The bodies who tell stories: tracing Deleuzian becoming in the auto/biographies Iranian female refugees

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ABSTRACT

The undercurrents of autobiographies can reveal more than just stories to their readers. The entanglement of authors and readers provokes the dialogic imagination and reproduces a text beyond the book. I ask how this entanglement can be addressed through notions of representation, subjectivity and embodiment. The article explores auto/biographies of two Iranian female refugees to trace the emergent process of their dialogic voices. Their voices are followed through their portrayal of body and home in transnational settings. I read their tales of desire and sorrow while departing from the Bakhtinian dialogic imagination to frame the narratives of embodiment and home in the mode of Deleuzian becoming.

Whenever I – an anthropologist – am asked during fieldwork what my story is, I reply that I have lived the life of a thousand stories. I have lived both the stories that I collect and also the stories that I read. I live them along those who share the stories either through the music of their voices or the touch of their words on the page. The written tales that are captive between the bindings of a book and imprisoned on pages hold endless charm me for me. Auto/biographies and memoirs, however, form a distinctive genre. They narrate and become performative in themselves within the boundaries of the book, its language and emerging life, while my curious eyes observe the body of the narrator. To this effect, I first examine Karpinski's recollection of the Bakhtinian dialogic imagination in order to highlight the inefficiencies of this approach. I then propose to broaden the dialogic voice through the notion of becomings which is inspired by Gilles Deleuze. The discussion will lead to a “reading” (Felman) of The last Living Slut Born in Iran Bred Backstage by Roxana Shirazi (2010) and A Beginners Guide to Acting English by Shappi Khorsandi (2010) in order to explain how auto/biographies convey becomings and fragmented selves.
I here choose to focus on the auto/biographies of two Iranian female refugees to examine Kaprinski’s method of framing auto/biographies. I explore the auto/biographies of Roxana and Shappi by tracing two constituting elements of their narratives: body and home beyond their homelands. These elements highlight the “precarious life” (Butler 134) of the female refugees who discover their bodies while encountering networks of signification which are different from those of their homelands. Meanwhile, I take note of the impact of the tactile existence of the books that contain the tales of female refugees as well as I – the reader – to include reflections of my role as the one who has chosen them for the exploration and analysis. I shall do so by critically departing from a Bakhtinian dialogic voice and developing a Deleuzian framework of becoming to inform an approach to reading the auto/biographies. It is my hope to trace the fragmented flows of becoming and understand the precarious life of those who are forsaken by their homelands like me. I am writing about these refugees at a moment when Europe is facing difficult times. It is an unusual feeling to write while many of the refugees stand by the fences and growing walls around “fortress Europe” (Lutz 93).

**Arriving through time, body and intensity**

Many scholars have addressed the question of subjectivities and selves within the frame of auto/biographies (see Perreault 32; Smith and Watson 37). For instance, Eva Karpinski proposes an approach to auto/biography through a framework inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin and Bakhtin’s notion of “dialogic imagination” (1981). Such notion aptly highlights how one “invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium” (293). Karpinski follows the self-infused discourse and storytelling to address the dialogic relations within the fabric of human life through texts and auto/biographies. She suggests that dialogic relations are constituted by diverse elements both from inside and outside of texts. Elements such as authors, readers, publishers, cover designers, political lives, nostalgia and desires collide and overlap in networks of relations and realities. They provide channels for dialogic voices to emerge all around them. The emerging dialogic voices are not restrained to the temporal dimension of ongoing-s (present) or bygones (past), but they also echo to the yet-to-come (future) too. Subjectivities and selves interact with the fluid movements of dialogic voices across the temporal marks and linguistic formations.

Bakhtin implies an embedded futurity within the dialogic voices by insisting on two aspects of subjectivity. First, dialogic voices underscore “the unfinalizability of one’s inner personality” (60) as they are configured in a constant projection toward the yet-to-come. Second, the dialogic voices are narratives in progress that demand an avoidance of reducing individuals into “sociohistorical categories” (37). In other words, narrative voices and individuals retain their subjectivity due to the never-ending process of formation. They are portrayal of “subjects in-process”
Therefore, Karpinski advocates for a Bakhtinian notion of dialogues and she articulates a reading method for auto/biography through it. She states “a dialogizing approach means avoiding totalizing and reterritorializing readings that stabilize and domesticate difference and arrest dialogic productivity” (203). Her framework emphasizes a constant flow of non-totalized subjectivities amongst the constitutive elements that bring the autobiography together.

