

## SALAAMAT AND HEGEMONIC PRESSURES: CHALLENGING THE MASCULINE IDEAL IN UZMA ASLAM KHAN'S *TRESPASSING*

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### ABSTRACT

*Masculinity just like any other identity is complex and always in flux. The present study discusses the character of Salaamat in Uzma Aslam Khan's Trespassing to highlight the complexity which male identity constitutes. It views the struggles faced by non-hegemonic male within hegemonic and hypermasculine settings. This qualitative study takes R. W. Connell's concept of multiple masculinities along with the intersects of nation and neurodiversity to study Salaamat's experiences in relation to his gender identity. The study draws a conclusion about Salaamat's masculinity as negotiating and struggling after he moves to the city before reverting back to his non-hegemonic identity towards the end of the text.*

**Keywords:** Masculinities, National Identities, Neurodiversity.

### INTRODUCTION

The study of identity in Pakistani context, just like in any other postcolonial society, has been a topic of study for a very long time due to its multifaceted and multidimensional historical specificities. It has been also a site of attention in terms of female gender and women's studies in various contexts, both in the private spaces of home and in public during different historical time periods. Gender is a complex and multifaceted aspect of human subjectivity. It is not an inherent aspect of one's individuality, but rather a result of hierarchical power relations. Male gender, on the other hand, has not been discussed with such detail in Pakistani context.

Masculinities are shaped and negotiated depending on an individual's experiences and cannot be generalized. Jack S. Kahn (2009) in *An Introduction to Masculinities* mentions that one cannot simply generalize the experiences of men. "As we learn about the construction of racial, ethnic and cultural identities, sexuality, religious beliefs, class and a host of other variables in relation to the experiences of masculinities, we may discover that statements that begin with "Most men..." are not really accurate (51). Gender is a complex and multifaceted aspect of human subjectivity. It is a result of hierarchical power relations. The subject in its relation to power is conscious of its position within the system. Power theorist Michel Foucault (1982) views power as a dual force in relation to its subject, simultaneously constraining, while also a driving aspect that shapes and generates knowledge. This study, by exploring this double bound of power in relation to gender identity, explores the ways in which gender operates as a systematic and structural component of the framework of power dynamics. The gendered aspect of power is a complex aspect which is central in shaping male subjects and how they come to be equated with privilege in socio-economic hierarchies. The text under study shows how various factors legitimize such gender hierarchies while at the same time providing sites of resistance.

Social power structures pertain to how gender shapes discourses and their impact on the allocation of power. Institutions and discourses, like the nationalist redistribution of resources and

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recognition show structured systems that hold a certain 'masculine' ideal, reinforcing male privilege over marginalized men, women and other under privileged groups. The present study discusses male identity in relation to nationalism. Traditional dominant masculine ideals impact individual's sense of identity in a number of ways. Masculinity is a complex identity which entails societal pressures and certain types of expectations and demands. This research investigates this complexity which form a man's life.

To analyze masculinity as contesting, negotiating and flexible this research follows R W Connell's concept of multiple masculinities (2005). This concept is significant as it opens up the pathways to approach male identities in its plurality rather than as a fixed entity. In its intersectional approach, it views how gender, nation and neurodiversity overlap to shape Salaamat's shifting masculinity.

### **Intersectional Insights: Exploring Gender, Nation and Neurodiversity**

The concept of intersectionality was introduced by the law scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). She proposes the idea that it is the overlapping of different identities that formulates one's sense of self. Her focus was on the experiences of black women. She highlighted that black women's experiences cannot be discussed in a simplified way, neither just as women's nor only as a black person's experiences. Rather, it is the intersection between both that encompasses the oppression and discriminations faced by women of color. Yuval (2006) also stresses the significance of intersectionality as a methodological approach for social justice. Lutz et al (2011) have compiled their collection of essays, extending the same debate within gender and masculinity studies and encompassing various aspects such as age, migration and disability. With the same aim to move away from any generalization, we take the idea of intersectionality in our study of masculinities in order to understand the intricacies inherent in a man's life experiences, mainly by focusing on the intersections of nation and neurodiversity.

