

A Trajectory of Decoloniality from “De” to “Re” in Fahmida Riaz’s Poem “Come Let Us Create A New Lexicon”

ⁱ *Aniqa Iqbal*

ⁱⁱ *Munazza Yaqoob*

ABSTRACT: *This research explores the trajectory of decolonial praxis in Fahmida Riaz’s poem “Come Let Us Create A New Lexicon,” using theoretical key concepts from decolonial theorists such as Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, and Gloria Anzaldúa. The study traces the progress of this trajectory from “epistemic disobedience” to “epistemic reconstruction” as articulated by Mignolo and Quijano. The research positions this journey within the state of “nepantla” as described by Anzaldúa. Together, these terms facilitate the process of de-essentializing and rethinking colonial epistemologies, leading to a “pluriversal” and multi-perspective worldview. This framework is situated in Riaz’s poetry to analyse how the engagement with these decolonial ideas illustrates the dismantling of colonial/dominant epistemic structures and the reconstruction of diverse narratives through repressed knowledge systems within Pakistani society. Riaz’s poem endeavours to liberate ignored narratives to be incorporated in the central epistemes to build a heterogeneous community. The findings of this study contribute to a nuanced understanding of Pakistani literature and its engagement with decolonial praxis, which becomes a tool for social liberation through epistemic reconstruction.*

Keywords: nepantla, de-coloniality, re-construction, pluriversality

ⁱ. aniquiansari@gmail.com

ⁱⁱ. munazza.yaqoob@iiu.edu.pk

1. Introduction

Fahmida Riaz’s poetry provides an impetus to explore the theoretical and philosophical trends prevalent in Western scholarship. Her poetry delves into the repressed and suppressed aspects of society, which remain ignored and unarticulated by the masses. One such example is her poem “Come Let Us Create a New Lexicon,” which explicitly questions the epistemological making embedded in lexicography that is largely orchestrated by dominant and normative viewpoints. Her call to incorporate culturally diverse and ignored knowledge in the creation of a dictionary serves the decolonial call.

In Pakistani society, the colonial legacy continues to influence intellectual formations where dichotomies of the dominant and the suppressed persist. Although there have been many debates in the domain of decoloniality, there is a significant gap in tracing decolonial praxis theory in Pakistani feminist writings, especially in Urdu. The poem that I chose for this research is primarily written in Urdu. However, this research has used a translated version to navigate the poet’s representation of epistemic disobedience and reconstruction. Fahmida Riaz’s poem “Come Let Us Create a New Lexicon” represents a decolonial trajectory that starts from the “de” of the decolonial theory espoused and elaborated by theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Anibal Quijano, and Walter Dignolo. The research establishes multiple manifestations of “de” of the said theory to maintain that the primary text is an embodiment of “delinking”, “epistemic disobedience”, and “de-essentializing” of the cultures. (Dignolo 451, Dignolo 139, qtd. in Gallien 31). This leads to the “re” of decoloniality that demands “epistemological reconstruction” that can ensure “pluriversality” and a multiplicity of perspectives (Quijano 177, Dignolo 451). Through this lens, the research explores the poet’s ability to handle the hazard of singular subjectivity in lexicography that can lead to an untruthful repository of knowledge.

2. Literature Review

The concept of decoloniality aims to interrogate and “delink” from the living legacies of colonialism in the modern world (Dignolo 451). It seeks to pinpoint the power structures in contemporary global relations by exposing their hegemony over the epistemologies of the neglected,

peripheral loci. Its departure from postcolonial thought is on the terms of “epistemic reconstruction”, as Anibal Quijano maintains, that it acknowledges the knowledges produced by the Global South as valid and equivalent to the central Global North to build a “pluriversal” world (Quijano 177, Mignolo 451). This literature review aims to build a comprehensive discussion on the theory of decoloniality, its evolution, limitations, and edges to build a strong foundation to indulge in research-oriented discussion and analysis to unearth decolonial calls raised by Pakistani poets, such as Fahmida Riaz.

Claire Gallien defines and explains the evolution of decolonial thought as she says it is “a gesture that de-normalizes the normative, problematizes default positions, debunks the a-perspectival, destabilizes the structure, and as a program to rehabilitate epistemic formations that continue to be repressed under coloniality” (Gallien 28). Linguistically speaking, decoloniality begins with verbs prefixed with “de”, indicating a process of undoing the established structures. Over time, its trajectory shifts towards verbs prefixed by “re”, symbolizing a return to reconstruction and reimagining of new forms of autonomy. The same observation can be found in Gloria Anzaldúa’s work *Borderlands/La Frontera*, where she introduces the concept of *nepantla* to capture the transformation of identity reconstruction. She defines *nepantla* as “the uncertain terrain one crosses... when traveling from present identity into a new identity” (qtd. in Gallien 31). For Anzaldúa, this liminal zone enables the “de-centering of the self” and “de-essentializing the cultures,” shifting from “a-perspectivism” to “multiplicity of perspectives.” Through “remembering” and “re-structuring,” *nepantla* paves the way for the formation of inclusive and pluralistic communities (Gallien 32).

