization of Muslim communities" (Aumeerally, 3).

This implication of authenticity through articulation is important in my analysis because it is the figurative terrain of the poem that can inhabit Western and ancestral homelands, incorporating second-generation experiences of what is literal, imagined, researched and/or inherited across space and time. This is otherwise physically impossible to attain. Moreover, Aumeerally also claims: "A phenomenon of 'fictionalisation of memory' among young diasporic

Muslims, marking attachment to an 'imagined Islam,' was harnessed after 9/11 to attenuate the sense of persecution targeting their group identity" (3). This figurative homeland, then, becomes a homeland on which second-generation immigrants can "write back" (*"since that's all you think I eat anyway"),* or craft authentic, positive, and complicated Muslim identities – homelands that dismantle prevalent orientalist and violent narratives.

Poems in Faizullah's most recent collection, *Registers of Illuminated Villages*, express how Faizullah's sense of belonging in America is threatened after 9/11, and how, as a result, America becomes less and less representative of an authentic homeland. One of the poems in the collection is titled "Your Own Country[1]," and it references the towers in the very first line:

> "…that wasn't the same day two towers staggered into the ground" (16).

The ellipsis signals that there existed something which came before the articulation of the experiences within the piece. Initially, it is ambiguous what the ellipsis literally stands for; the author is purposefully constructing a moment where readers are thrown into the speaker's reflections, which are connected to the staggering towers. Thus, the entire poem is framed by 9/11, each moment inextricably tied to the two towers, and it is also implied that it was 9/11 which prompted the poem to be written at all. This strategy illustrates how Faizullah's creative practice and output were impacted by 9/11, particularly in her choice to represent its negative effects on the perceptions of Muslims in her work. This impact mirrors the experiences of other Muslims in America, where shifts toward more vocal and obvious Islamophobia also resulted in a shift in their ways of existing – of being and thinking.

The poem continues to wield temporality in a non-linear way. Like the ellipsis, which allows the author to construct a reflection about a moment before that moment occurs, the poem's long lines – it functions as a prose poem though it contains deliberate line-breaks – also

[1] Different versions of "Your Own Country" exist online. My analysis is independent of these other versions.

work to collapse time. New sentences and separate moments occur on the same line, and this pacing suggests the written instances occurred concurrently:

> …The girl with the curious fingers says hello. Her friend's scorn. You'll get whatever they have! The skylight pours down all that white at home. *What about the poor people in our country? Do you want to be like them? Is that it? Then go. Go* (16).

There are three distinct lyrical moments in the section quoted above: the speaker's interaction with the girl and the girl's friend, the image of white skylight, and the ambiguous questioning—perhaps a memory, or internal speech. However, through the poem's form, each moment is not in isolation. These instances are linked, with no breath or break between them. The poem, as a result, disorients the reader in time by conflating the many separate moments. This collapse of time, and the simultaneity of the poem's moments, is further accentuated by the repeating phrase "there's a first day," which precedes, and therefore contextualises, all the antagonistic moments in the poem:

> …There's a first day
> you learn a country can't be earned. Your heart's embarrassed eesh-oof. It is
> soft. It isn't soft at all. A shiny pickup drives past. Go back to your own country!
> they holler. A firecracker, lit then thrown. There's a first day you learn *ours* and
> *theirs* (Ibid).

Each antagonistic event provokes a revelation. There is a first time the speaker comes to the revelation that "a country can't be earned." There is a first time the speaker learns the social construct of "ours" and "theirs" and how it relates to a sense of belonging. While these revelations occur as a result of different events in the poem, the repeated phrase "there is a first day" has a cyclical effect. This technique subverts any linearity – there is no moving forward because the poem continuously prompts a return to the language of a "first day." As a result, there is no sense of when things occur in relation to one another; in the world of the poem, these events could easily exist at the same time. This is especially true given that the very first line

of this poem suggests this piece is reflective, and therefore not tied to a sequence of events as they factually occurred.

It is possible to also look at Faizullah's poem from the perspective of Bhabha on the imaginary of spatial distance:

> to live somehow beyond the border of our times – throws into relief the temporal, social differences that interrupt our collusive sense of cultural contemporaneity. The present can no longer be simply envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past and future, no longer a synchronic presence: our proximate self-presence, our public image, comes to be revealed for its discontinuities, its inequalities, its minorities (*Location,* 6).

On the figurative landscape, only two periods appear to exist: 1. the "first day," on which the hostile incidents are all occurring, and 2. everything outside of the "first day," where the speaker has not yet come to the revelations of how they are viewed by a Western society. As a result, Faizullah's poem lives in what Bhabha describes as "beyond the border of our times," where there is no synchronic present, or alternatively, where *every* instance exists in the present moment. By constructing this binary through the prose-like form of the poem, the suggestion of the ellipsis, and the repetition of the "first day," Faizullah further emphasises the shift toward aggression and racism that correlates with 9/11. The falling towers themselves are the catalyst for the speaker's revelations (or creation of this poem). Thus, the two periods can also be framed as *after* the towers fell, and *before* the towers fell. Through this construction, Faizullah inhabits the very moment of 9/11 and its effects in multiple capacities: before the towers fell, immediately after the towers fell, years after the towers fell, and so on, all within a singular space.

In "The Maintenance of Innocence," Sadia Abbas explores the destabilisation of linear time as a response to 9/11 through an analysis of the film, *Zero Dark Thirty.* She writes, "perhaps the most striking claim made by the opening shot is that there is no continuity between life before and after September 11, 2001. The screen is a black blankness bearing the legend, 'September 11, 2001' … the blankness obviates the possibility of any past other than the attack, which becomes the originary event of history" (*At Freedom's Limit,* 32). Returning to "Your Own

Country," the self in Faizullah's poem, a Muslim self, inherently embodies the unarticulated past Abbas refers to; this embodiment is, in a way, communicated through Faizullah's rhetorical choices, particularly the ellipsis that begins the poem. "Your Own Country" similarly emphasises 9/11 as a kind of originary event through the repetition of "there's a first day." Instead of eradicating the past like *Zero Dark Thirty*, however, Faizullah's assertion signals a transformation and not an erasure. In other words, for the non-Muslim, 9/11 is originary, and thus, ("new") Islam must be defined by it. Meanwhile, for Faizullah, two temporal spaces occur: that wherein they are, or they are not defined by 9/11.

In addition to two temporal spaces, "Your Own Country," occupies two physical spaces: 1. America: a country that Faizullah articulates as her own but which is, through repetition and context, violently taken from her; and 2. an unnamed space, or country, that is not America. Like the mango in "Self-Portrait as Mango," "country" accrues meanings through repetition, and is sometimes articulated by others in order to sever Faizullah's ties to America as homeland. In the last line of the poem, it is owned by the speaker: "Your own coun/try demands it" (16). The result of these accrued meanings is that "country" becomes ambiguous, representing a figurative space that is and isn't a Western homeland. It is an America that misrecognises brown bodies, it is an America that is owned by a brown body, and it is a vague, non-American country that is projected onto a brown body by others.

This poem exemplifies how misrecognition on the part of others prevents identification of a physical space as homeland. For example, "*go back to your own country*," suggests Faizullah has a concrete, physical homeland to return to. This is a misrecognition unique to second-generation immigrants, who are displaced from an ancestral homeland, but, being born in America, do not necessarily have a physical space to *go back* to. Furthermore, this misrecognition extends beyond the individual – it serves to infer that America is a white country that racialised immigrants, due to their histories, beliefs, and appearances, do not belong to. Although this poem becomes the most authentic space to explore hybrid identity through its collapse of time and space, and its

possibility of figuration and repetition, it primarily does so through negation: by acknowledging how (white) America both can and cannot be the author's singular homeland and recognizing that the othered character must negate a part of the self ("There's a first day you learn how to kill yourself without dying") in order to belong. Furthermore, the lineation at the end of the poem demonstrates the hybridity of the speaker and the multiplicity of the figurative homeland: The word "country" is itself broken in half and split deliberately across two lines with a hyphen:

> "Your own coun-
> try demands it" (16).