R.W. Connell (1987) defines gender as a product of repeated elucidations assigned to human reproductive and sexual abilities. Connell analyzes that socio-political institutions and individuals work in collaboration to control certain gender regimes which Connell calls the gender order. R.W. Connell's hegemonic masculinities are worth examining as they include an exploration of hegemonic masculinity as an idealized masculinity around which men mostly built their lives. Hegemonic positions, according to Connell, are not always the same but rather unstable, contested and in negotiation. Connell and Messers/8chmidt in *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept* (2005) redefined the concept to assert the instability of male identity and its multiplicity. The concept of hegemonic masculinity is based on the Gramscian concept of hegemony, which involves dominant groups in society, maintaining their power over subordinate groups through consensual rather than forceful means. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as "The configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (2005, p. 77).

According to Connell, male dominance takes various forms across the hegemonies of masculinities. It is not a fixed idea or a static attribute of a man. Connell proposes four categories in the model of hegemonic masculinity: hegemony, subordination, complicity and marginalization. Mostly, men, no matter what position they hold, are either depended upon, defined by or benefit from hegemonic masculinity. This gives the idea of hegemony being the ideal and static form of masculinity. The other masculinities include subordinated which is defined as being associated with femininity and as "gayness" (2005, p. 78). Complicity masculinities, Connell defines as men who enjoy patriarchal privileges associated with being a man without being actively part of hegemonic masculinities, "They benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (2005, p. 79). The third is marginalized masculinity those who are oppressed e.g., through the intersects if race and class (2005, p. 80)

Pierre Bourdieu (2002) talks about how gendered habitus over the period of time has legitimized male dominance. Certain power injustices and inequalities have come to be considered as natural. Male dominance is so deeply ingrained into the subconsciousness that one can no longer see it. Discussing Bourdieu's take on masculine dominance, Todd Reeser (2003) writes that the link of masculinity with power as innate and natural conceal the actual struggles of a man within the system of power hierarchies.

This essentialized link of masculinity with power conceals the fact that masculinity is also a gender identity and gives the false expression of masculinity as pure and natural form of being. Power hierarchies seep into everyday life as a norm. Male domination or gendered habitus works through symbolic means, perhaps not visible to the eye in its functioning but its effects “are real whether they be physical and individual or symbolic and collective” (Bourdieu qtd. in Reeser and Seifert 89).

Todd Reeser and Lewis C. Seifert note that Bourdieu in his discussion of gender habitus doesn't discuss its instabilities in depth. Bourdieu overemphasizes the stability of male dominance whereas male identity is unstable, it oscillates between dominator and dominated, between hegemony and non-hegemony (94). There is a need for a more nuanced as well as a critical approach to masculine domination and hegemonic masculinity that discuss not just the prevalent gender order but also talks about its instabilities.

Gender is socially constructed and variously redefined at different points in times. “The ‘I’ is always already outside of itself, ‘ec-statically’ elsewhere in the intricate web of the social relations that constitute it” (2004, p. 35). Gender as a discursive construct can be defined as a mechanism through which masculine and feminine concepts are both naturalized and denaturalized (2004, p. 42). Judith Butler defines gender as a performance that gains legitimacy over a period of time. It is a continuous “reiteration of a set of norms” (2011, p. xxi) performed by a gendered subject out of either pleasure or anxiety to conform to the cultural and social realities. Power in this sense can be defined as “reiterated acting ... in its persistence and instability” (2011, p. xiii). It is important to deconstruct it to see how a certain gender as a bodily and social schema is assigned to subjects through power. Being born into a system of power relations, one unwillingly enters into a system of hierarchies.

Another significant intersectionality while discussing gender in the present study is national identity. Nira Yuval-Davis (1997), writes in detail about how gender relations are affected by national processes. She explains that national projects and formation are closely interlinked with specific notions of masculinity and femininity. She probes how gender relations play a central role in different aspects of nationalist endeavors like cultural aspects and one's understanding of citizenship. The discussion on gender characteristics of the nation should encompass its link with state institutions and also historical and nationalist ideologies. Laurent Berlant also talks about the ideological construction of a collective national character through interrelated set of discursive practices and its relationship with gender identities. Berlant (1991) talks about how “Nations provoke Fantasy” (1) and shapes an individual's private and public life. Discussing the life and works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Berlant asserts the struggle of an individual of both submitting to and drifting away from national fantasies.