Aníbal Quijano’s decolonial concept, i.e., “coloniality of power,” interrogates how colonial structures persist through racialized hierarchies in today’s world. He critiques the “social classification of the world’s population” as a product of “colonial domination” and European hegemony (Quijano 533). He advocates for “epistemological reconstruction”, which becomes liberation of knowledge from “the pitfalls of European rationality/modernity” in favor of “the acknowledgment of the heterogeneity of all reality” (177). This process, he argues, aims toward “social liberation from all power organized as

inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and as domination” (178) to build a world of totality with the multiplicity of narratives and epistemologies.

Furthering Quijano’s thoughts, Walter Mignolo coins the term “delinking”, which, for him becomes an essential tool to achieve the “pluriversality” of knowledge, and reversing colonial power structures operating in the society. “Pluriversality” negates the universality of Western epistemology and the recognition of knowledge systems from outside the Global North. As he develops his argument, he says that “the critique of the modern notion of Totality doesn’t lead necessarily to post-coloniality, but to de-coloniality.” (Mignolo 451, 452). For him, delinking is a “de-colonial epistemic shift” that “brings to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economies, other politics, other ethics” (Mignolo 453). Mignolo incorporates this interdisciplinary approach to highlight decoloniality’s potential materiality in modern power structures, particularly in the domain of knowledge, knowing, and thinking.

Quijano’s later intervention, “Bien Vivir,” rearticulates his earlier framework as “de/coloniality of power,”. This concept positions it as “a continuous orientational axis of social practices” that can address “the existential crisis of the global coloniality of power” (19). His vision extends toward a global “communal association of the world population,” offering “an efficient mechanism to distribute and redistribute rights, obligations, (and) responsibilities” (20). Although his recent rendering appears to be a kind of reinforcement of the already existing ideas. However, the difference is that it emphasizes more on the call to build a communal association. Similarly, in *On Decoloniality: Second Thoughts*, Mignolo calls for a “coalition for change” as a global endeavor that depends “on all the parties interested in building them” (5). He insists on “epistemological decolonization, as decoloniality,” necessary “to clear the way for new intercultural communication” (4). Mignolo and Quijano call for coalition building as a vital step to put decoloniality into praxis to align with the demands of the contemporary world. Another facet that decoloniality adopts as per the challenges of modern times is in the joint venture of Mignolo and E. Walsh, where they problematize the meaning of “pluriversal decoloniality”. Drawing on Adolo Albán Achinte, they advance the idea of “re-existence,” defined as “redefining and re-

signifying of the conditions of ‘dignity’” (Mignolo et al. 3). Through this nexus of theory and praxis, they reinforce the idea that decoloniality has a material existence and the “re-existence” of the people living on the periphery can be claimed through re-signifying the conditions of dignity.

Walter D. Mignolo defines coloniality as “the darker side of Western modernity,” which operates through the “colonial matrix of power (CMP)”. CMP is a structure that gets reinforced by institutions like Christian theology and neoliberalism. He asserts that “decoloniality”, as a thought and a praxis theory, has the potential to “delink” from the contemporary CMP. Mignolo calls it a form of “epistemic disobedience” within modern Western epistemology that can lead to transformations instead of reformations (139). In this context, decoloniality emerges as a non-ethnocentric approach, with Mignolo’s strategic use of the word “disobedience”, accentuating a disgruntled perception of Western centrality towards the others. Similarly, Ramón Grosfoguel cautions that decolonial critique is not confined to the perspective of the oppressed. Rather, it convinces people who are “socially located in the oppressed side of the colonial difference, to think epistemically like the ones on the dominant positions” (Grosfoguel 209). This observation reinforces that decoloniality’s aim is not ethnocentric but the pluriversality of the epistemic body.

Contributing to the decolonial praxis theory, Mafie’o et al. critique the limitations of Western evidence-based methodologies. They argue that these approaches fail to produce “the most useful outcomes in our diverse, naturalistic settings” and may even “distance and dehumanize the very people expected to be beneficiaries.” Instead, they advocate for a “story-saturated” research approach grounded in Indigenous epistemologies. By “owning our stories,” researchers can yield culturally relevant ways of knowing (547).