I wonder, however, if we – as human and nonhuman fellows forming dialogic relations – can only be summarized in attempts of not totalizing and not becoming a totality. Are we condemned to break totalities and categories? Is this the only way to read the auto/biographies in an open-minded fashion? Aren't we more than just cranky teenagers trying to break free of the parental shackle? Further, how can we avoid turning a non-totalizing act into a totality and canon? These are the questions that bring me to a different reading style of auto/biography; to crafting another approach for the voices that are “becoming” (Deleuze 1994) dialogic. My intention is not to advocate categories and totalities but rather to promote an approach that recognizes the simultaneity of desires and rejection toward them. Both Bakhtin and Deleuze advocate for an inchoate and incomplete life that cannot be limited in the form of being, but it may be understood in the fluxes of becoming. However, I foreground the theories of Gilles Deleuze because his Bergsonian notions of time and intensity reveal the mechanisms of auto/biography in a clearer light. His style exposes the engineering of narratives without transforming non-totalizing attempts to a totality and canon. A Deleuzian becoming brings fluidity to concepts by addressing the generative qualities of auto/biography. This is a fluidity that does not intend to break totalities but flows through them.

**Surplus, totality, and the latent desire**

The act of non-totalizing, in the manner of Bakhtin and Karpinski, while reworking the totalized method, turns to a totalizing method. Their attention is limited to processes and relationality which inverts their method into becoming the totality that it initially proposed to break. The circular progress from an anti-canon/anti-totality to a totality restrains an open-ended and imaginative reading of auto/biography. This may seem like the usual circular progress of intellection and intellectual musings; however, inspirations from Deleuze offer a way out of this challenge. Let me begin by addressing the insufficiencies of the method from which I am departing. Bakhtinian dialogic relations neglect two constituting forces of “bio” in auto/biography: first, the surplus of the self who initiates the dialogic imagination; and second, time as imagined and lived by the self. The lack of attention to these two forces disables and contributes to totalizing dialogic productivity.

The first force is located at the emergent point of auto/biography. The emergent point is where the body flows into the writings and meets the intersecting flows of language and later readers. The body is the first step in initiating the kinetic
act of writing, in encountering the symbolic impositions language, in seeking the narrative voice and finally, in awaiting the readers. The initiation, the encounter, the seeking after and the waiting configure the text beyond a book. The text is a configuration of elements beyond authors, authorship, readers and readership. In sum, the body meets the “text” beyond the book (Iser 1972). I add another dimension to the text, the tactile existence of the book since we are in the age of electronic books on the verge of failure (see Tenopir 1997; Manoff 2000). However, highlighting an emergent point does not imply an absolute and actuated origin: instead it addresses the threshold of departure from one flow to other flows. It addresses all others that have delivered the emergent point specific to the author. The emergent point does not come about arbitrarily or with no substantiation. It is where body and mind meet each other, where an intense fragment of the self is enacted or where a vibrant splinter of splintered life overwhelms. The intense fragment or vibrant splinter watches over all other fragments and splinters. It is not that which traditionally is called the “core self” (see Kammeyer-Mueller, Judge and Scott 2009) but the fold that has reached so much intensity and affective quality that it stands more visible in the realm of lived experience of the author. The emergent point is the fold, vibrant with intensity, that stimulates the “bio” of auto/biographies.

The surplus is the performative quality of the intensified vibrant fold. The inclusion of intensity does not disregard all the other flows and folds. It highlights the enacted emergent point that has turned that specific fold into a narrative voice. The surplus is the very kernel of authors and narratives that “resists integration-dissolution” (Zizek 1989) into the cacophony of dialogues. It insists on remaining intact and monolithic by virtue of articulation and by submitting itself in the totality of the narrative categories, genres and languages. In other words, every author abides the tyranny of certain totalities but she may resist them through creative modes of narrativity. The latent desire to be totalized and subjected to the category, however, be it sociohistorical or be it a genre, is chosen by her only and only if it is fulfilled by herself, the author. In sum, the author agrees to the totality in order to exercise her creativity within the given limitations.