Both nationalism and masculinity are submerged into each other's idealized reflection as they share cultural themes which are “thoroughly tied to the nation and manliness” (Nagel 252). Talking about the roles of men and women in African nationalism, McClintock (1993) says that nations are imagined in kinship genealogies and are referred to as “Motherlands” and “Fatherlands”. Man's role in the nation is active, as a protector and the one who is responsible for the household. It is “metonymic, that is, men are contiguous with each other and with the national whole”, as compared to the woman's role which is “metaphoric” (62). These genealogies of kinship are circulated through public discourses to strengthen the bond among citizens and form a collective feeling of attachment.

The traditional ideals linked with manliness and masculinities are viewed in similar manner. Reeser (2009) by drawing on Anderson's concept of imagined communities also writes that both nationalism and masculinities are viewed in each other's images. He writes that just as the nation “is imagined as sovereign” and “a sovereign rules and rules over others. Consequently, the man that symbolizes the nation may have to have power over others to help the metaphor function” (p. 181). Nagel (1998) also draws parallel between the two and writes that nationalist politics as a masculinist enterprise does not just instill ‘unity’ but also ‘otherness’ (p. 242-269). Reeser (2009) adds that “A man who fears castration or emasculation may turn to patriotism or to more extreme nationalisms (fascism, right-wing evangelism) to assuage his own anxiety about being a man” (p. 189). The fear of being excluded stemming from masculine anxiety may lead to multiple ways through one defines one's position within the nation.

The intersection of neurodiversity is also central to this research. Khan uses neurodiversity not to show the character of Salaamat as oppressed rather she nuances the concept of neurodiversity in order to dismantle the possibility of any coherent national and male identity. The incorporation of neurodiversity into the discussion of non-hegemonic masculinity can be helpful as a way to complicate the notion of idealized and unified masculinity. Neurodivergence refers to “the perceived variations seen in cognitive, affectual, and sensory functioning differing from the majority of the general population or ‘predominant neurotype’, more usually known as the ‘neurotypical’ population” (Rosqvist, Stenning, Chown 1). There is a need to discuss and complicate the distinction that prevails the popular discourses within the academia between “neurotypes and their ‘others’” (Rosqvist, Stenning, Chown 2) as brought on as an aim in *Neurodiversity Studies* (2020). Khan through the character of Salaamat nuances this distinction between neurotypical and neuroatypical as sanity/insanity binary among men in the novel is sometimes hard to sharply distinguish.

During the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s, “the psychiatric jargon was critiqued albeit in terms that remain mired in pathologizing discourse” (Brian 78). In “A Genius for Unreality: Neurodiversity in Elizabeth Bowen’s *Eva Trout*”, Valerie O’Brien (2019), writes that rules for approaching the accepted ways of being need new conceptualization. There must be alternatives while seeing patients as one’s behavior might as well be their way of expression and way of being rather than an illness (Brien, p. 78).

Anna Stenning, in *Understanding Empathy in Neurodiversity Studies* (2020) writes that the common perception about autistic people as amoral comes from a notion that autism is characterized by lack of empathy. She rules out the concept that cognition is the only factor that defines empathy. Autistic people have their own ways of showing empathy and feelings and cannot be labeled as lacking emotions. Ralph Savarese (2014) also calls for empathy and need to create space for the acceptance of neuroatypical people. He coined the term neurocosmopolitan, the idea of a society where one can feel at home “with all manner of neurologies” (p. 193)

The analysis of *Trespassing* follows’ Connell’s idea of multiple masculinities that are constantly in dialogue with each other. This is visible in Salaamat’s case as his gender identity is not stable, rather constantly shifting. The complexity of his negotiating masculinity is best discussed through the intersections of nation and neurodiversity.

### **Negotiating and Dynamic Masculinity: Analyzing Salaamat in Uzma Aslam Khan’s *Trespassing***

*Trespassing* depicts the ethnic unrest in the city of Karachi. It portrays men dealing with marginalization and struggling for their place within the nation specially during the time period of Zia’s regime 1977-1988. This struggle is best exhibited through the character of Salaamat.