2.1. Critiques on “Decoloniality”

Ming Dong Gu offers a critical assessment of Mignolo and Catherine Walsh’s rendering and suggests decoloniality’s entanglement with modernity. Citing Mignolo, he notes that “the root cause of coloniality’s enduring strengths lies in its inherent connection with modernity” (Gu 4). Gu further argues that “global coloniality is not only political, economic,

and military but epistemic and cultural in all its domains as well” (249). Distinguishing decoloniality from decolonization, Gu asserts the former seeks “decolonial horizons of liberation,” while the latter is more about “forming sovereign nation-states... out of the ruins of the colonies” (125). Reflecting on Mignolo’s 2020 essay, Gu concludes that “there cannot be modernity/coloniality without decoloniality, and vice versa” (360). This suggests that there is a dialectical relationship between these intertwined concepts.

Although the concept of decoloniality by Mignolo and Quijano has enjoyed an established position in the scholarship of modern epistemes. However, it has faced much criticism as well, as George Hull emphasizes that decoloniality should be free from “distorting bias”, which is a result of colonial and neocolonial power relations (Hull 148). He contrasts it with earlier intellectual decolonization efforts by thinkers like Anthony Appiah and Kwasi Wiredu, whom he calls more “truth-oriented” as they sought to replace “incorrect claims with correct theoretical conclusions” (149). Hull critiques decoloniality’s challenge to “universal truth,” describing it as based on “drastically undermotivated, hyperphilosophizing inferences” (153). He asserts that decoloniality originally aimed to expose “false theoretical claims in social science” rooted in Eurocentric bias (150). Mpofu’s argument seems to answer Hull’s rebuttal by calling decoloniality a “philosophy of liberation” that aims to “rehumanise the dehumanised” (Mpofu). He advocates for a cosmopolitan vision that transcends both Eurocentric and Third World fundamentalisms.

2.3. Fahmida Riaz’s Other Poems

The discussion now needs to shed some light on how Riaz’s poems have been dealt with in research and scholarship to bring a nuanced understanding of the poet’s stance. In her article, Urvashi Sabu presents Riaz as a voice of dissent against patriarchal and religious authoritarianism in Pakistan. Sabu observes that Riaz “takes on Zia’s Islamisation programme by the horns and turns it upside down in contemptuous tones” (203). Sabu explains how Riaz in her poem “Virgin”, dismantles the virginity myth: “the woman and the animal have no say in the ritual... performed at the cost of their individuality, identity, and dignity” (204), and calls out patriarchal theology with, “O Imperious

one! O Proud and Angry one!” (204). Sabu further dissects Riaz’s poem “Aqleema”, where she challenges reproductive determinism through lines: “Above the tangled womb / Aqleema has a head too. / Let God speak to Aqleema sometime / And ask her something!” (205).

Likewise, Basra et al., in their feminist discourse analysis of “Four Walls and a Black Veil”, argue that Riaz “constructs a new identity of the women like the one emerging out of their suppressed origins” and critiques male sexual dominance through lines: “not on this earth merely as a signet / Of your great lust” (432, 435). They also explore how her voice of feminist resistance resounds through such lines: “I have spread my sails / In the open wind” (435). Their linguistic critique delves into Riaz’s poetry that exposes deeply entrenched gendered hierarchies.

Asad Alvi frames Riaz’s poetry as a “decolonial feminism” that crosses boundaries and defies singular narratives. Her self-positioning as a “midnight’s child” critiques post-Partition nationalism where “the men’s desires to protect the new nation would find a metaphor in the woman’s body.” He states that “Badan Dareeda” was labelled “pornographic” for its sensuality, which reflects more about societal discomfort with women’s autonomy. And her poem, “Chadur aur Chardiwari” uses irony to unmask male control through enforced veiling. These studies collectively position Riaz as a radical literary figure reimagining feminism in the Urdu poetic tradition.

In “A Comparative Analysis of the Critique of Patriarchal Social System in the Poetry of Simin Behbahani and Fahmida Riaz,” Ahmadi Shirazi et al. emphasize Riaz’s critique of gendered oppression and note that she “addresses various issues” like forced veiling and “sexual abuse for low wages,” by portraying veiled women as “moving dead” (). They explore that in “Chador and Chardiwari”, Riaz symbolises veil as a deeper systemic patriarchal oppression. Her critique is described as “deep, thoughtful, sharp and reckless, with political connotations and critiques of the ruling power” (Ahmadi Shirazi et al. 102). Khan et al.’s work argues that Riaz’s poetry embodies Third World feminist resistance. Her poetry coalesces “the personal and the political” in “Will You Not See the Full Moon?” (547). Her poetry is branded “naked” and “obscene,” yet her voice remains defiant: she would rather “turn the tears of a mother into the blood of a martyr” than remain silent (548). Through this lens,

Riaz’s poetry is not only literary but revolutionary. They conclude that her poetry embodies “salad bowl feminism” by rooting feminist defiance in specific socio-political contexts.