The tension of surplus and totality can be explained through an example. Manuel DeLanda, the author of a new philosophy of society, related an anecdote in his lecture at the European Graduate School. He recounted how he learnt the extent of submission and resistance toward another in a BDSM club. In this context he witnessed a woman leashed in a leather collar and chained to a bar stool whilst her “master” let wax tears of a burning candle drop over her. It seemed to DeLanda that she enjoyed it, but there were moments of objection and growling too. She would warn the master with her angry gaze whenever he acted hastily, and when the wax tears fell faster than her desired pace. This is the perfect example of how surplus operates according to submission and resistance to it. These elements lend to each other simultaneity. The surplus calls on the being of a totality through submission at the altar of language; that which Lacan calls “symbolic
order” (1973). However, the surplus is not a static modes of existence; it bears intensity and tension within itself. The surplus becomes the negotiating point of temporal dimensions, the fragmented self and the impacting vectors of life that are knitted into the flux of becoming. The surplus is the one fold that remains intense; it holds back from dialogic productivity but it places itself in the safety of submission to a totality. The surplus-as-placed-in-totality stands as the integral wave that conveys the auto/biography – the subject of my argument here.

Tracing the surplus exposes an identity politics that overarches the dialogic voices, although, as Karpinski suggests, “reducing individuals into 'sociohistorical categories' … might be seen as one of the pitfalls of reading life writing through identity politics” (202). One can include the arguments of identity politics into the life writing without risking reductionism if only a cartography of the surplus is executed at first. The cartography demonstrates the emergence of identity politics while surplus operates in the form of exoconsistency which is its relationship with outside elements while maintaining its endoconsistency. For instance, the surplus of an author submits itself to categories like gender, genre and language while it sustains its endoconsistency. The endoconsistency is the network of relationships within the poesies of an author, for example, her emotions and pleasure of telling a story; the pleasure of exhibiting all that is not told beyond private life. The exoconsistency and endoconsistency portray how the surplus binds the network of signification. The vast network that includes not only the impacting vectors of without but also subsumes the correlating vectors of within. The surplus is enacted both rigid and fluid simultaneously. The idea of surplus is based on the fact that recognizing the network of signification, correlations and the web of dialogic voices must not disregard what is held back. The surplus is the reminder of the body and flesh that exists prior to the meanings. It is the reality that reminds the author is made from flesh and feels the flesh beyond all idealism and operations of minds. Tracing the surplus calls for attention to simultaneous workings of identity politics, subjectivities, socio-historical categories and body along with the materiality of a book that conveys the auto/biography. I shall return to that later.

The second force is the time that is narrated in the auto/biography. Remembered time destabilizes the Bakhtinian dialogic voice because time oscillates between the surplus and other fragments of the self that are dispersed across dialogic voices of the auto/biography. It traverses the linear organization of past, present and future. The auto/biography displaces time from its linear formation. Every past event appears as the narrative of present and the future of every past event is felt through present and on-going time as accessed by a reader. The future projections and past memories bring about what is experienced by a reader as present. The reader receives the past when the author’s tales come to an end, and the publishers have embarked on distribution and selling the tale. In other words, past, present and future are packaged in a book that speaks of bygones but the reader experiences those times differently. However, the question remains: how is the past narrated and how are bygones are treated? Are bygones remembered
and articulated in steps of a calendar or they are enmeshed into a setting that disregards the past that is prior to present and future? Bergson and, following him, Deleuze explain time in the auto/biographical manner. They describe time that is messy and is not a series of passing moments. Bergson realized the importance of remembering and its link with time and therefore portrayed a time which is formed as a whole. The whole-form time is contained within instants and moments that have their own place, and that are internally linked with every other instant. This present instance is the perfect time to imagine the dialogic imaginations and productivity in it.