Salaamat is a young boy from a fishermen family. He moves to the city after the sea space is taken by the foreign trawlers. In the city he goes through various traumatic experiences in the search for belonging. Salaamat has partial hearing impairment due the accident he had at the sea space. His hearing disability is not clearly talked about. Salaamat’s sister told Dia that he is deaf “only when he wants to be” (235). It is his position in the city that makes him a silent witness and makes him adopt the role of a mute as he rarely speaks. Salaamat becomes a silent witness, not just in village but in the city as well. He accidentally witnesses Dia’s mother with another man. When his Chachu who works for Dia’s mother, catches him, he warns Salaamat, saying “Today you are a witness. But you are also deaf, dumb and blind (263). Salaamat is non-hegemonic in nature but the city is filled with men whose identities are being impacted by the fear of national exclusion.

A sense of masculinity is instilled in Salaamat through the public spaces in the city of ajnabis (strangers), Karachi. His first job when he moves to the city is at a bus workshop named Handsome Body Maker which is a hypermasculine place. Men at the workshop strive for dominance over other ethnic groups in the city to reclaim the city space as their own. The names of the workers present them as objectified, each denoting either an ideal masculinity or its lack, like Hero, Handsome, and his brother Chikna which is used for subordinated masculinity and has connotations of weakness. Salaamat is a 17-year-old boy when he arrives in the city for work. His first meeting with men at the workshop shows the symbolic workings of casual harassment which is often ignored because it is not as apparent and

provocative as its more physical forms. Their fetishization of Salaamat shows how the exploitation of teenage boys is very much a norm among men in public as they equate their age and bodies with weakness and femininity. He is teased for his dark skin. Handsome, while referring to Salaamat's foreignness, "opened his palm and shook it rudely under Salaamat's chin" following a "Wah!" in the proclamation "We should thank the Almighty the foreigner has come to us!" (128). The other man keeps touching Salaamat's locks and calls him "pretty" in an objectifying manner. He tells him that "A pretty boy like you should have no problem finding work" (128). Being young and lean machera (a fisher boy), he becomes an object of strangeness for these men. His loss of displacement from home is further fueled by the constant rejections and denial of any public inclusion through his journey in the city.

Salaamat gets infuriated through his traumatic experiences in the city, whereas in village he was more at ease with his feminine side. He was more easily accepted among the commune of women in the village than the men in the city. In his village he used to work at his grandmother's all women's tea shop where he was the only male to work but managed to make secure place among them. Some women complaint at the beginning, but her grandmother argued that he was "emotionally" and "physically" unfit for the work anywhere else. She further argued that he couldn't hear anything therefore he "could not spoil the luxurious privacy of their female sanctuary... Within a few months, the boy's mysterious silence, his calm, and most of all, the ease with which he did women's work – scouring pots, refiring hookahs, weaving fish-baskets – endeared him to them. Some even enjoyed flirting with a youth who was neither man nor boy. They poured their secrets into him" (121-122).

Salaamat's struggle for identity in the city is initiated by desiring national fantasies of feeling complete through collective identification. He is reminded time and again of being an outsider. Men at the workshop are either Punjabis or Pathans, the two main groups in conflict. Salaamat being a machera is the only one from "a third group" (132), he was mocked about every aspect of his identity "his looks, accent, language, carriage" (132). All the men are looking for a sense of belonging by letting other men down. Salaamat aligns his sense of meaning with national recognition by desiring right to citizenship and its privileged enjoyed by some men around him. He becomes more and more alienated with each new experience in his life. Salaamat feels furious as his history is being denied by the men in his group. They continuously insinuate that he is an outsider in comparison to them who have more legitimate claim to the citizenry. This may be viewed in Salaamat's pain of exile mixed with the underlying humiliation and vulnerability. He is excluded on an ethnic basis.