Lastly, Kamila Shamsie’s remarks about Fahmida Riaz need attention here. Shamsie contextualizes Riaz’s voice within a tradition of dissident Urdu poets. Riaz’s exile, triggered by sedition charges “that carried the death penalty,” reveals how poetic dissent is criminalized when it threatens patriarchal or authoritarian norms (Shamsie and Rahman 196). Yet, Shamsie foregrounds the defiant feminist energy of Riaz’s verse. In “The Laughter of a Woman,” the poet asserts a female agency: “Wealth, power and fame mean nothing / In her body, hidden, lies her freedom” (198). Shamsie uses such lines to demonstrate how Riaz reclaims female sexuality as a site of sovereignty, which remains inaccessible to the state. The existing researches establish Fahmida Riaz as a vital figure in political and feminist discourse, yet her poems remain unexplored in the context of decoloniality. This research seeks to address that gap by analysing her poem “Come, Let Us Create a New Lexicon” within a decolonial framework.

3. Theoretical Framework

The research intends to build a framework that will encapsulate the trajectory of decolonial praxis theory that starts from the prefix “de” as in Mignolo’s concept of “epistemic disobedience”. This leads to Quijano’s term with the added prefix “re” in “epistemic reconstruction”. This disobedience takes place in the state of “Nepantla”, as Gloria Anzaldua describes it as a state where “de-essentializing the cultures” occurs that leads to the self from “a-perspectivism” to “multiplicity of perspectives”. Drawing on these theorists, I argue that social liberation, manifested through a diversity of perspectives, begins with epistemic disobedience and subsequently fosters social epistemic reconstruction, as illustrated through the primary text. The framework is positioned within Fahmida Riaz’s poem “Come Let Us Create A New Lexicon”.

4. Research Objectives

The research sets its objective to develop a framework to analyze "epistemic disobedience" and "epistemic reconstruction," which are represented in Fahmida Riaz’s poetry “Come Let Us Create A New

Lexicon” to achieve a “multiplicity of perspectives” for communal building. Also, it aims to explore repressed epistemologies and how these repressed voices are articulated in the selected literary text.

5. Research Question

The research sets to answer the following research question:

1. How does Fahmida Riaz’s poem, “Come Let Us Create A New Lexicon” provide an enactment of the concepts of epistemic disobedience and epistemic reconstruction in the context of “nepantla” for building a diversity of perspectives in lexicography by relinquishing the orthodox linear narratives to obtain social liberation?

6. Discussion and Analysis

I have chosen Fahmida Riaz’s poem “Come Let Us Create A New Lexicon”, a translated version of her Urdu poem “Nai-Dictionary”, as a response to the call of decolonial praxis theory. This framework asserts that the epistemologies of the non-Western, suppressed, marginalized and outgroup should be treated as equals, fostering a “pluriversal” epistemological social construction. Riaz recited this poem at the Critical Discourse session conducted by the Sindh Education Foundation, where she reflected on her role as an editor of the Urdu dictionary published by the foundation the previous year. As Zubeida Mustafa quotes her that it “traces the history of our civilisation... a discourse on 1,000 years of our culture, tradition, and customs”. In discussing the national psyche of Pakistan, she maintains that they tend to adhere to their conventional beliefs while negating whatever contradicts their popular perceptions. She believes there should be inclusivity of perceptions of the knowledges in lexicography, and a singular subjectivity can lead to biased and untrue narratives (Mustafa). What is especially striking is that Riaz talks about the Urdu dictionary in a session held by the Sindh Education Foundation, which can be interpreted as addressing the very clash between the ethnic language Sindhi and the national lingua franca, Urdu. In doing so, she not only resolves but also creates room for “pluriversality”, distancing from central and dominant narratives.