In her debut collection *If They Come for Us,* Fatimah Asghar responds to growing up in America as a Muslim in a post-9/11 context. The collection includes her poem "Partition[2]," which captures how second-generation immigrants inhabit multiple identities as a result of having multiple homelands. Like the end of Faizullah's poem, where the poet's multiplicity is illustrated visually by splitting "country" over the line, Asghar both begins and ends the poem with an action of splitting. At its beginning, this duality is created by the title itself, "Partition," which immediately refers to the Partition of British India and suggests the separation of one country into multiple states. The first few lines, which address Partition directly, also doubly resonate with how artificial borders threaten identities:

> you're kashmiri until they burn your home. Take your orchards. stake a
> different flag. Until no one remembers the road that brings you back.
> you're indian until they draw a border through punjab (9).

At the end of the poem, Asghar writes: "you're american until the towers fall. until there's a border on your back" (Ibid). She returns to the idea of separation, but this time, she uses the language of partitioning a country to suggest the splitting of an individual body and identity.

[2] *If They Come for Us* includes several poems titled "Partition," which are technically individual pieces.

Although in second-person point of view, it is possible to read the poem's perspective multiple ways. Given Asghar's Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage, and the confessional nature of *If They Come for Us,* there is a suggestion that the "you" and "I" are conflated. However, like the title of her collection, *If They Should Come for* Us, "Partition" also cultivates a sense of community for those at the margins. The individual moments in the poem outline experiences that exist in numerous, unspecified, temporal and physical spaces. Thus, the poem may also refer to a more general "you," one that encompasses the lives of many different characters. In both readings, this poem serves as a space that allows Asghar to negotiate both Western and ancestral identities; however, like "Your Own Country" by Faizullah, it does so through negation. As shown in the next paragraph, Asghar uses involuntary transformations of identity – transformations almost always prompted by the misrecognition of others – as a device to determine that no obvious homeland, or identity, wholly belongs to her.

The transformations in "Partition" occur regularly and deliberately. They become the poem's primary structural pattern: "you're kashmiri until they burn your home." The "you" versus "them" mechanism is again employed to imply a sense of alienation. Here, the "you" is powerless and stripped of an identity through the violent imagery of a burning home. Furthermore, the poem layers the imagistic representation of losing a home with an instance of metaphorical "unhoming." While on an imagistic level the poem suggests a loss of shelter through a fire, this moment also metaphorically represents the deeper, figurative loss of a Kashmiri identity in response to others' actions. As a result, the character is suspended in their liminality, stripped of both a Western homeland as well as an ancestral homeland. The first occurs through othering, by creating a "you" versus "them" opposition throughout the poem, and the latter occurs primarily by use of the word "until." The character is Kashmiri *until* that identity is figuratively burned. Although written and published before India revoked Article 370[3]

[3] Article 370 granted special status to Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, which had allowed the state to make its own laws.

in August 2019, it is impossible to ignore the present resonances of this poem, particularly as borders are redrawn and the Muslim-majority region of Jammu & Kashmir loses its autonomy to make its own laws, or even have its own flag. In this way, "Partition" illustrates the ongoing legacies of colonialism, depicting its very present violence and instability.

Asghar repeatedly employs this strategy of figuratively unhoming the self/the poem's characters:

> you're indian until they draw a border through punjab. until the british captains spit *paki* as they sip your chai, add so much foam you can't taste home. you're seraiki until your mouth fills with english. you're pakistani until your classmates ask what that is. then you're indian again. or *some kind of spanish*… (9)

This rhythm propels the entire poem until the very last line, where Asghar also unhomes her Western identity: "you're american until the towers fall" (Ibid). In this way, "Partition" creates an authentic figurative homeland by inhabiting a space that simultaneously occupies what the character *is* and *isn't*. In each section, the "you" *is* and *isn't* Kashmiri, Indian, Pakistani, American, and so on. Thus, the character resides in an in-between, figurative area as opposed to the absolutes that *is* and *isn't*, when used independently, suggest. Asghar's character assumes identities by naming them ("you are kashmiri"), and therefore inhabiting them, but then unclaims these assumed identities, because of misrecognition, in the very same space. I argue that these two spaces (both the assumption and rejection of these identities) do, in fact, occur in a single moment. Like Faizullah's poem, "Your Own Country," this is mainly due to the format of the poem. Written as a prose poem, the piece both spatially and visually occurs in a single stanza lacking the deliberate breath and distance that is acquired by lineation. The lack of capitals throughout the poem is also a signal that there is no change of pacing, and that every sentence/line exists on the same plane. The lowercase letters also suggest the instability, or lack of permanence, of "the nation," referring to the various transformations and instances of

unhoming that occur. Therefore, these identities, and the connection to multiple homelands, exist concurrently and equally in the poem.

Although sometimes the transformation of identity is a response to acquiring Western attributes like learning English, "Partition" focuses on the dispossession of an identity that happens antagonistically by someone else. These instances are often italicised: the racial slur, *paki,* and the misrecognition of a South Asian identity as *some kind of spanish.* The author's emphasis on a pattern of negation and losing *all* of one's identities by the last line of the poem illustrates how an authentic sense of identity is affected by the actions and perceptions of others. The poem closes on how a post-9/11 America contributes to a loss of American identity, specifically for Muslims, who are separated from their Western homelands as a result of the violence of Islamophobia: "you're muslim / until it's too dangerous. you're safe until you're alone. you're american / until the towers fall" (9).

"Microaggression Bingo" (see fig. 1 below) is a poem that utilises the structure of a bingo card to represent public and private spheres in Western society. The free space in the middle of the card, which is renamed the "safe" space, is the only moment in the poem where the speaker is homed. Given the title, the poem is clearly written as a response to misrecognition by others. Almost all the poem's lines are dialogue or refer to a past conversation. The shape of the poem, as shown in fig. 1, utterly displaces its spatial and temporal qualities. There is absolutely no linearity. The form suggests that like a bingo game, where numbers are called randomly, instances of microaggression can occur at any time with no discernable pattern. Asghar has, through this form, set up microaggressions as randomised, but ubiquitous, acts that one cannot prepare for.

White girl wearing a bindi at music festival	Friend defends drone strikes to play "devil's advocate"	Teacher still calls you "Fat-ma" on the last day of class	"But you are lucky you have something exotic to write about!"	Everyone thinks you're an expert yogi even though you can't touch your toes
Stranger calls you sexy samosa at the bus stop & then asks for your number	"I went to India once, to *find myself*."	Casting call to audition for Terrorist #7	All the actors in a movie about Egypt are white	"Oh, but you don't *really* seem Muslim."
"You're from Kashmir? I have a <rug/ sweater/ scarf> from there!"	Someone misspells both your first & last name in an email	**Don't Leave Your House For a Day - Safe**	"Oh, but I read a book by Jhumpa Lahiri once: all South Asians are *so* rich."	Editor recommends you add more white people to your story to be more relatable
Casting call to audition for Battered Hijabi Women #42	"I'm working on a story about Muslims. Could you read it & tell me what you think? I'll take you out to coffee!"	"But America is so much safer for women."	Get called a FOB & told you smell like curry	"So what's Muslim food taste like?"
"You're from the same place that M.I.A is from, right?"	"I love hanging out with your family, it always feels so *authentic*!"	The villains are wearing headscarves in yet another fantasy series	"Oh, did your parents make you wear a Hijab?"	In the 5th week of class on Bollywood a student refers to South Asia as the Middle East

Fig. 1. *If They Come,* 68.

Bilici explores how "Muslims make the transition from being 'in' America to being 'of' America" (597). He suggests that the correspondence between habitus[4] and habitat is essential to feeling "at home," and the act of immigrating disrupts that correspondence:

> The correspondence between home and homeland must be reasserted by extending 'home' into the new homeland; that is, immigrants must come to feel at home not only in the privacy of their homes but also in the public culture of their society. Continuity between home and homeland thus requires the projection of the private and subjective (i.e., the household, what is Muslim, communal) onto the public and intersubjective (the city, what is American, national) (Ibid).

[4] Bilici is referring to Pierre Bourdieu's definition of habitus as the physical embodiment of cultural capital, which is detailed in *The Logic of Practice* published in 1990.

Bilici refers solely to first-generation immigrants in his study – those who have migrated from Islamic countries to America, experiencing a non-Islamic state for the first time. Second-generation immigrants who were born in America, however, do not undergo the process of inserting "home" into the new homeland. As illustrated in "Microaggression Bingo," the second-generation immigrant undergoes a process that is almost exactly opposite: the speaker's "home," or the feeling of being "at home," in their American homeland is constantly threatened as a result of misrecognition in the intersubjective sphere. This is made clear by the middle space (not leaving one's house) being safe: not entering the public domain is how the speaker reconciles safety. It is not the physical act of immigrating that disrupts the correspondence between habitus and habitat, but interactions with others that dialogically inform the speaker's sense of identity – an identity that cannot, under these definitions, be wholly American.

While Asghar's poem becomes a space where she can interconnect public and private spheres – for example, by challenging microaggressions and asserting their falsehood – it also echoes with critiques of the nation. When Bilici writes "immigrants must come to feel at home" in public, he is in dialogue with Abbas' meditations on the "we." If second-generation immigrants, who have not undergone physical migration, are viewed as strangers, do typical notions of an American public exclude racial and religious minorities? In "Microaggression Bingo," we are made to confront the systemic oppression that divides a nation into the stranger and what Audre Lorde calls the "mythical norm:" "In America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian and financially secure (114)." Fatimah Asghar, a queer, Muslim woman of South Asian descent, contrasts with several traits of the "mythical norm," emphasising a further dislocation from it. Lines such as "You're from the same place M.I.A. is from, right?" and "Get called a FOB and told you smell like curry," are two of the few examples in "Microaggression Bingo" that illustrate this divide, demonstrating how second-

generation immigrants in North America are constantly seen as "in" America as opposed to "of" America.

Kazim Ali has published six books of poetry, all of which are woven with details of his Western and ancestral heritage. Like both Faizullah and Asghar, Ali writes explicitly about the "otherness" of his Muslim body after the 9/11 attacks. The title of Bilici's work, "Homeland *Insecurity,*" hints at the heightened institutional oppression in post-9/11 America. Ali writes of his confrontations with some of the newly established laws of that period in his essay, "Poet Crossing Borders." He states, "the truth is that any Muslim body is strange now, other, worthy of scrutiny" (*Resident Alien,* 122), before narrating his own experiences at the American border. In the following excerpt, Ali considers how he embodies the stranger while also navigating how he may be familiar or unfamiliar in his Western homeland:

> I heft my shoulder bag. [The passport control officer] does a quick double-take when he catches a glance of my fingernails, painted in what I think is a fetching slate blue. He keeps walking. I am annoyed immediately but what is more disturbing … [is] that somehow I take this as a sign of my Westernization and postmodernity to be a marker of queerness and thus excusing me from security … That somehow, I am not like 'that kind of Muslim,' that I am not *like them* (Ibid).

Arjun Appadurai also examines the notion of a "we" in *Fear of Small Numbers*: "Today's ethnic groups number in the hundreds of thousands … their movements, mixtures, cultural styles, and media representations create profound doubts about who exactly are among the 'we' and who are among the 'they'" (5). Similarly, Ali is meditating on the dichotomy of "them" versus "us," and how, as a second-generation immigrant born in a Western society, he is, at different times, categorised as both. It is important to note that Ali describes this self-identified division as "disturbing." This resonates both with internalisation as described by DiAngelo's cycle of oppression, as well as Coulthard's and Chari's critiques of recognition: the nail varnish is a marker of Westernisation and postmodernity, but it is a sign/recognition dictated by the oppressor's understanding of the nation and who belongs in it.

In *Inquisition* (2018), Ali continues a nuanced exploration of his queer, Muslim and American identity, and his sense of belonging, by entwining his own personal experiences with imagined fictions. In one poem, Allen Ginsberg and Agha Shahid Ali speak to him[5] while others retell the myths of Zephyr, Apollo and more. The collection lives in a figurative space of reimaginings. In "Origin Story," Ali reimagines his homeland(s). Like Faizullah's and Asghar's poetry, this reimagining is prompted by the dialogue of another character. "Origin Story" begins with the following stanza:

> Someone always asks me 'where are you from'
> And I want to say a body is a body of matter flung
> From all corners of the universe and I am a patriot
> Of breath of sin of the endless clamor out the window
> But what I say is I am from nowhere
> Which is also a convenience a kind of lie (23).

The poem begins with a question that automatically displaces the poet, suggesting they are from elsewhere. Although unclear where he is physically positioned, the question itself presumes that the poet does not belong where he is. The word "always" in the first line also suggests that this is a normal occurrence, an ordinary part of life. Ali's response is to assume the entire universe is his homeland; he does not name a specific place. However, it is important that the author *wants* to say this explanation out loud, implying that he does not say it in the literal world outside of the poem. Consequently, the poem is a space where Ali can articulate his hybrid identity, something otherwise unattainable. In "Origin Story," Ali deliberately constructs a figurative homeland: it is a body of matter flung from all corners of the universe. It is also nowhere. He assumes all space and simultaneously no space as his origin, an articulation of homeland that, while impossible to inhabit physically, is figuratively accomplished in the space of the poem. Additionally, the middle section of the poem delves into memories of the different physical worlds Ali has inhabited over his lifetime: Mumbai, England, Winnipeg, and New York City. Readers witness how an origin

[5] In the "notes" section of *Inquisition,* Ali reveals the speaker of this poem as himself.

story becomes origin *stories*. The poem's terrain highlights – and challenges – the misrecognition that someone is only ever from one single place. "Origin Story" is a poetic response that emphasises this flaw of the question *where are you from*?

"Origin Story" has a cyclical nature. It ends by referring again to that question:

> Listen:
> I have no answer to your question
> I am not kidding when I tell you:
> I earned my own voice
> The shape it makes in the world holds me
> I have no hometown no mother tongue
>
> I have not been a good son (25).

Ali's address becomes more intimate, transforming "someone" into "you." As a result, the response feels more immediate, the tone more assertive. This transformation into a more specific character ("you" as opposed to "someone") suggests that writing the poem allowed Ali to finally articulate what he *wants* to say, which was a point of conflict in the beginning. Thus, he claims ownership of his figurative homeland by answering the question "where are you from" in an imagined public sphere—as well as the public sphere created by the publication of the poem.

Chapter Three: Fragmentations and divides: Metaphorical gaps in the figurative homelands of second-generation immigrant poets

In his review of Anthony Anaxagorou's collection *After the Formalities,* Will Harris considers the experience of time as it relates to migration. In examining an "after," which frames the collection, he refers also to its implicit suggestion of a "before:"

> In every family with a recent history of migration, the question of 'before' is never far from the surface. Its perspective haunts the present. Just as the past is a foreign country, the future is beaten beyond possibility. 'What comes before a fact?' Migration doesn't just change what comes before and after, it alters the experience of time.

Harris writes about the lived experience of migrants – how the past *is* a foreign country, how the experience of time is changed – and how this becomes a lens through which they view the world. Harris is in conversation with Homi K. Bhabha, who suggests that the "struggle against colonial oppression not only changes the direction of Western history but challenges its historicist idea of time as a progressive, ordered whole" ("Interrogating Identity," 59). When taking these deconstructions of temporality into account, the definition of homeland as a physical location, bound within the constructs of space and time, is revealed as a flawed concept. Homeland more accurately encompasses both "befores" and "afters" simultaneously. That is, for those with a recent history of migration, particularly racialised persons who struggle against colonial systems, time is not an orderly "whole." For second-generation immigrants, the past – and the foreign country – is further displaced and transfigured: inherited, transferred, recollected, and at times, fictionalised or imaginary, but no less consequential to their identities. Because figurative homelands merge temporal periods and spatial locations, they represent a more holistic definition of homeland, one that incorporates several facets of an identity. By "more holistic," I am referring to how the figurative homeland, because it transcends physical space, captures a non-finite number of locations and is not dependent on any singular experience of time. I am

also referring to how it more accurately reflects how one's displacement from an ancestral homeland is complicated by an increasingly globalised and transnational world. This is emphasised by Jessica Retis & Roza Tsagarousianou, who argue that diaspora is more than just a lamentation for homeland and outline how "[diasporic subjects] seem to be simultaneously uprooted and *connected*, experiencing loss and engaging in creating new spaces" (emphasis my own). That is, "they are not looking toward one direction" but many (5).

Poetry is uniquely positioned to account for the past, the present, and even the future of a diasporic subject. For example, through metaphor, various aspects can be likened: past and present can co-exist within a single instance, as can two physical locations. This strategy collapses illustrations of diaspora as a spatially bound construct that hinges on a location in the past, allowing us to recognise it, instead, as a constantly refined and altering state outside the constraints of physical location. However, while poetry, in this way, shapes *presence*, it implicitly (and at times, overtly) simultaneously gestures toward what is absent. Bhabha writes about "the space between a range of contradictory places that coexist" ("Interrogating Identity," 68). At the point of confluence of multiple physical locations, or "places," both real and imagined, another "space" is formed. This space is integral to the figurative homeland; it emerges as a result of contradiction and suggests an unknowable moment born from hybridity. When applied to figurative homelands crafted by second-generation immigrant writers, such as Kazim Ali, Fatimah Asghar, and Tarfia Faizullah, these unknowable moments, or spaces, which manifest in contradiction, are those aspects of ancestral and Western homelands that, for whatever reason, elude the poet. This includes what is inaccessible to the poet because, for example, the poet is racialised and "othered" in those nations, and aspects that are inaccessible to the poet because memory, especially inherited memory, is fallible. This space materialises in poetic works as gaps, something ungraspable or missing: an absence made present.

Figurative homelands must also consider those gaps formed in relation to articulating hybrid identities. While the ability to make present multiple locations and temporalities marks

poetry as a crucial method of representing authentic homelands, these representations are incomplete without accounting for what is lost, or what remains unknown, for second-generation diasporic subjects. In her analysis on Audre Lorde's encounters with racism at a young age, as articulated in *Sister Outsider,* Sara Ahmed acknowledges how recollection, and therefore the consequences of these encounters themselves, extend beyond temporality:

> We must remind ourselves as readers, that the recalled encounter between herself and an-other is written, and that it functions as an aspect of an argument within a text that shifts between academic, personal and political modes of address. The encounter is lived and written, but it fails to be an event, or even a text, that is simply in the present. The encounter is already recalled and relived in the metonymic slide between different encounters (*Strange Encounters,* 40).

Recollection, particularly of memories which are intergenerationally inherited, is a poetic strategy that illustrates liminal identities. This essay will examine how articulations of recollections in poetry also inherently denote gaps within hybridised or racialised identities; it will do this primarily by depicting how loss is metaphorically represented in the poetry of Fatimah Asghar, Kazim Ali, and Tarfia Faizullah.

At the centre of Asghar's *If They Come for Us* rings the word "partition." In a short note prefacing her collection, Asghar writes: "Partition remains one of the largest forced migrations in human history; its effects and divisions echo to this day." As if to illustrate this, *If They Come for Us* is a collection that itself echoes with partitions – that of India/Pakistan in 1947, and also those of which are metaphorical: separations within American communities ("them" versus "us") faced by Muslim bodies, and the partition of the poet from her ancestral history – most specifically, her separation from her parents at an early age. Often paired with both metaphorical and literal partitions is a partition, or split, of the self. Throughout the collection, there are also multiple poems explicitly titled "Partition," accompanied by two blank pages, which appear as interludes. These blank pages work to deliberately signal a section break, thus reflecting a division of parts within the collection's structure. The unwritten pages also suggest an absence;

their existence hints at the unsaid, the necessary pause (the space) that occurs when temporal or spatial shifts occur in her work. British poet Bhanu Kapil alludes to the unwritten page in *Schizophrene*:

> For some *years*, I tried to *write* an *epic* on Partition and its *trans-generational effects*: the high incidence of *schizophrenia* in diasporic Indian and Pakistani *communities*; the parallel social history of *domestic violence*, relational *disorders*, and so on. Towards the end of this project, I *felt* the great strength of *the page*: its ability, as a fibrous *surface*, to *deflect* the *point* of my *pen* … On the *night* I knew my book *had failed,* I threw it – in the form of a *notebook,* a handwritten final *draft* – into the garden of my *house* in Colorado. Christmas Eve, *2007.* It snowed that *winter* and into the *spring;* before the weather turned truly warm, I retrieved my *notes,* and began to write again, from the *fragments, the phrases and lines* still legible on the warped, *decayed* but curiously rigid *pages* (i).

For Kapil, the page is a surface that deflects the pen. There is the suggestion of an inability to write about the inherited trauma of Partition, which is metaphorically represented as an unwritten epic, a blank page: a gap. It is only when the book itself assumes the same shape of fragments, of decayed and interspersed legibility that reflect the "trans-generational effects" of Partition, that Kapil is able to write again.

Although less explicit about its fragmentation, Asghar's collection traverses the same gaps and missing pieces. As she writes about Partition in 2019, making present this aspect of her ancestral history, and inherently navigating its trans-generational effects, she is also gesturing toward loss: given her positionality as born in America, in a time after the conflict of Partition, what about it is unknowable, or what missing pieces only become evident through a process of research? The metaphorical partitions and divides also reflect how Asghar embodies multiple states of mind, geographies, and temporalities. The collection works within a framework of severing, and the poet, and the poems' speakers, belong to all sides, but also across them. That is, this signalling of a multidimensional identity exists not only in the various resultant parts, but also in the spaces that exist in between those parts and adjacent to them. As a second-generation immigrant, Asghar locates a liminality that both emphasises the existence of an ancestral history and narrative, while simultaneously erasing it through Western articulation, or even her own

Western gaze. This contradiction, when articulated, manifests as an interstitial space that is illustrated when aspects of the poem are made inaccessible to either the poet or the reader.

A clear example is in Asghar's poem "From," where the poet examines these gaps metaphorically through language:

What They Say	How They Say It	What They Actually Mean
Where Are You From?	a short cut to the end, could be period. a lovesong if they weren't locking a drone on target.	you must not be from here. so, where are you from?
آپ کہاں سے ہیں؟	aap kahaa se hai?	there is a wrong answer
आप कहां से है?	aap kahaa se hai?	there is a wrong accent
تسیں کتھوں ہو؟	tusi kitho ho?	how did you forget? how will you remember?

Fig. 2. *If They Come,* 27.

Interestingly, "From" is the only poem aside from those titled "Partition" that is introduced by blank pages. Because of Neil Fraisat's "contexture," described as "the contextuality provided for each poem by the larger frame within which it is placed, the intertextuality among poems so placed, and the resultant texture of resonance and meanings" (qtd. in Natasha Sajé, 157), this

choice feels significant. Despite not being titled "Partition," contexture results in "From" accruing similar resonances and meanings, similar divides.

What is notable about this poem, besides its visual form (see fig. 2), which clearly echoes division, is that the languages in the left-most column are never explicitly literally translated into their English meanings. Instead, the word "actually" in "what they actually mean" suggests an interpretation of meaning. In this way, a gap is formed both between readers that are non-speakers of each language and their accessibility to this column, but also between the poet and these languages. Also, whether or not the phrases are understood literally by different audiences, or whether or not it becomes evident they are all referring to the question "Where are you from?," comprehension of the phrases is nevertheless constructed metaphorically, rather than literally, by the author, and it is the interpreted meanings that are central to the poem. In fact, languages and their definitions are further displaced from poet and reader because these interpretations are antagonistic, always framed by a "they." There is a gap in accessibility, but there is also a gap in the closeness of the poet to those who utter these words: a sense of not belonging, fully, to any of the identities present. By pairing the symbol of these languages with their meanings according to a "they," Asghar uses them also as a symbol of her otherness. However, given that one of her homelands is an American homeland, and the poem is primarily in English, this technique also articulates that these language-symbols inherently exist in relation to a Western audience.

Additionally, "From" alludes to forgetting and (re)remembering. In what I assume is the last verse, although the form of this poem itself undermines temporality, Asghar writes:

> how did you forget?
> how will you remember? (27).

Thus, it may be that the inaccessibility of language, the lack of a sense of belonging, is a result of the act of forgetting. Forgetting is especially cogent in relation to language, particularly ancestral

languages, which are notably lost throughout generations. Whereas first-generation immigrants generally retain their native language, there is a measurable "language shift" toward "the language that is most widespread in the population, or the language of institutions and businesses" in subsequent generations (Sabourin et. al, 728) – which, in America, is English. In its final moments, "From" gestures toward loss through forgetting, and motions toward a gap that remembering may not eliminate, but may, at least, bridge.

Language as a tether to lineage is a palpable theme in *If They Come for Us.* In "From," languages create rifts in understanding: their presence symbolises a gap between non-speakers and the poem, and those gaps are bridged by metaphorical interpretations: meaning as accent, meaning as answer, meaning as forgetting, as remembering. Harris' assertion that migration alters the experience of time is illustrated in tandem with themes of language. Turning toward a poem earlier in the collection, "Kal" is an exploration of how direct translations of Urdu to English are not always seamless, and in using one language in relation to the other, meaning is lost or altered. But, in "Kal," Asghar reclaims the spaces, the losses, by metaphorising language itself, and using it to reflect an altered experience of time. In the first verse, kal is defined as meaning both "yesterday" and "tomorrow." And the word itself becomes a symbol of a gap: ungraspable in its literal English translations, while also being a device that Asghar can use to situate the poem in multiple temporalities – multiple figurative worlds that encompass different aspects of her identity.

> Allah, you gave us a language
> where yesterday & tomorrow
> are the same word. Kal.
>
> A spell cast with the entire
> mouth. Back of the throat
> to the teeth. Tomorrow means I might
>
> have her forever. Yesterday means
> I say goodbye, again.
> Kal means they are the same.

I know you can bend time.
I am merely asking for what
is mine. Give me my mother for no

other reason than I deserve her.
If yesterday & tomorrow are the same
pluck the flower of my mother's body

from the soil… (10)

If we return to Bhabha's statement on contradictory places, we see how this poem exemplifies his analysis. "Tomorrow" and "yesterday" are two places (places, in this case, being two separate temporal instances) that are exactly contradictory. And through language, through the word (kal) and its pairing with an act of English translation, these two contradictory temporal instances intersect. In fact, Asghar brings them as close as possible to coexisting on the page, both rhythmically and visually, through her use of the ampersand. The emergent "space" is represented by this complicated and untranslatable word, which somehow means that past and present, forever and goodbye, "are the same." Asghar emphasises this conflation of time through her images, as shown by the startling representation of the speaker's mother as a flower. Within the poem, the mother is plucked from her grave and momentarily alive once again through the flower's vibrancy. And yet, the word "plucked" itself echoes with removal, and contextually, absence still lingers. This duality stresses the coexistence of both "tomorrow" and "yesterday" by way of a single object.

As the poem continues, kal remains ungraspable, unknowable, a representation, even, of Allah. It is the absent history, the absent family, that Asghar longs for and must bend time to create. We see this longing partially materialise as certain, balanced three-lined stanzas, a form that suggests a concreteness with fewer leaps and crosses between time and space. However, this is undermined in the poem's use of figurative language, as previously portrayed by the flower. Kal is contextualised heavily by images, which themselves are liminal realities, "[signs] of absence and loss" and metaphors of division: "[The image's] representation is always spatially split – it

makes *present* something that is *absent* – and temporally deferred: it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition" (*The Location of Culture,* Bhabha, 73).

If they Come for Us illustrates fragmentation and division using a variety of strategies. In the previous poems, "From" and "Kal," the symbolisation of language represents inaccessible moments, or points of interstitiality. However, Asghar's innovative poetic structures also visually suggests gaps and absence. In one of the poems titled "Partition," and subtitled "August 15th, 1947," a document is reformatted to imitate a "fill in the blank" worksheet:

At the stroke of midnight, ________ (country) achieved freedom, resulting in a

________ (adjective) celebration. Both ________ (country) and ________ (country) fought for many

months to come to this agreement and now that the ________ (proper noun) are gone

the ________ (proper noun) people celebrate their victory. "We end today a period of

all ________ (noun) and ________ (country) discovers herself anew," said ________ (proper noun), in a

public speech, to great cheers of ________ (slogan). With ________ (country)'s promises of

the security of the ________ (proper noun) region and its borders, ________ (country)'s citizens

________ (verb) to put the unfortunate events of the last few months behind

them, and ________ (verb) with their new neighbors. Though millions

________ (past tense verb), leaders assure ________ (noun) and future prosperity alongside

cooperation with the military. ________ (proper noun) people are advised to shed fear,

and ________ (verb) the new ________ (country). ________ (proper noun) vowed that members of all

________ (religion) are welcome in ________ (country), but asked ________ (religion) to honor the

________ (country)'s flag. However, if you are planning to leave for ________ (country),

please do not forget to surrender your ________ (plural noun) and ration cards

(________ (noun) and ________ (noun)) at the ________ (proper noun) railway station. We wish you

peace and ________ (noun). ________ (slogan)!

Fig. 3. *If They Come,* 65.

All specific details (names of countries, religions, and proper nouns) are replaced by a blank space, as if the reader could substitute in any word of their choice (see fig. 3). Although one effect of this strategy is that the poem becomes timeless and ubiquitous, suggesting that the violences of Partition are universal, borderless, and not confined to the event or countries involved themselves, another effect touches on the identity of a second-generation immigrant and an act of inherited trauma/inherited remembrance. For second-generation immigrants born in the West, how is a conflict like Partition recalled and internalised? The structure of this poem may also suggest holes in memory, moments where recollection fails, or an inability to state information as fact. For readers, the full document and its contents are inaccessible without further research. This mimics how Fatimah Asghar writes about Partition, which, she revealed in an interview with *Dazed*, involves personal accounts, recollections of her inherited story, and her own research about the Partition of India/Pakistan.

> How much research did you have to do on partition to write this?
>
> Fatimah Asghar: A lot. Part of it was that I knew my family's story. It was also a thing that I was obsessed with forever. I've been reading about partition for a really long time and then I started to really see that it was the building blocks of the book. With something like partition, where there was a retributive genocide on so many sides, everyone is a victim and everyone is a perpetrator and it was a really hard thing to talk about.

Kazim Ali's most recent collection of poems, *Inquisition,* is sequenced into three parts, though there are imagistic and thematic echoes across them. Within *Inquisition*, there are several instances that appear unknowable, that slip just beyond the poet's, speaker's, and reader's grasp, leaving the merest imprint behind. In his poetry, Ali illustrates how his Western and ancestral homelands come together and coexist, often in the context of his queer and religious identities. This collection, particularly in the first two sections, often seems to inhabit a surreal terrain, timeless and rich with mythical details.

As the poems themselves are lifted into a surreal and imaginative landscape, limitless in scope, Ali also gestures toward absence. Where the gaps in Asghar's collection were centred on Partition(s), one of the most evident gaps in Ali's work is metaphorised as the body: or, more specifically, the disappearance of the body, which also at times translates to the disappearance of the self. Sara Ahmed argues that "there is no body as such that is given in the world: bodies materialise in a complex set of temporal and spatial relationships to other bodies, including bodies that are recognised as familiar, familial and friendly, and those that are considered strange" (*Strange Encounters,* 40). In *Inquisition*, emergent "spaces," or gaps, are often metaphorically represented as a body, whether that is the speaker's, author's or otherwise. Often the self – which is representative of a multidimensional identity – continually fractures and splits to uncover absent spaces. In other words, once Ali's hybridised identity is acknowledged, the body manifests as "strange" and undergoes figurative transformations. These transformations simultaneously come to represent recognition of the body from its absence: the body is whittled down, altered, and/or decentralised from a poetic moment. In Ali's work, there is a self-awareness that emphasises how his recollections are fallible and cannot characterise a whole. There are fissures in the narrative, illustrated through the way time is worked and reworked: almost backtracking or rewinding, only to be rewritten before moving forward once again.

This is evident from the collection's first poem. In "The Earthquake Days," two characters (the speaker and a "you") appear to exist in a specific, unnamed place that is contextualised by the movement and shattering of earthquakes. Between the characters, there is a sense of routine and closeness with one another:

> In the earthquake days I could not hear you over the din or it might have been
> the dinner bell but that's odd
> because I'm usually the one
> cooking up if not dinner then
> a plan to build new fault lines through the dangerous valley (5).

In the semi-narrative style of this opening stanza, we are situated in a series of past events called "the earthquake days." The narrative quickly collapses as the poem moves into a voice in the present tense: "but that's odd / because I'm usually the one…" Much like in Asghar's poem, "Kal," this technique disorients the temporality, and the past and present begin to merge. In these few lines, the choice of "might" and "but" are small directives on how to read this first stanza: there is no absolute truth; there is a story pieced together, an interpretation of events that may reform and change. And, given the sense of routine this stanza conjures, there is the suggestion that this memory is revived and retold again and again, as steadily as (what might be) the dinner bell. Just as swiftly, this sense of disorientation manifests beyond suggestion, when Ali uses the strong image of fault lines to suggest displacement, fragmentation, and a lack of wholeness:

> I can't give you an answer right now because I'm late for my resurrection,
> the one where I step into my angel offices and fuck
> the sun delirious.
> That eclipse last week? Because of me
> You're welcome (5)

Here is when the "space" that is born from coexisting temporalities is first metaphorically represented as a loss of one's body. The contradictions in this poem manifest in how the author experiences – or at least articulates his experience – of time. When Ali writes "I'm late for my resurrection," he is crafting the body as transient: it simultaneously flickers into the present, into a past moment (represented by the speaker's lateness), as well as into a future resurrection. The past, the present, and the future are held together in a single moment of poetry, and the subsequent gap that forms is represented by the body that *should* be at the resurrection but isn't. The motif of routine and repetition also echoes in how the author refers to "last week," which appears to signify a past resurrection. The presence or absence of the body is significant, as is illustrated in the lines, "where I step into my angel offices and fuck / the sun delirious," as well as the later moment, where the body (symbolised by the sun) essentially disappears into an

eclipse. Similarly, in later stanzas, the speaker's body is constantly avoiding being seen; it desires to be hidden or eclipsed:

> The postman rattles up with your counteroffer and I'm off
> to a yoga class avoiding your call yes like the plague
> because son you can read
> in the dark and I have no
> hiding place left
>
> …
>
> No tempest will catch us unaware
> while we claim our share of
> the province of penumbral affections –
> You have no reason
> to trust me but I swear I lie
>
> down in this metal box as it thunders and looks
> inside my brain… (5-6).

The poem's imagistic narrative of being in darkness and attempting to hide, of avoidance, and not being caught unaware, plays into how the physical body of the speaker intends its own invisibility to the other characters and situations within the imagined world. Even the affections must be "penumbral." In his construction of both the gaze of the other, and the invisible body under that gaze, Ali's poem echoes with the "missing person" that Bhabha refers to in "Interrogating Identity." There are parallels between the references to the invisible body in "The Earthquake Days" and what Bhabha articulates as "negations of identity:"

> What these repeated negations of identity dramatize, in their elision of the seeing eye that must contemplate what is missing or invisible, is the impossibility of claiming an origin for the Self (or Other) within a tradition of representation that conceives of identity as the satisfaction of a totalizing, plenitudinous object of vision. By disrupting the stability of the ego, expressed in the equivalence between image and identity, the secret art of invisibleness of which the migrant poet speaks changes the very terms of our recognition of the person.
>
> This change is precipitated by the peculiar temporality whereby the subject cannot be apprehended without absence or visibility that constitutes it […] so that the subject speaks, and is seen, from where it is *not*… (66-67).

Eventually, the speaker's body disappears completely into a metal box – what literally might be a hospital scan – and the articulation of the poem trails off into disassociated fragments. In those fragments, the poet is once again self-aware of being a writer, and the poem is self-conscious in how it refers to moments and processes that are repeatedly rewritten:

> …I am terrified nothing
> is wrong because otherwise
> how will I rewrite the maps unmoored
> a deep sea a moor a cosmonaut
>
> Who needs saving more
> than the one who forgot
> how the lazy cartographer mislabeled
> his birthplace as Loss?
> Riding the bus out to the end of the lines and back
>
> I collect trash for art, oil spill, spent forest, the mind
> is at work and everything is at stake – I demand
> statehood for my states of mind, senators
> for my failure, my disappointment, the slander
> and my brain unmapped reveals no
>
> explanation for danger the ground untamed
> I make paintings of nothing and
> stand before them like mirrors (6).

Within the question "how will I rewrite the maps unmoored," Ali emphasises the power of articulation to (re)write a map that represents the body: something which continuously eludes the poet, and so must be (re)written in order to be anchored/reclaimed. The map, inherently, also symbolises geography, location, and even history. Ali puts pressure on this symbolism: The character of the "lazy cartographer" can be read as both the speaker and a character foil to the speaker. Logistically, the cartographer is the reason unmoored maps must be "rewritten" in the first place. The speaker is fully aware that he is reconstructing and rewriting a birthplace, one which the cartographer mislabelled as "Loss." In this poem, one's birthplace, or what is typically named (or mislabelled as) one's homeland, is not only inaccessible, but emphasised as a place

that is lost. However, when applied to Ali[6], whose birthplace is a Western homeland, this section of the poem also emphasises how aspects of his ancestral identity may be continuously lost, and, thus, must be rewritten and rearticulated. That is, the Western homeland is both lost and a place of loss. As the elision of the body merges imagistically with the lost birthplace, Ali exemplifies Bhabha's point of the "impossibility of claiming an origin for the Self" where identity is conceived as a "totalizing, plenitudinous object of vision." Due to Ali's ancestral homeland, the birthplace is neither an origin, nor is it totalizing. Furthermore, by juxtaposing the speaker, who can rewrite the unmoored maps, with the lazy cartographer, who lets aspects of his identity remain lost through inaction, Ali constructs cartography as a metaphor for the creation of holistic figurative homelands in writing. Yet, on either side of the "rewritten maps" – the figurative maps on which homelands coexist, as opposed to one homeland replacing the other – is the metaphor of the disappearing body. Initially, the body disappears behind a machine. Later, the speaker makes paintings out of "nothing" and "[stands] before them like mirrors." The word "nothing" becomes a mirror for the speaker: he reflects nothingness and the mirrored body is nothingness.

Throughout *Inquisition,* the body being whittled down, reflecting nothingness, or representing an absence is a reoccurring theme. These instances may also be read as a metaphor for the in-between spaces that exemplify the liminality of a second-generation immigrant. Below is an excerpt from "The Astronomer:"

> His azimuth splendour maps the city twice in time
> and he feels the drag of the tide pulling him along through millennia
> into other cities each of which existed here in this same place.
>
> Afternoon in sunlight, he climbs up the mountain
> and arrives at the flower-gate leading to the garden on the slope,
> there being no more resistant surface
>
> upon which eternity could make its useless claim:
> that the prayers he learned

[6] In poem's "Notes," Ali reveals himself as the speaker

> all his life mean no more to him (9).

Numerous places are inextricably linked in this poem. First, we are introduced to multiple cities which coexist within the "same place." This place, initially represented by a mountainside garden in sunlight, is the figurative homeland which accounts for the present city, as well as all the cities which existed there in the past. At this point of confluence, a gap first manifests as the lost meaning of prayer. This moment of loss – alternatively, the emergent space – is contextualised by the metaphor of flowers as a body that immediately follows in the next tercet:

> Thrust up from the dark of the earth only to wither,
> how are flowers in any way supposed to understand god?
> They are no better than a human body that seeds and sprouts and dies.
>
> And even if a body were to remake itself or rename itself as different matter
> what would it matter? Briefly he wonders: is he a river then,
> furiously plotting a course? Or the boat floating down it or the person inside?
>
> No mathematics can plot the path from a body that doesn't exist to a city
> that doesn't exist. The storm won't abate, its numbers irrational, tempers extreme,
> like that of another poet-mathematician who lived a thousand years back or maybe
>
> one who lived a thousand years on… (9-10).

The withering flowers represent multiple absences: 1) the body, which is likened to flowers through the images of seeding, sprouting and dying, and 2) the invisible meaning of prayer, which is demonstrated by flowers that also cannot understand god. Identity itself is also interrogated and continuously transformed – the astronomer can shift from a withering flower into a river, into a boat – until it is eventually ungraspable. As present cities merge with past cities, as heaven and earth coexist to represent eternity, and as the presence of the poet-mathematician exists both "a thousand years back" and "a thousand years on," the magnitude of loss increases: the body, as well as the city, disappear totally; they are removed from existence.

In Part II of *Inquisition,* the body remains a central motif as is shown in the poem "Persephone as A Boy*."* However, though the collection is divided into parts, Ali travels swiftly across these structural gaps. The poem opens with the familiar symbolism of flower as body:

> His father used to say, 'Your face is like a flower'
>
> At seven each morning he wakes with the sun, imagines it burning
> through the window. He dreams he has cancer burning through his skin
> but has never been to a doctor.
>
> Yesterday he imagined a death even better, spectacular and violent: crazy
> taxi, stray bullet, runaway train –
>
> In the final scene of this film he's lying there with wide eyes
> mouth trembling, struggling to speak to his father… (39).

The very first line sits on its own verse, contained in its own moment of nostalgia. Ali is using blank space and verse length to structurally illustrate shifts in temporality. For example, the choice to leave the first line in isolation exemplifies the lyricism of the moment as reverie. There is a deliberate shift, both visually and in the changing tense, as the poem moves into the second and third verses. This technique contrasts "The Earthquake Days" and "The Astronomer," as well as Asghar's poem "Kal," which use structural devices and visual techniques to bring different temporal moments as close as possible. For example, "Persephone as A Boy" separates not only each temporal moment visually or through diction ("used to say," "at seven each morning," and "yesterday"), but also divorces its images from one another – they do not transform or enjamb into each other. However, despite these moments, which are seemingly assured in their own, remote, places, Ali's construction of the body still recalls the gap/missing person that is evident in other poems. This is apparent in lines which alter the physical body, like "cancer burning through his skin," but is clearest in the repeated (dreamed) deaths that occur in the established routine of dreaming and waking.

It is also through the title of this poem that Ali evokes liminality and in-between spaces. The character, this poem's "Persephone," is representative of both the figurative homeland where multiple places converge, and he is *also* representative of the gap that emerges from said convergence. In Greek mythology, the two worlds inhabited by Persephone remain separate – but it is through the figure herself that they can be represented together. Persephone crosses borders. She is neither wholly from earth nor from the underworld, and therefore she experiences fragments of both. In other words, through this dual experience of two contradictory places, Persephone is also estranged from earth and from the underworld at different times. As a result, aspects of each place are unknowable to her, and she will never exist fully in either one. This concept echoes "Persephone as A Boy," wherein the character exists in (crosses into) each isolated temporal moment – or even into the dream world versus the literal world. The poem provides a landscape onto which these divided moments can meet. And, in both myth and Ali's poem, the body of Persephone – which merges contradictory places that otherwise exist in isolation – is also an absence:

> Passing the subway stairs on his way home, he realizes he could go underground here and, by ticket and transfer, not emerge again from the earth for hundreds of miles (39).

In the myth, this absence is represented when Persephone disappears into a cleft in the earth to the underworld. Likewise, in the poem, he imagines disappearing into the underground, and not emerging again for a long time. The story of Persephone, both within the myth and in Ali's poem, can be read as a symbol of migration: the characters represent the possibility of coexisting places, the crossing of the spaces between them, and the fragmentation/losses, or gaps – the unknowable aspects of each place – that occur when they converge.

The "spaces" which proliferate in Kazim Ali's and Fatimah Asghar's poetry are often in dialogue with intergenerational, inherited memory. That is, the gaps they experience and articulate are often products of their own personal histories and remembrances (and, crucially,

imaginings), which are then made universal through poetic form. Asghar's collection, *If They Come for Us,* also includes witness of Partition. These accounts require research to fill in what is not directly experienced or told, though still use personal memory to further texture that witnessing. For example, the "we" often used in Asghar's "Partition" poems is reflective of a lyric "I," while also encompassing a wider public. Similarly, in her first collection, *Seam,* Tarfia Faizullah engages with poetry of witness. In 2010, she travelled to Bangladesh and interviewed rape survivors of East Pakistan's 1971 War of Independence; the middle of *Seam* is comprised of these poeticised interviews. A conversation with Faizullah about the project in *The Paris Review* states that along with translating these atrocities into poetry, *Seam* also "investigates, and attempts to come to terms with, Faizullah's own heritage, identity, and experience." In the interview, Faizullah states, "my grandparents' generation grew up thinking of themselves as Pakistani, not Bangladeshi. So my experience not only changed how I thought about the war, it complicated the very notion of being from a place and feeling a loyalty to that place." However, although Faizullah still coalesces personal memory with her witnessing, because just as Partition is a part of Asghar's ancestral history, so is the 1971 War of Independence a part of Faizullah's, the latter's approach is slightly more distant from the personal because its focus is on the anecdotes of the rape survivors. The poems represent the interviewed voices, often transcribing their accounts, which in turn represent the over two hundred thousand women who were raped during the War. This witness is entwined, too, with the voice of the interviewer as she is wrenched between the urgency to give voice to the birangonas[7] and her own ethical concerns of asking them to relive their trauma.

Poetry of witness as a term is, of course, continually in flux. In a globalised society that is connected more than ever through digital media, translations are more easily acquired around the world, small or digital literary presses provide more accessible outlets, and social media and other

[7] The government of Bangladesh gave these women the title birangonas, or "war heroines."

online platforms provide more immediate contact with voices experiencing conflict. Work outside of a North American context is ultimately more available to Western audiences *and* it is more mobile, resulting in poetry of witness becoming a flexible, extensive category. Poetry of witness also echoes with Ahmed's reading of *Sister Outsider,* where encounters are "(re)narrativised" – that is, recollection and articulation are complicated by relationships between "past and present self, between an apparently intimate self and a public life, between the writer and her subject, and between the reader (myself as reader) and the text" (*Strange Encounters,* 40). However, despite this ever-changing context, Carolyn Forché's "Against Forgetting: Twentieth-century poetry of witness" remains foundational for conceptualisation of the term. Witness, like the figurative homelands of these poets, hangs in the balance between real and imaginary – not to be confused with true and untrue, as both real and imaginary are authentic and true in the sense of the poem. Forché emphasises this:

> A poem that calls on us from the other side of a situation of extremity cannot be judged by simplistic notions of 'accuracy' or 'truth to life.' It will have to be judged, as Ludwig Wittgenstein said of confession, by its consequences, not by our ability to verify its truth. In fact, the poem might be our only evidence that an event has occurred: it exists for us as the sole trace of an occurrence. As such, there will be nothing for us to base the poem on, no independent account that will tell us whether or not we can see a given text as being 'objectively' true. Poem as trace, poem as evidence (9).

However, while still flickering between real and imaginary, the figurative worlds formed through poetic articulation in *Seam* also illustrate how the author reconciles gaps through a method of research when they cannot be bridged by inherited memory, imagination, and lived experience. Although Faizullah is a South Asian Muslim woman with Bangladeshi heritage, her Western upbringing and spatial/temporal distance from the 1971 War of Independence meant that writing poems "just from imagination," which is how her project first began before her travels to Dhaka, felt incomplete: "There was something wrong in my assumption that, even if the poems were imagined, I could claim to understand what a woman who had undergone something like that would be going through, and what it might mean to her" (*The Paris Review*).

In this way, Faizullah's witnessing integrates both recollection – through poeticised transcriptions of the birangonas remembered experiences – as well as Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory to draw together the various fragments of a figurative homeland in her work:

> Postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation (22).

The witnessing in *Seam* is a process itself where contradictory places come to coexist. For example, Faizullah physically crossed from her American homeland to her Bangladeshi homeland to conduct the interviews in Dhaka. This movement echoes the crossings of Persephone in Kazim Ali's "Persephone as A Boy," in which the body itself inhabits multiple locations. Although not explicitly poetry of witness, several other poems in *Seam* emphasise Faizullah's own unfamiliarity with her ancestral homeland, even while she inhabits it. This comes through in poems with titles like, "Reading Tranströmer in Bangladesh," where the inclusion of "Bangladesh" suggests physically being in her ancestral homeland is outside of her ordinary experience and will, in some way, alter her experience of reading.

The interview sequence interweaves the stories of the birangonas' with Faizullah's own meditations. While the stories of the birangonas' are always at the forefront, their voices centralised, the sequence alternates between survivors' anecdotes, each titled "Interview with A Birangona," and Faizullah's own introspections on the interviews, sometimes titled "Interviewer's Notes" and other times, titled more specifically, such as "The Interviewer Acknowledges Desire." In this way, Faizullah as the interviewer, is both integral to, and displaced from, the sequence overall. The "spaces" born from this coexistence are illustrated in the poem's structure, where the interview is represented as a numbered sequence, and consequently, each section comes together to represent a whole. However, between each segment of the sequence, several shifts take place: temporal and spatial shifts, but also shifts in who is speaking, what

interview question is being answered, and whether they are transcribed accounts or lyrical meditations. Thus, the gaps are symbolised in the movement from one section to another: as readers, we understand that in going from section 1 to section 2, the story transforms in some way, and some aspects of it will remain unarticulated, or "untraceable" in the poem itself.

In the interviewer's segments of the poem, the birangonas' anecdotes are not only captured poetically, but rearticulated through Faizullah's lens. As Forché suggests, this does not make the encounters inaccurate. Rather their "truths" are in Faizullah's experience of witness, particularly as a second-generation Bangladeshi woman intergenerationally impacted by the War. In these pieces, the author reconciles the "notion of being from a place," and feeling both from, and removed from, her ancestral homeland. These dissonances, and the consequent "spaces" borne from them, are portrayed in the diction and imagery of the sequence, both of which exemplify how the survivors' accounts, and the experience of witnessing, impact the author's experience of inhabiting Bangladesh. For example, in the sequence's first "Interviewer's Note:," daily observations of life in Dhaka are woven with definitions of the word "victim," altering the tone of the sequence into one haunted by impressions of violence:

i.

You walk past white high-rises
seamed with mold. Past a child
wading through drowned
rice fields, one pink blossom
tucked behind her ear. Past
yourself rippling a storefront
window. *Victim: (noun), one*
that is tricked or duped. Past
a woman crouched low
on a jute mat selling bangles.
One that is injured, destroyed
under any of various conditions.
Was it on a jute mat that
she gave birth to the baby
half-his or his or his? *Victim:*
a living being sacrificed. Past smoke
helixing from an untended fire.
Past another clothesline heavy

> with saris: for hours they
> will lift into the wind, hollow
> of any bruised or broken body (27).

The poem intricately brings together contradictions. The opening sentence of the poem emphasises the image of high-rises *seamed* with mold, stressing the act of something being seamed or sewn together. As the lines unravel, we see how the speaker's observations are, too, *seamed* with the italicised definitions of "victim," metaphorically suggesting that Faizullah's witnessing bridges the gaps of creating figurative homelands purely from imagination. That is, this witnessing provides a more authentic and powerful depiction of the legacy of the 1971 War of Independence, specifically in how past violence remains always present for the birangonas. However, this strategy contrasts powerfully with the final image, which hinges on the word "hollow" in the penultimate line. Despite her witnessing through the accounts of the birangonas, the poem concludes still, on an imagistic representation of unanswered questions: of missing women and histories, of anecdotes that will remain unknown. The end of the poem highlights that there are experiences Faizullah cannot articulate, both because it is impossible to interview every birangona, and because of her own positionality as a woman raised in America in the 1980s. The image of the saris, which closes the poem, is naked of any body; the saris themselves are an image representing how Faizullah shapes both presence and absence in her poetry.

Closing Comments

This study was intended to examine how poetry realises figurative homelands for second-generation immigrants in the works of Kazim Ali, Fatimah Asghar, and Tarfia Faizullah, three Muslim, South Asian American poets. It consisted of three sections, organised by theme: intergenerational inheritance and storytelling; the misrecognition of Muslims in post 9/11 America; and metaphorical representations of loss. This organisational strategy allowed for a close examination of the intersections and variances between Ali's, Asghar's, and Faizullah's poetic works. This was a natural choice, given that these poets published their first poetry collections in a similar climate – a post-9/11 context (and thus, within the last two decades) – and their most recent works were published in close proximity between 2018 - 2019. In placing Ali, Asghar, and Faizullah directly in discussion with one another, this study highlighted both similarities and differences among them that may have otherwise been overlooked.

One of the most intriguing similarities found across the entirety of this study was that each poet displayed a significant interest in sequence poems or poems that bend genre. This gestures at how diaspora poetics have a keen focus on "shifting space," and places importance on the flexibility to take temporal or geographical leaps, to thread together multiple voices or consciousnesses, and to reimagine or transfigure the same moment several times within a piece – all while remaining in the same figurative homeland. Consequently, it was made apparent that poetry's ability to cross time and space is crucial to constructing figurative homelands for the migrant identity. The sequence poem symbolises lines of flight and reconnection – the ability to move forward and backward simultaneously – and these techniques therefore demonstrate diaspora as multidirectional. As shown through this study's analysis, the figurative homeland accounted for those shifting spaces that proliferate these authors' works. It was a place for poets to reconcile their multiplicity and challenge notions of the terms: "country of origin" and "new

country." This is particularly crucial for second-generation immigrants as both terms are not accurately representative of their various homelands.

Chapter One of this study highlighted another interesting similarity: in their poems about trauma, both Asghar and Faizullah centralised the mother figure's body. In these particular works, violence tended to be illustrated through the natural world, whether in the increasingly dangerous mimetic glow of Faizullah's green pond water in "1971," or the overriding grasslands, which consumed the image of Asghar's mother's legs, in "How We Left: Film Treatment." This similarity, as well as several others (in form and lineation, for example), between Asghar's and Faizullah's poems about trauma undoubtedly linked their works. Analysing Faizullah's inherited witnessing of the 1971 War of Independence immediately next to Asghar's imagined witnessing of Partition (1947) unearthed unavoidable resonances. The structure of this essay itself demonstrated how the fragmentations and tensions that followed Partition were deeply felt in the War, and within the analysis, the violences almost seemed to deterritorialise and reterritorialise one another. In contrast, likely because he is not writing about trauma in the same way, this Chapter found that Ali was less determined to reimagine the landscapes of the countries that make up his ancestral homeland. Instead, his inheritance – and, thus, his ancestral homeland – was primarily illustrated in articulations of faith, and particularly in his father's observance of Islam.

That said, faith is certainly the map that connects each poet to one another. While each may practice (or not practice) differently, Islam was a critical motif throughout this study. On the subject of misrecognition and "unhoming" in the Western homeland, these three poets appeared to agree. Chapter Two found that each poet "writes back" to systems of oppression in America, reclaiming Islam from its harmful constructions by white America in a post-9/11 context. Invocations and symbols of Islam were tenderly expressed and utilised to build a strong sense of community. However, by studying only their most recent collections, this chapter also illustrated ongoing aggressions and cycles of oppression; this was demonstrated through work still explicitly

about the "two towers," and 9/11's enduring impact on a sense of belonging for brown bodies in the West. Also apparent from this study was that, in the wake of 9/11, literature and media played a large role in orientalist and damaging views of Islam. This is perhaps one of the reasons why Ali, who has been publishing poetry since 2005, concretely placed his first two collections in Muslim contexts (*The Far Mosque* and *The Fortieth Day* both referring to Islamic practices) – to challenge the destructive views that proliferated Western media. Although slow to change, as demonstrated by these recent collections still being (necessarily) in conversation with 9/11, this study examined how Ali, Asghar and Faizullah also found a sense of belonging in the figurative homeland. It illustrated how these poets constructed a "we" that authentically considered their ancestral and Western homelands, and in which they built a sense of security.

Chapter Three addressed a commonality often expressed by second-generation immigrant diasporic subjects – the sense of being split, divided, or fragmented between varying histories, experiences, and narratives. It found that, in addition to illustrating multiplicity through *presence*, such as through the shaping of stories told and retold, and through each poet's embodiment of an inherited past (as discussed in earlier chapters), the figurative homeland also acknowledged *absence*. At the confluence of difference, which was experienced as the simultaneity of time and/or space, gaps were formed, and it was made apparent that aspects of Western and ancestral homelands remained unknowable for these authors. This was revealed through the (in)accessibility of languages, imagistic representations of fractured or displaced bodies, and poetic forms veined with white space, grid lines, blank pages, and so on. This chapter ultimately emphasised metaphorical representations of loss. However, to echo the Introduction of this study, it also clarified that diasporic identities in the twenty-first century have access to methods of research and discovery that bridge gaps and promote both new imagined, and real, communities. Increased globalisation, diasporic digital technologies, and a re-evaluation of diaspora as multidirectional, not merely a *looking back*, were shown to supplement imagination, reproduction, and recreation of figurative homelands.

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