It is Salaamat's neurodivergent ways of being that makes him negotiate his sense of self with the hegemonic men he deals with. He makes connections in ways that deviate from the dominant set of rules. Salaamat's sense of gender is fluid and complex. He doesn't have any relationships in the conventional way. His sister calls him "lovesick" (258). He starts a relationship with the painting on one of the buses through exotic fantasies. He becomes attached to the painting of Rani which he was sure blinked and smiled (130) when he first saw it. He even buys jewelry for her from his hard-earned money. This also leads to his confused erotic episode with Rani. His sexual deviance stands as a provocative and radical performance against normative masculinity.

Salaamat's neurodiversity is shown through his non-conventional ways of emotional attachments and the way he perceives relationships that eventually redirects him from the competing masculinities back to his non-hegemonic self. Salaamat does not form relationships in the conventional sense. He dreams of doing a painting on the bus as a way to satisfy his need for lost pride and his home. The buses remind him of the decorated boats in his village (127). He achieves this when given the opportunity to paint a bus when other Punjabi painters started leaving their jobs and moving out due to protests by ethnic groups and chaos in the city. He wants to be represented in the city and he achieves this through his painting of Rani. He paints a "younger, more tousled Rani" (242) with symbols and objects that are closer to him from his memories of the village and the city. He wants his story to be heard in some way. He takes pride in his creation. He feels a sense of dignity because he sees his bus as a token of his national identity and his masculine pride. Its movement on the roads will reaffirm and reclaim his place in the city. His bus represents his sense of power and identity, "his chronology" (239) in the city. That is his way to be heard and to reaffirm that he exists, and that his story as his history matters.

Salaamat also fantasizes himself in other's place just as he fantasized the picture on the bus. This is shown through his encounter with Daanish. This can be seen in his fantasies of imagining himself as other men in higher social positions than him. Salaamat comes to idealize the men he sees in TV ads. In this fantasy, while he sits in a cave on the beach, he imagines himself being in a cigarette ad, wearing a red jacket and climbing a mountain. In another fantasy, he lights another cigarette in the Himalayas.

He has been living in the city as a witness and observer without any active role to play which he was becoming tired of. Salaamat as a driver of Daanish's friend used to take Dia and Daanish to the beach and stay there as a chaperone. He is part of Dia's and Daanish's secret relationship. One day sitting by the cave on the beach, he checks out Dia. As Daanish gets closer to Dia, Salaamat slips into another fantasy. He imagined himself in Daanish's place. As he sees Daanish putting his arms around Dia, "he imagines his own hand in his dip above Dia's wet behind" (233). Daanish often feels insecure in Salaamat's presence which shows the untold sense of competition among men. Daanish feels humiliated by Salaamat as his "presence put Daanish in the same league" (325) as him.

Salaamat makes impulsive decisions as he relies more on his emotions rather than logic. His decision to join Sindhi Movement for separate land, is not because he wants to claim territory or has competitive urge to take revenge from other men, rather it comes from the sheer disappointment after he lost his bus to one of the riots. It got burnt down during a violent riot where angry mob was burning public transport. It is through that event that he finds himself in exile again. He watches his bus burn as he loses his sense of pride and his way of recognition, "his months of barely sleep; his runny eyes; his hands sliced by steel; his glittery fish; his chronology" (Trespassing 255). Due to the disappointment and fear of alienation and with no tangible prospects for the future, he joins a group of freedom fighters.

Salaamat's non-hegemonic self through his neurodiversity complicates the stability and fixity of ideal or hegemonic masculinity. He ultimately rejects the notion of homogenous national identity as his ways of belonging to the place is different from other men. He doesn't enjoy territorial possession rather he exists through multiple connections with his surroundings, which mostly include non-human beings or even inanimate objects. Through neurodivergent male identity, he aligns with the concept of Gilles Deleuze's becoming and dismantles any hierarchical aspects of dualism. He rejects binaries such as male/female and human/non-human and also the concept of centrality. His belongs in the world through multiple connections. Deleuze's concept of identity opposes vertical hierarchies of power relations and talks about ecological connections as a way of belonging. According to him, "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order" (Deleuze 7). Such belonging which defies fixity or order is shown through Salaamat because he opposes any ideal of top-down hegemonic power networks.