6.1. Epistemic Disobedience in Riaz’s Poetics

Fahmida Riaz’s poem “Come Let Us Create a New Lexicon” is a literary manifestation of the decolonial praxis theory. The poem starts with a recurring invitation: “Come let us create a new lexicon” (1, 21, 38). This serves as a metaphor of linguistic and epistemic reconstruction within the body of lexicography. This call aligns with Walter Mignolo’s concept of “epistemic disobedience,” which refuses to comply with hegemonic systems of knowledge production that perpetuate colonial hierarchies. Here, Riaz is not suggesting a change in vocabulary, but also advocating for such a kind of rethinking that shapes meaning, identity, and social relations. Delving deeper into the poem, the following lines highlight the purpose of the subject’s epistemic disobedience: “swallow like bitter potion / The truth of a reality that is not ours” (4–5). These lines are deemed as the site of the epistemic reconstruction, as they will debunk the power-centric notion of their reality that is not theirs. In doing so, they embody an act of decoloniality that involves configuring and reconfiguring their epistemologies. The early lines invoke an awareness of inherited discourses: “Wherein is inserted before each word / Its meaning that we do not like” (2–3). This insertion represents a deliberate re-examination of imposed values. This can be seen as an act of delinking from Mignolo’s “colonial matrix of power”, another facet of decolonial theory, that defines the already operational systematic subjugation, in particular knowledge production, in his book *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*. Contextualizing CMS in the given poem, it can be said that it sustains itself through linguistic, religious, and epistemic dominance. Within the context of the poem, the line “The water of life bursting forth from this stone” (6) can be read as a symbol of CMP, a force that shapes and determines reality according to colonial logic. However, the subsequent line “takes a course not determined by us alone” not only makes a deliberate attempt to break away from Mignolo’s symbolic CMP but also aligns with his concept of “delinking”. The speaker acknowledges the discomfort and violence inherent in confronting truths shaped by others, while exposing how these knowledges have long been misrepresented and have silenced marginalized voices.

6.2. Delinking from Hegemony: Riaz's Lexicon as Decolonial Strategy

Creating a new lexicon becomes an act of “delinking” from the canons of hegemonic social epistemes that tend to misrepresent truthful knowledge. At the same time, it also empowers subjects to reclaim their version of reality. This is also an act of epistemic disobedience, as the subjects are “resisting the coloniality of knowledge” operating at the social level (Mignolo 30). As Ramón Grosfoguel, insists, “the success of the modern/colonial world system consists in making subjects that are socially located in the oppressed side of the colonial difference, to think epistemically like the ones on the dominant positions” (Grosfoguel). Fahmida Riaz's poem conveys the exact decolonial mindset when they want to project such a kind of lexicon that is equivalent to the knowledge produced by the dominant side. Overall, the literal paraphrasing of the poem reflects on the dominant narratives produced by the power structures that undermine and misrepresent knowledges by blocking a spectrum of subjectivities. Gallien aptly puts forth this thought that “being socially located on the oppressed side of power does not automatically imply that one is thinking decolonially” (Gallien 31). Rather, decolonial praxis demands thinking “epistemically like the ones in the dominant positions” (Grosfoguel). Through this perspective, Fahmida Riaz's endeavor to propose an alternative “lexicon” that delinks and dismantles the hegemonic social narratives ensures a “pluriversality” of the knowledge with the socio-cultural environment of Pakistan. The poem's ending in the word “potentials,” “in which you and me are equal / Before which we and they are the same” (36–37) also embodies Mignolo's “pluriversal” horizon, where knowledge and being are not organized hierarchically but dialogically. This articulation resists essentialist identities and envisions a cosmopolitan and rehumanizing goal of decoloniality, as described by theorists like Mpfu.

6.3. The Poem as Epistemic Reconstruction

This research aims to trace the decolonial trajectory from “de” to “re”. So far, the analysis has explored the philosophy of decoloniality from the perspectives of the theorists such as Anzaldúa, Quijano, and Mignolo, highlighting their emphasis on delinking and de-essentializing the dominant and established epistemes in order to construct heterogeneity,

the multiplicity of perspectives and “pluriversality” within the system of knowledge. Moving from “de” to “re”, the philosophy of decoloniality demands, in Anzaldúa's words, “re-membering” and “re-structuring” (Gallien 32). Viewed through this lens, the concluding lines of Riaz’s poem resonate the same thought, as she seeks to restructure the lexicon wherein “A word in which you and me are equal/ before which we and they are the same/ So come let us create a new lexicon” (36- 38). Similar to this thought, in Quijano's philosophy, terms such as “reconstruction” and, in Mignolo's works, “re-existence”, “re-defining”, “re-signifying”, and “reformation” appear (Quijano 177, Mignolo et. al. 3, 139). These terms resonate throughout the poem, reflected in expressions like “creating a new lexicon”, and “let us raise our sight to friendship” (1, 32). Mporu's philosophy takes a humanistic approach as he uses the word “re-humanize”, aptly describing the entire purpose of writing the poem to build “friendship” amidst the multiplicity of perspectives (Mporu).