I argue for the whole-form time to complete the notion of becoming against the theoretical shortcomings of Bakhtinian dialogism. However, I would not trace the notions of time within the autobiographies discussed in this article. I discuss notions of time in my theoretical framework to offer sufficient insights on Deleuzian becoming and its application in reading auto/biographies. The notion of time operates at two levels in reading of auto/biographies: at the first level, it operate in-between the fragmented selves, surplus and disjointed memories of an author. At the second level, readers experience an author’s “bygone” time in the form of their own ongoing time from the moment that they pick up the book. Readers senses their time within the maze of time of their “Others” (Lacan 2006) as if each instant of time stands by itself rather than being dependent on other instants. The variety of instances correlate to each other and co-create the whole-form time with each other without overshadowing one another. However, the affective intensity of time portrayed by the auto/biography can overwhelm a potential reader. The reader dissolves personal time within the enchantment of an author’s lived time. Therefore, time and surplus create the text regardless of the linear annals of histories. Time is remembered by an author, and by readers, by virtue of the performative quality of auto/biographies. Consequently, I doubt if “the [linear] temporal dimension of any utterance” (Karpinski 203) could necessarily be accounted for “foreseeing future potentialities” (203) that are confined in the narrative and the book. Time within an auto/biography reveals an experience of temporality according convergence of the author and reader rather than one sided impositions.

Similarly, it is appropriate to locate the temporal dimension of any utterance, but this often excludes the author’s experience of time. Historicizing the temporal dimension fixes time within the dialogic productivity rather than permitting the flows of time to emerge in the frames of remembrance belonging to an author. Such demarcation steals time of an author and turns it into a discursive fabulation by others. An author lends the experience of remembered time to her readers. She calls on them to conjoin their experience time with the one of her auto/biography. These are the times, the instants, the pasts and the presents which stand by each other. They uphold each other and flow into each other whilst generating new flows. “The past,” May states, “as well as existing in the present also trails behind it in the form of past moments that were once present” (145).
The pleasure of be-cumming: the body that enjoys her stories

The first auto/biography I will analyze is literally and figuratively the “field of action and significance – leaking out on all sides – mediated by power and knowledge” (Biehl and Locke 317 emphasis added). *Last Living Slut* (hereafter *LLS*) is a carefully designed book that takes the reader on the journey of carnal pleasures of Roxana Shirazi, a self-proclaimed Rock & Roll groupie. Her autobiography is the journey of self-discovery of a young girl who witnessed the brutalities of the Islamic revolution in Iran – the journey that brought her to England as a refugee when she was only ten years old. I begin with the book’s appearance and how it is designed following Whitlock (2005). Whitlock invites us to pay “sharp attention to how these [books] are produced, promoted and marketed” (57) in her study of the narratives of Afghan women. The book cover displays the innocent face of a young girl wrapped with a headscarf and marked with the emblem of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It “elicits both sympathy and advocacy that can be put to quite different political and strategic uses” (55). However, the book does not start with words but with a photo in stark contrast with its cover. The book appears like a diary full of collages and pictures that are explicit with naked bodies and sexual innuendo. The inner cover shows Roxana bare naked, staring at her readers whilst reclining in the tattooed arms of Dizzy Reed of Guns N’ Roses.

The publisher writes in the introduction: she is “a woman who was not a victim, but who made rock bands her victim” (*LLS*, introduction). By the end of her book her tale suggests otherwise, but she allows this to be the opening for her auto/biography. Her autobiography is yet to start. Numbers do not mark the pages until she does not redefine the notion of a slut. She writes to represent “the last living ‘slut’ *embodying* the negative meaning of the word, and the first living ‘slut’ *embodying* a new, positive and celebrated meaning of the word” (*LLS*, “a few thoughts,” emphasis added). I do not dwell on what she makes obvious. However, I explore how she employs the tale of her body and sexual encounters in order to share her stories. To enable this reading I trace Roxana throughout her auto/biography as she writes about her body and home in transnational settings.

The book does not follow a conventional biographic structure. It begins with Roxana in the company of Rock & Rollers with her childhood memories and displacement which come many chapters later. She writes before the beginning of the narrative about “how the concepts of masculine and feminine are merely *performances*” (*LLS*, “a few thoughts,” emphasis original). Roxana understands the performing body and how it impacts upon lives. She articulates a body that is appropriated beyond given categories. The surplus turns fluid as she reconfigures categories through her awareness of the stereotypes about groupies and her intention to break them. However, she remains haunted by stereotypes during her book tour and interviews across social media. Moreover her performative surplus affirms those categories by using seductive and provocative language. She remains within the boundaries of “slut” while she struggles to traverse them.
She immediately begins with a story that makes it difficult not to return to these presumptions. She narrates a fragmented body as she “sways between them [the band Motley Crüe] … eyes glistening with liquid warm honey, mouth parted like meat … needing to be double-penetrated” (LSS 4, emphasis added). She frames the story as if her body parts can turn into a unified body with the force of double-penetration by two rock legends. Simultaneously, she fantasizes about Nikki Sixx’s “rasping gasoline voice that fucks [her] in the cunt” (LSS 5) in-between the desire that is being fulfilled by the double-penetration and the spectacle which she exhibits. It is one desire that unfolds the other, a body in need which is teased by another curiosity.

Roxana presents a body with no shame and guilt. Her auto/biography initially is all about “cunt” and “pussy” until the emotional threshold emerges and the organ becomes “my flower” (LSS 5) or “where it was dirty” (LSS 264). The tale tries to break innocence – pornographic, erotic, sexual, childlike or feminine – but instead it continues to oscillate between them. It is the surplus which appears while all the fragments of her “self” perform in other capacities. Her leaking body becomes the constant center of the narrative; her narration is structured around a bodily response that avoids domination and meanwhile enjoys the dominating gaze. She tries to be “civilized and not spontaneously lactate as [her] femininity begins to open up” (LSS 6) in the presence of Nikki Sixx. She manifests an embodied sexual reaction to Nikki, who states at the top of the same page – at the beginning of the very same conversation – “you sound so angelic” (LSS 6). Roxana writes the auto/biography of a desiring body that needs no vibrator nor an acting sexual organ to seek the phallic. The surplus remains the origin of desiring and other fragments constantly convey suffering as we shall below. She shows an embodiment of “stable identities [which] are dissolved in creative acts [of desire]” (Deleuze 238). However, sometimes the text struggles to be interesting by repeating anecdotes of her sexual adventures.

The narrative of embodiment changes after 17th chapter when she begins to write about her childhood. She remembers living with “old-school hippies” (LLS 70) away from her ailing grandmother. She admonishes them by stating how they “came to gawk at Me (sic) … [at her] sweaty [body] with the aroma of exotic spices … [at her] fabulous olive skin and traumatized soul” (LLS 71). She articulates her body and how it was marked with difference through an acquired language. The university-graduated Roxana writes the history of her body through discursive impositions about her encounters in the transitional settings. She has formed new imaginaries whilst learning about post-colonialism and transposes them into her memories of past discomfort. There is a constant movement amongst all the shades of Roxana. She portrays an othered body, between the Roxana who did not know English, the Roxana “an Iranian girl with a mustache” who was called “Fuckin Paki” (LLS 71), and then the Roxana who questions her holy temple of Rock & Roll as “dangerously romanticized” (LSS 313). This oscillation amongst the fragments of a self stands in for the experience of becoming.
The occasions when Roxana writes about home provide insight into the repeating chaos of both body and home in her tale. She tells us of her childhood home only after she expresses how Rock & Roll consumed her during the first few chapters. She recalls her “first childhood home” as a place that “belonged to [her] grandmother … [who Roxana] remained basked in [her] pure love and happiness” (LLS 16). She links affection and motherhood with the home that was shadowed by fear. She tried to deregister the violence of the 1979 revolution and enforced Islamic law through the memory of her grandmother and her own mother. Her notion of home is an “assemblage” (Deleuze 21) of mother figures, experiences of political turbulences, the creepy tenant who sexually abuses her and Islamic codes imposed over her sexuality. Roxana constructs a home through her frame of remembrance associated with the emotional imaginaries that she can assemble. The imaginaries of home become the last refuge of the refugee in the transnational setting while she has very little access or possibility of returning to her homeland.

Roxana’s experience of home is at first marked by a mother who is serious, quiet and an active revolutionary; then by her loving grandmother who is wholly unlike the mother; and finally, a distant father who leaves her behind. She cherishes this home even though reminds her of the raid by Shah’s secret police. Roxana juxtaposes both love and horror in the texture of the home that she narrates. She nostalgically remembers her grandmother but shares her experience of pain along her mother with an undertone of adventure. She recounts the horror of incarceration with her mother. Then there is a sudden shift – in the same paragraph – to the fairy-tale experience of playing in “sunshine-soaked dusty alleys” (LLS 18). She turns to the experiences that make her readers aware that her space of belonging is not where everyday life turns into screams and terror. She prefers to narrate a home where she can imagine her grandmother’s food, kitchen and “raw Persian sky” (LLS 18).

The narrative of home finds a new direction, however, when little Roxana finds her mother’s makeup. She marks this discovery as the threshold of her childhood fading away. This threshold is formed within the notion of a home where love cannot protect her. Violence and political turmoil, an absentee father, sexual abuse and the recognition of bodily changes lead Roxana into the threshold that transforms her narrative home. She remembers a home in the form of a bygone that haunts her present. Her embodiments of that home frame her unconventional journey into the back stages of Rock & Roll. Her childhood home was infused with “the delicious dark thrill” (LLS 33) of masturbation, the violence of invasion, and the shadow of abuse. Interestingly, these are same undercurrents within the texture of the home that she builds in the United Kingdom’s backstage of Rock & Roll. She harnesses the dark thrill and forms a lifestyle from it. She resists and struggles with the structural violence embedded in the UK against her. Finally, she is abused and betrayed by a male figure whom she previously trusted in the world
of Rock & Roll. The repeating patterns are uncanny. The re-emerging textures of her becoming in the transnational setting provide the home away from homeland.

I end this section through an example of intensity. As I implied earlier, one particular layer becomes more vibrant and intense amongst the layers of the fragmented self. The intensity pushes that specific layer to dominate the auto/biography and color the narrativity. Roxana returns to carnal pleasures throughout her narrative, but they take an unusual turn almost 100 pages into the book. Sexuality and her desiring body vanishes while she shares the tales of pain and discrimination. She doesn’t tell tantalizing anecdotes of falling for schoolmates or sleeping around. Instead she narrates being “othered.” Her narrative is of a body that is shamed and pointed at instead of desired by herself and others. The process of the embodiment is solidified through her pain and memories of the transnational setting. She arrives at the point when she exhaustedly confesses “I was different” (LLS 72) and asks, “had we given up love for this?”

The laughter all along becoming

Shappi Khorsandi penned her auto/biography A Beginner’s Guide to Acting English (henceforth BGA) while she was collecting recognition and smiles during her tour around Europe. Her autobiography narrates a stand-up comedian who ridicules modernity, Occidentalism, Orientalism, race and ethnicity with no hesitation and shames them with her satire. Unlike Roxana, Shappi experienced being a refugee. She left Iran when she was three years old and the revolution brewed in its corners. There were still four years remaining until the days when blood flowed on the streets. She traveled to Europe with her family because her father was assigned as a foreign correspondence in the United Kingdom. The cover of her book portrays the exotic palm tree and a mystical Persian dome while a globe-trotting cartoonish family runs to another side. They run toward a modern home with a well-pruned tree in front of it. Satire is conveyed through the comical fonts of the title, which implies how to act like the “English.” The book begins with a small low-resolution photo of the grown up Shappi before telling about the difficulties that the little Shappi had to endure in a British school.

Shappi articulates adjectives in manner of a politically incorrect stand-up comedian: Brits who were aliens for her, and speaking “gobbledegook” (BGA 1); a London that was not “red, white and blue but grey” (BGA 37); becoming a little “puppet” for “Englissee” people instead of “jaan” (Farsi equivalent for darling) (BGA 4); and “funny looking people [Brits] who did not smile” (BGA 44). Shappi’s auto/biography is structured around her process of settling into a new language and how she recognized cultural differences through language. She writes the tale of a girl “who understood made up language better” (BGA 4, 108), with a father “who could not be funny in English because he did not know enough words” (BGA 8). He warned her “we are here to learn English not to forget Farsi” (BGA 218). She recalls her father scorning the Iranians who try
to “elevate” their stature by forgetting their native language. These differences become the mark of an unaccounted realization that she is neither from here nor from there.

I will survey language briefly before moving to the quest for the body. Language constitutes Shappi’s becoming and highlights her experience of displacement. Tracing her tale of language exposes identity politics in her narrative and “not the matter of searching for an origin but rather evaluating displacements” (Deleuze 61). Hence, I follow how Shappi embodies the displacements while growing into the new textures of body and home. Six years old Shappi thought “English is all ‘shshshshsh’ and ‘aar’ and ‘ow’ although she had been for a while in the new English school. She remembers asking her friend ‘shoosharaaarsh?’ when she actually wants to ask “do you want to play?” (BGA 108). Learning the new language, transitioning into its phonetics and learning the sound of it are her “displacement.” The displacement unfolds identity politics within the trajectories of her becoming beyond her homeland. The trajectory that takes along with it uncertainties of her life as she gets confused between the Farsi and English alphabet. She was taught Farsi at home and English in the “Englissee” school. She recalls that the confusion shadowed her long enough that she “carried on throughout school knowing that if [she] made a guess, there was a 50% chance of getting it right” (BGA 110). The yo-yoing movement between home, school, language, and cultural difference in the transnational settings forms Shapphi’s becoming while she recognizes how body can become the marker of difference.

Shappi comes to a realization of her body while becoming an exotic object for “Brits.” She discovers her own image through the gaze of others. She encounters being different through those who call her “Paki” or fuss over her and her brother’s “beautiful brown skin, shiny curly hair” (BGA 85). Shappi’s auto/biography conveys the tale of integrating an othered body within bodies. I place emphasis on integration because she wants to be treated the same as the blonde white girls in her school. She wants to be the angel in the nativity play in her school, but she is told she can only be the shepherd. She is told with smiles that she can do that because she is “nice and dark” (BGA 164). Her body becomes the mark of coming from somewhere else. She comprehends she is different, and she can only talk to her Indian schoolmate. She is able to connect to Rana, a dark-featured Indian Tamil because she was “much browner than” Shappi and “could talk to her about coming from Iran” (BGA 251).

One can see the transition in Shappi’s imagination of herself merely by tracing the linear formation of the tale: Shappi, at first, imagines herself a girl and just different from her brother. Then, she encounters the detailed marks that turn her to the other who does not belong to the UK. The tensions and frictions of belonging turn her body to the center of becoming until she develops a stress-eating-disorder. However, the pressure is not sensed only outwardly and as against white natives. She turns against her mother who wears a scarf and appears “religious” (BGA 221). Shappi explicitly tells her mother that she does not want to be an Iranian
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anymore (BGA 292) since it is such a disadvantage in her life. “Acting like an English” becomes an intensified fold of her becoming as she despises her mother’s “bloody foreignness” (BGA 233). The displaced body and cultural bodily markers make her aware of her corporeality, manner, and bodily attitude. Shappi experiences the life of being othered long before taking the label of refugee. London is her second home, but it becomes the place of refuge when she loses the chance of returning to Iran. The constant yo-yo between who she is whilst at home with her parents and who she desires to be while outside amongst Brits brings about the disturbed flux of becoming. The tension is the symptom of the subject who is trying to arrive but “stuck in the middle and never exactly an English” (BGA 252).

Shappi’s story demonstrates that home, like the body, is another marker of recognizing the differences in transnational settings. The author is aware home is somewhere special rather than spatial. She writes how her mother was embarrassed when she saw two “punks” kissing in public and was told by them “go home uptight Bitch.” The little Shappi was amused: “Why did they tell us to go home? … we were going to the museum there then go home” (BGA 47, emphasis original). At this moment, she does not distinguish between homes because they evolve around the imaginaries which constitute her territory of embodiment: family, other “Iroonies,” languages, and school. Her home at the time of this anecdote is the flat that they have bought in England as “a commitment to our new life” (BGA 83). “Home” becomes the word play between the punks, the mother and the little Shappi, who decodes the words through her own semiotics rather than that of the grownups.

Shappi has a home in Iran, but she has almost lost it by the end of her autobiography. However, it is the network of realities all around her that make her imaginaries home. For instance, Iranian expatriates who encircle her family in London make her feel at home in the UK until the revolution ruptures her life. The constant getting together brings about an idea of home, where although it smells like Iranian food and her grandmother, it remains a possibility in the transnational setting. The “home away from home” is a simultaneity that she creates and that enables her to navigate life. She writes “these parties were part of our lives the way milk and biscuit were part of our lives too” (BGA 54). Seeking the home through imaginaries implies the surplus that is held back: the surplus that absorbs the intensity of becoming a bilingual, of finding a new home and of different bodies.

The Iranian revolution brings about a rupture that seizes not only her physical access to her home (in Iran); she loses the constituents of her imaginaries too. Her father’s friends who maintained connections with Iran “disengaged from [his] circle” (BGA 167). The revolution brought down the bridges to her former home because her father was declared the enemy of the revolution. He was rejected by the revolution, which he had supported against the injustice of Shah’s regime. The patriarchal foundation of her home beyond the homeland becomes apparent when they cannot go back to Iran because of the Father. The Father cannot return home, and such a turn of events forces them to apply for the refugee status. The book
ends while Shappi and her family are registered refugees. They are perplexed by their documents and status. The documents states: they are allowed to travel to every other place on the planet except the homeland from which they originally came. The surplus that seeks home questions the documents while she asks “why Baba couldn’t be normal?” (BGA 269). Her auto/biography ends but she adds a note after the ending that brings different colors to her story. I shall discuss that in the conclusion.

Knitting the becoming, self, and stories

I left Roxana in despair of the discrimination in her school and Shappi with the distress of broken bridges. I re-told their stories not to bring clarity to their sense of home and body or reduce embodiment to an obscure concept. Instead, I elucidated the entangled process and incoherent mechanism of embodiment by following the model of the Deleuzian becoming. For instance, Roxana oscilates amongst sexual abuse and carnal pleasures in the past while discovering new desires in her on-going present to bring together and shape the flows of her becoming beyond her homeland. She narrates the contrasting feelings, reoccurring patterns, and nostalgia that render her auto/biography an example for an inchoate life in becoming. The fragmented selves scattered in her life-journey come together across one story to deliver how she perceives herself by way of body and home – the story which is the tale of her adventure backstage in the Rock & Roll world. Her surplus overarches her story; she began with Rock & Roll and she ends with it. She ends her auto/biography disappointed by the world of Rock & Roll and tries to distinguish herself through a nostalgic desire for the past that delivers her to the present. Roxana writes at the end “I was full of heart … full of the sunshine my mother and grandmother had fed me every morning, noon and night in Iran” (LLS 303). Her becoming takes a turn toward the past that crawls up to take over her future.

Shappi narrates her remarkable moment of becoming after the birth of her son. She reflects on the ethnicity of her newborn and asks the nurse to mark “other” on the birth certificate. She writes “despite his English father … my son is ‘other’ like me. There is something liberating about this. We the other are not defined by the color we are or by the place we happen to have been born” (BGA 307). Shappi has realized her becoming through the surplus and experience of body at large. The reoccurring experience of being different and the incessant presence of the body has intensified her affirmation of the surplus while furthering her journey. She expresses the realization via her new-born who becomes the living reminder of the surplus that marks body. In other words, she has narrated her auto/biography in form of the corporeality that flows in every direction to bring about new becomings and new formations.

This article highlights the necessity of locating time within all the intervening voices across narratives then addresses the surplus of subjectivities that shapes speculative realities of the act of writing and narrating auto/biography. I have
used these examples of auto/biography to emphasize that the surplus that supplies virtuality and desires is born from a quality of life that “brings new virtuality to matter which already harbored in itself the impetus of becoming” (Grosz 11). Therefore, one may seek the bio of an auto/biography with regard to the congress of surplus, becomings, language, belonging at home vs. transnational settings, and tensions of totality vs. anti-totality which flow from body in pursuit of the “necessarily communicating world” (Deleuze 280). Finally, such style of seeking lives of within narratives turns reading of tales of precarity to an act of collaborative storytelling rather than discursive fabulation (Deleuze 280).

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