His ways of attachment, interests, and patterns of sensitivity show his different ways of belonging. His reaction to the news of his mother's death, which he gets from his brother is vague. At one moment he is angry at why he wasn't told the news before, and then he moves on to ask about his sister. He takes a long pause and then moves on to ask about his sister (139). The news of his mother's demise doesn't affect him in a way one would expect. He doesn't overtly react.

The fact that he is an almost mute person, he doesn't rely on language that much, rather his way of expression is mostly through how he feels. His connection with the non-human is very deep as it provides a sense of identity for him. He doesn't see turtles as different from himself. His rerouting from public hegemonic masculinity occurs through submerging in a cosmic oneness through hypersensitivity towards the environment. His disconnection from the feminine and natural space when he moved to city, aided to his fall into the world of masculine hegemonies in the urban space. His sense of ease and wholeness as one being with nature drastically shifted to a world conceptualized in divisions. His whole journey in the city is a struggle as he tries to find a safe space in a place that is highly polarized and hegemonic. His vulnerabilities make him weak in its hegemonic surroundings as he becomes intermingled with violent ways. He has grown up to exist among non-humans and nature as equal parts of the cosmos. His bonds are stronger with nonhuman others than with the humans. When he is beaten up at sea, he holds onto a turtle shell for safety (122). When he is thinking of going to the city, he imagines his uncertain journey through the journey of hatchlings (124-125).

His attachment to the environment as a counter-hegemonic dimension of his identity takes over and pulls him out of the hegemonic struggles of masculinity. He is not ashamed of being at ease with his feminine side. Looking at the river he tells Fatah, his fellow fighter in the group that he sees freedom in the river as it reminded him of his grandmother, “Now here I am, on the water again, and I feel like her. Down the Indus flows, taking the worst of me with it. You can call that freedom” (353). He wants to see the world and feel through the eyes of his grandmother, instead of any dominant masculine ideality, and that puts him at ease. He is more at peace in his association with nature and femininity. This enforced way of living makes him feel exhausted.

In *Trespassing* all men are marginalized along varied lines of hierarchies, but still pitted against each other. The commander leading the Sindhi Freedom Movement instills hatred and violence among his young trainees. He humiliates them by telling them that nation never did anything for them “You are illiterate, homeless and hungry ... filthy, ugly, destined to drift from current to current” (354). It is Salaamat’s empathetic attachment to nature and gender fluidity that he never needed to be assimilated and embraces his diversities by going back to the cosmic connection which redefines his place in the city. This realization can be seen through Salaamat’s transformation, quite visible when he was going towards one of the camp, far north of Sindh. He looks at his steps and “Instead of distancing himself from the land, he was entering it. And he grew unconvinced that the answer to all his troubles was a separate state. If anything, this land the others wanted to split was showing him how to glue back his splintered pieces” (358). He distances himself from the ideology of these men seeking to separate the state. As he is coming back, he thinks “you cannot force a land to belong to you” (13). He starts a job as a driver. Although subjected to gendered national fantasy, he always finds peace in the sea space, turtles, and rocks. If he can’t see them, he would imagine them and that would put him at his ease. Salaamat ends up spending most of his time on the beach. His connection with the sea reminds him of his village. Salaamat’s behavior at times deviates from the accepted set of standards but his journey also shows his masculinity not as abnormal but different which establishes masculinities as multiple and negotiating.

## CONCLUSION

Uzma Aslam Khan’s *Trespassing* through the character of Salaamat shows the complex intermingling of masculinities and national identities while also subverting any coherent ideal of both. The conventional supposition of being a ‘normal’ man is contested and defamiliarized through Salaamat’s neurodivergence. Against this dominant line of argument for singular masculinity, Khan shows Salaamat’s neuroatypicality. Neurodivergence makes Salaamat conflictual towards the normative expectations of the people around him as he perceives the world in different ways. His strangeness comes across as a provocation as he deals with hegemonic men. Men in the public are shown to be hypermasculine. Due to national insecurity and ethnic violence, most men resort to violence and revenge. Salaamat too gets pushed into the gender and national politics but he makes his way back due to his non-hegemonic self. Khan shows in *Trespassing* that national identities intermingle with masculinities in various ways while also establishing masculinity as negotiating through the character of Salaamat.

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