Moreover, the turning point of the poem arises with the questions: “But why should the many hued new horizon / Remain to us distant and unattainable?” (19–20). These lines articulate a yearning for transformation. This desire moves from mere critique to Quijano's “epistemic reconstruction”. Mignolo’s “disobedience” is a break from the established hegemonic knowledge system, and Quijano’s reconstruction is a build upon it. Thus, the speaker starts imagining a collective emergence from “this bleak abyss” (22), where “only the first few footsteps are hard” (23). This signals a hopeful transition from disillusionment to re-creation.

6.4. Coalition as Decolonial Praxis

The metaphor of the “new day” and “abundant valley” (25–27) reflects Quijano’s vision of a world no longer organized by colonial hierarchies but by “communal association”, rooted in mutual dignity and recognition. The cleansing of “the grime of self loathing” (28) is not just a psychological act but an epistemic reconstruction that washes away the dirt of colonial loathing that was a part of the existing lexicography. The image that is “reflected in the mirror of time” (30) becomes an inclusive one, embodying “our glory and our accomplishments” (31). This reclaims history from hegemonic narratives that have long erased or diminished the marginalized ones.

Similar to Mofu, Mignolo's call for coalition building is a central goal of decoloniality, which he describes as "an orientation to a praxis of living", meaning that the theory is realized through its practice (4). He further emphasizes the importance of coalition for change by saying that it is a reciprocal global design that depends "on all the parties interested in building them." (5). To achieve this coalition, Mignolo stresses the idea of "epistemological decolonization" which he says is essential for building "intercultural communication" (4). Through this perspective, the first three lines of the poem, "Come let us create a new lexicon/ Wherein is inserted before each word /Its meaning that we do not like" (lines 1,2,3), embody the decolonial spirit of coalition building and communal association to bring together a diversity of perspectives by raising a call to address a collective pronoun "we". Pronouns such as "us, we, our" signal an intersectional approach to coalition building, fulfilling Mignolo's demand for inclusive and reciprocal collaboration.

6.5. From Delinking to Nepantla: The Liminal Terrain of Decolonial Becoming

Fahmida Riaz, a female poet who writes about the plight of the marginalized and the social injustice that they face at the hands of power structures and social agencies, becomes a decolonial writer by proposing alternative epistemologies that debunk the power-centric narratives in lexicography. The poem under discussion employs a decolonial call to manifest many attempts to create a new lexicon that potentially possesses words, meanings, and phrases that are extremely subjective to one central group. An act of lexicography becomes a tool to decolonize and reverse the systematic social injustice caused by homogenous conventions, beliefs, values, and social ills such as sexism, misrepresentation of the suppressed epistemes, and especially silencing the voices of the peripheral community within Pakistani society. The initial tone of the poem is a negation of multiple aspects that bring hope to the heterogeneity of epistemology. The speaker negates all the imposed systematic social construction that has smothered the peripheral people to be a part of the centrality of the knowledge production. Phrases such as, "meaning that we do not like", "reality that is not ours", "a course not determined by us alone", "we do not fill the abyss", "we do not see that which is true", "we have not redeemed ourselves", "we do not seek to be cured" (Riaz 3,5, 7, 15, 16, 17, 18) convey the purpose of creating new lexicon. Also, all these

negations are true manifestations of the prefix “de” of decolonial praxis theory that is present in Gallein's using the words, “de-normalizing”, “de-stabilizing” and “debunking”, Gloria Anzaldua's terms “de-essentializing” and “de-centering”, and Mignolo's terms “delinking” and “de-coloniality” (Gallien 28, 32, Mignolo 451). The poem becomes an endeavour of “de-normalizing” the conventional narratives for an inclusive repository of knowledges that “we do not like” or “not ours” in the Urdu dictionary. What makes this poem distinctive is that the decolonial call is coming from the center, rather than the margins. Being an editor of the Urdu dictionary, she holds a central position within the socio-political linguistic landscape of Pakistan. Yet, through this poem, she floats the thought of providing substantial space to the people who struggle to articulate their indigenous or subjective knowledges to be incorporated into the dominant epistemology. The poem serves as an effort to “de-stabilizing” the established structure and an initiative of “debunking” the normative knowledges that we often accept without question. For instance, in the same Critical Discourse session, she substantiated her decolonial argument by citing the word “ababeel”, traditionally considered a kind of bird in the Quran. However, through extensive research on lexicography, it was revealed that in Arabic, it was only a collective noun for a flock of birds (Zubeida). Through this example, she argues that the multiplicity of knowledges must not be suppressed to preserve the sanctity of the established epistemes. This idea forms the foundation of the under-discussion poem.

Anzaldua's theory is more socially oriented, hence aptly describes the process of ‘de-essentializing’ the cultures and avoiding “a-perspectivism” within the self. Riaz similarly embraces this approach, aiming to create such a lexicon that embodies multiplicity of perspectives, irrespective of conventional values and thoughts. “Truth of reality that is not ours... a course not determined by us alone” (Riaz 5, 7) points to an act of knowledge production that is solely based on homogenous narratives. “The wounded pride of self delusion”, and “self praise”, are the symptoms of “a-perspectivism” which compel us not to “be cured” (9, 10, 18). She continues by describing the beauty of bringing heterogeneity within the epistemological bodies by stating “But why should the many hued new horizons/ Remain to us distant and unattainable/... The limitless expanses beckon us/ To the dawning of a

new day/ We will breathe in the fresh air/ Of the abundant valley that surrounds us” (19, 20, 25, 26, 27). These lines directly reflect Anzaldúa’s concept of multiple perspectives within the body of self. As Anzaldúa argues, this process is meant to develop a more coherent, vibrant, and diverse community. Similarly, Riaz brings this idea into her poem to promote the inclusion of diverse viewpoints to enrich and strengthen the collective whole.

The poem captures the transformative state of subjectivity. It symbolises the concept of “nepantla” by situating itself in the liminal space between identities and worldviews. This space of in-betweenness allows the speaker to critique the postcolonial condition, which has been externally imposed and internally materialized. The repeated phrase, “We who...” (8–14) reveals the symptoms of a colonized psyche: “We who are filled with the wounded pride of self delusion” (9), “We who lick each of our wounds incessantly” (11), “We who spread the poisoned chalice all around / Carrying only hate for the other” (12–13). This collective introspection illustrates Anzaldúa’s concept of the painful de-essentialization of identity, which is a far cry from the binaries of us/them that replicate colonial modes of separation.

Thus, Riaz’s poem functions as a literary enactment of decolonial praxis. It begins in epistemic disobedience and rejects inherited meanings and truths. Then it moves through the introspective and liminal terrain of “nepantla”, and culminates in a vision of “epistemic reconstruction” through “coalition building”. Rather than presenting decoloniality as a static theory, Riaz demonstrates it as a lived and poetic practice.

6.6. Story-Saturated Knowing: Decolonial Epistemology in Riaz’s Poem

Mafile’o Tracie et. al. opine that there should be a “story-saturated” approach to research methodologies. While critiquing the Western evidence-based methods, the authors contend that the reliance on these studies “does not always bring the most useful outcomes in our diverse, naturalistic settings” and can even “distance and dehumanize the very people expected to be beneficiaries.” In contrast, the authors advocate for a decolonial approach to research that can ensure “story-saturated” processes. By “owning our stories,” researchers are encouraged to

develop ways of knowing that are culturally relevant (Mafille’o, Tracie, et al.). Fahmida Riaz’s under-discussion poem is a profound example of bringing decoloniality into practice by expounding a new lexicon that challenges established epistemological norms. Phrases such as “Meaning that we do not like,” “reality that is not ours,” and “a course not determined by us” reflect the rejection of dominant and normative narratives as the sole truths (3, 5, 7). Riaz’s works call for the inclusion of diverse knowledge, emphasizing the need to disrupt conventional epistemes. Hence, the poem exemplifies decolonial praxis by advocating for the inclusion of culturally vibrant and alternative knowledges into the central epistemology. This approach not only fosters an inclusive understanding of the world, but also resists the dominant, often Eurocentric, narratives, and creates space for diversity of voices.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, this research has established that Fahmida Riaz’s poem “Come Let Us Create A New Lexicon” embodies a decolonial call to dismantle the existing social epistemic construction prevalent in society. She rightly identifies a gap within the socio-epistemology by highlighting deficiencies such as the inability to represent a true subjective narrative of the people. On the other hand, she raises a call to consider the repressed social epistemes. By “delinking” from the dominant narratives, she negates all the aspects that contribute to the misrepresentation of subjective ways of knowledge. The poem ends with a pluriversal epistemic world, where there will be a “dawning of a new day,” where they can “breathe in fresh air,” an “abundant valley,” and “potentials” which she defines as “a word, in which you and me are equal, before which we and they were the same,” and “many new-hued new horizons” point to the true picture of Mignolo’s pluriversality (19, 25, 26, 27, 35, 36, 37). The research has established an interpretation of the philosophy of *nepantla* coined by Gloria Anzaldúa to describe a transformative journey of lexicography that aims to incorporate multiple perspectives coming from diverse cultures in order to build such a utopia/ community that is harmonious, yet replete with heterogeneous epistemologies.

Works Cited

- Alvi, Asad. "Fahmida Riaz, the Woman Who Decolonised Feminism." *Dawn Images*, 1 Dec. 2018, <https://images.dawn.com/news/1181354>.
- Basra, Zainab, Urooj Fatima Alvi, and Mubashar Nadeem. "Muslim Feministic Narrative in Poetry: A Literary Analysis of Fahmida Riaz's Poems." *Journal of Nusantara Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2022, pp. 424–443. <https://doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol7iss2pp424-443>.
- Gallien, Claire. "A Decolonial Turn in the Humanities." *Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 40, 2020, pp. 28-58. Department of English and Comparative Literature, American University in Cairo. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26924865>.
- Grosfoguel, Ramón. "Colonial Difference, Geopolitics of Knowledge, and Global Coloniality in the Modern/Colonial Capitalist World-System." *Review*, vol. 25, no. 3, 2002, pp. 203-224.
- Gu, Ming Dong. "What Is 'Decoloniality'? A Postcolonial Critique." *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2020, pp. 596–600. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2020.1751432>.
- Hull, George. "Some Pitfalls of Decoloniality Theory." *Peer Review*, vol. 89, 2021.
- Khan, Kalsoom, Mumtaz Ahmad, and Malik Mujeeb ur Rahman. "Poetic Negotiations: Salad Bowl Feminism in Selected Poetry of Fahmida Riaz, Pat Mora and Joan Loveridge-Sanbonmatsu." *Global Social Sciences Review*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2020, pp. 541–550. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2020\(V-II\).51](https://doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2020(V-II).51).
- Mafie'o, Tracie, et al. "We Story: Decoloniality in Practice and Theory." *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, vol. 22, no. 6, Dec. 2022, pp. 547–61. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1177/15327086221105666>.
- Mignolo, Walter D. "Decoloniality and Phenomenology: The Geopolitics of Knowing and Epistemic/Ontological Colonial Differences." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 32, no. 3, Sept. 2018, pp. 360–87. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.5325/jspecphil.32.3.0360>.
- Mignolo, Walter D. "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of de-Coloniality." *Cultural Studies*, vol.

- 21, no. 2–3, Mar. 2007, pp. 449–514. DOI.org (Crossref),
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162647>.
- Mignolo, Walter D. “On Decoloniality: Second Thoughts.” *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4, Oct. 2020, pp. 612–18. DOI.org (Crossref),
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2020.1751436>.
- Mignolo, Walter D., and Catherine E. Walsh. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Duke University Press, 2018. K10plus ISBN,
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822371779>.
- Mignolo, Walter. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Duke University Press, 2011.
- Mpofu, William. *Decoloniality as Travelling Theory: Or What Decoloniality Is*. Not. 7 Aug. 2017, www.exampleurl.com.
- Mustafa, Zubeida. “Will Pakistan Follow Egypt?” *Dawn*, 22 Feb. 2011,
www.dawn.com/news/608204/will-pakistan-follow-egypt.#comments
- Quijano, A. (2016), “Bien Vivir” – Between “Development” and the De/Coloniality of Power, *Alternautas*, 3(1), 10-23.
<http://www.alternautas.net/blog/2016/1/20/bien-vivir-between-development-and-the-decoloniality-of-power1>
- Quijano, Aníbal. “Coloniality And Modernity/Rationality.” *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2–3, Mar. 2007, pp. 168–78. DOI.org (Crossref),
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353>.
- Quijano, Aníbal: “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America”. *Nepantla*, Volume 1 (3): 533-580, 2000.
- Riaz, Fahmida. “Come Let Us Create A New Lexicon.” *Poem Hunter*, 9 Apr. 2012, www.poemhunter.com/poem/come-let-us-create-a-new-lexicon/.
- Riaz, Fahmida. *The Body Torn and Other Poems*. Translated by Tahira Naqvi, Foliobooks, 2020.
- Sabu, Urvashi. ““You Have a Right to a Pedestal and Heaven’: Perspectives on Islam in the Poetry of Pakistani Women.” *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities (IJELLH)*, vol. 6, no. 7, 2018, pp. 200–211.
www.ijellh.com/OJS/index.php/OJS/article/view/7609.

Shamsie, Kamila, and Aamer Rahman. "The Poet Is Heard in the Land." Index on Censorship, vol. 31, no. 4, 2002, pp. 196–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03064220208537156>.

Shirazi, Ali Ahmad, Reza Chehreghani, and Mohammad Iqbal Shahid. "A Comparative Analysis of the Critique of Patriarchal Social System in the Poetry of Simin Behbahani and Fahmida Riaz." *Journal of Comparative Literature*, vol. 13, no. 24, Summer 2021, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman.