

SOUTH ASIAN TRANSHUMANIST POSTHUMAN ONTOLOGIES: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VEHICLE ART AND MIND UPLOADING IN UZMA ASLAM KHAN'S *TRESPASSING*

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ABSTRACT

One possible way to decolonize the posthuman field of literary criticism is to find possible stylistic and thematic affinities between the literatures from the less technologically advanced regions such as South Asia and mainstream Euro-American science fiction. This article invites and affirms alternative ways of perceiving and comprehending the transhumanist posthuman paradigms from the technologically underdeveloped world (South Asia) through a critically informed analysis of the motifs, symbols, and characters in the Pakistani writer Uzma Aslam Khan's Anglophone novel *Trespassing* (2003). It argues that the nonhuman agency of truck art in *Trespassing* can be interpreted as a metaphor for a possible local technique for consciousness uploading. By applying the theoretical framework of transhumanist/posthumanist literary theory, this article demonstrates that the depiction of truck art in the novel can be analyzed as an analogy for the transhumanist posthuman dream of whole brain emulation.

KEYWORDS

transhumanism, posthumanism, truck art, South Asian Literature, mind uploading, science fiction

One of the many ways to study the transhumanist form of posthumanism in non-Western contexts is the depiction of truck art in Uzma Aslam Khan's novel *Trespassing* (2003).¹ It provides a non-Western perspective on how South Asian communities try to extend their human consciousness through the enmeshment of local artistic expression (truck art) and machines. By comparing a

Pakistani regional art form of vehicle painting to mind uploading, I contend that the bodies of the vehicles, in this novel, contain figments of their decorator's memories, hopes, and aspirations. Therefore, the mechanical bodies of the decorated buses evolve as transhumanist posthuman subjectivities, as they are the material alterities that carry the mindscapes of their painters. Since literature from most of the developing countries (such as Pakistan) very rarely incorporates transhumanist themes in its narratives, there is a dearth of transhuman literary critiques of these works. One possible way to include the literature from developing countries is to find a point of convergence between the representation of transhumanist themes, motifs, metaphors, symbols, and narrative strategies in the literature produced in developed and developing countries. The classification of developing, developed, and least developed countries is measured on the basis of the socioeconomic and industrial progress of a country. Pakistan falls into the category of developing countries because of its low level of economic, industrial, and technological progress (World Population Review 2022a, 2022b). This article demonstrates one of the many ways a literary text from a non-Western context can be analyzed under the rubric of transhumanist posthumanism. This research not only intends to expand transhumanist posthuman approaches to study and analyze an extra-European literary text but also endeavors to further clarify the onto-epistemological boundaries of transhumanism and posthumanism.

Literature has almost always been a potential site to explore the relationship between human and the nonhuman (Hayles 1999; Clark 2008). Be it William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) or Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021), it provides intriguing vantage points from which to explore the nuances of man-machine fusion and ramification for both humans and machines involved in this connection. Science fiction from the developed countries is considered more appropriate for transhumanist literary inquiries because of the presence of Artificial intelligence (AI), robots, humanoids, and cyberspaces. For instance, in *Neuromancer*, by William Gibson (1984), and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick (1968), there is a very well developed consciousness uploading system, while in *Klara and the Sun* (Ishiguro 2021) and *The Bicentennial Man* (Asimov 1976) there are genius humanoids. However, South Asian fiction rarely depicts scientifically advanced humanoids, robots, or artificial intelligence networks. Perhaps the only exception in South Asian fiction that depicts intelligent machines is a short story, "Anukul" (Roy 1976), by the Indian writer Satyajit Ray (1921–1992), which depicts a humanoid.² Another short story from South Asia, by Krishan Chander (1914–1977), "Mom ki Guriya" (which can be translated as "The Wax Doll"; 2004), has transhumanist themes because in this

story the main protagonist gets tired of women in his life and buys a female wax doll as a partner.³ Most of the South Asian texts mainly illustrate human beings' relationship with very basic level technology, such as interconnections between humans and media that can be observed in Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of the Small Things* (1999). The representation of social media is pervasive in Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West* (2017) and Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017), vehicles and humans have a metaphoric cyborg relationship in Hamid's fiction (Liaqat and Raza 2021), and more recently the inhuman use of drones has been depicted in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and his short story "Terminator: Attack of the Drone" (Hamid 2011; discussed in Liaqat 2022).

The novel under discussion, *Trespassing*, is unique because it presents the relationship between vehicle art and the human desire for immanence (one of the many transhumanist aspirations), which is usually depicted in mind uploading science fiction (a subgenre of science fiction). *Trespassing* does not describe the involvement of micro memory chips in consciousness uploading, and it also does not depict any automaton such as Klara, who stores human emotions, expressions, and feelings in her database. Nevertheless, it demonstrates the artistic association of one of its many protagonists (Salaamat) with a machine (bus), who projects his emotions, aspirations and memories on the vehicles he decorates. Although this novel does not incorporate the intricate details of the scientific machinery involved in the dynamics of consciousness uploading, the decorator paints the most significant spatial locations, people, moments, and objects from his life history on the mobile body of the bus. I propose that there is thematic similarity between the science fiction narratives about consciousness uploading and this text's ontological approach to the human desire for immanence and immortality, which is the main motivational force behind all scientific efforts toward the realization of whole brain emulation technology. Therefore, this relationship between a human being's memory and its depiction on the vehicle (machinic other) is a possible site to study transhumanist posthuman intermediations between the human and the nonhuman in the countries where the transhumanist field of consciousness uploading has not yet become as popular as it is now in fiction produced in technologically advanced countries. Drawing insights from posthuman theory and literary criticism (Lau 2018; Herbrechter 2013), this article will first quote various definitions and connotations of the Euro-American notions of "transhumanism" and "posthumanism" and then illustrate how human beings' relationship with truck art in *Trespassing* is akin to the transhumanist notion of consciousness uploading and engenders posthuman subjectivities.

“Posthumanism” is an umbrella term and “transhumanism” is one of its many offshoots. Transhumanism and posthumanism have some similar concerns, but the term “transhumanism” implies the freedom of human beings from their biological constraints, and posthumanism aims at “criticism of humanism” (Ranisch and Sorgner 2014, 17). In other words, posthuman theory and philosophy are a critique of “humanism” and study the relationship between human beings and their companion nonhuman species (Badmington 2000; Clark 2008; Wolfe 2010; Braidotti 2013, 2018; Ferrando 2018), while transhumanism denotes human extension and transcendence by implanting external devices in human bodies (More 2013; Sorgner 2014; Ferrando 2019; Manzacco 2019). There is an overriding tendency to conflate the term “transhuman” with the notion of posthumanism (Ferrando 2018, 438; Monzacco 2019, 81–82), but it has its own distinct trajectory and underpinnings. This article will use the term “transhumanist posthumanism” to critically analyze the transhumanist resonance of the motif of truck art in this novel to illustrate the meanings and implications of the transhumanist form of posthumanism in *Trespassing*. The field of posthumanism is often criticized by the non-Western intelligentsia for its “limiting parochialisms ... myopic horizons” (Jackson 2018, xii) and its primary focus on the Euro-American side of the world. Therefore, this study aims to decolonize this field and expand the trajectory of transhumanism to the literature being produced in the South Asian region.

Recently, there has been witnessed an increasing trend toward posthuman inquiries into the stylistics of various genres of literature, such as posthuman discourse on poetry (Olsson 2021), posthuman aspects of fiction (San Miguel 2020; Sewlall 2020), and transhumanist posthuman interpretations of films (Gilebbi 2020). Nevertheless, there is a dearth of posthuman literary criticism on Pakistani Anglophone literature. However, a recent study by Asma Mansoor (2019) contends that a possible way to study the “post-postcolonial selfhood” (297) of fictional Pakistani characters is through their relation with the materials/objects around them. She argues that nonhuman materiality emerges as a “new referent for re-thinking Pakistani identities” (298). She further asserts that “Pakistani Anglophone literature invites a re-reading of representations of Pakistan’s material environment within which Pakistani selfhood, in all its diverse forms may be rethought” (297). Although Mansoor studies archeological motifs in two novels, *A Geometry of God* by Uzma Aslam Khan (2009) and *A God in Every Stone* by Kamila Shamsie (2014), in order to trace the human and nonhuman relationship, her insights and claims about the significance of human interaction with the materials around can be helpful in exploring the relationship between the materiality of automobile technology and Pakistani selfhood and subjectivities.

A TRANSHUMANIST POSTHUMAN READING OF *TRESPASSING*

One critical way in which the Pakistani text *Trespassing* makes its posthuman mark is through reflecting on the relationship between humans and truck art in Pakistani society. The main protagonists of the text are Dia, a free-spirited girl who belongs to a well-educated affluent class in Pakistan; Danish, who is a student of journalism at a foreign university; and Salaamat, who belongs to a fishing village in the interior of Sindh (a province of Pakistan). All of them live in Karachi city—the main metropolitan hub of Sindh. This article focuses on the character of Salaamat, whose ancestors were fishermen from the coastal areas of Sindh, but who has to migrate from his native village because of the onslaught of the fishing trawlers that sabotage the ancestral profession of his family.

When the readers are introduced to the character of Salaamat, he is being beaten up by the people who have taken over his ancestral profession—fishery. Salaamat is being beaten because he stops them from breaking the eggs of the turtles in the coastal area. He is shown as an introverted, imaginative, and romantic person who loves turtles, fishes, his grandmother, and beautiful girls such as Dia (Khan 2003, 2, 242). When he migrates to the big city of Karachi to find employment, he decides to adopt the profession of vehicle painting⁴ because it reminds him of the beautifully adorned boats in his native village. He is treated as an alien and an outsider by his fellow vehicle artists, who mainly belong to the other provinces of Pakistan: Punjab, Khayber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan. The Pakistani art of vehicle painting is overwhelmingly more dominated by the other three provinces than by Sindh (Elias 2003). In this sense, the painting of the buses in this novel stands as a metaphor for the underrepresentation of the province of Sindh and its cultural heritage. Salaamat's involvement with truck art in this novel reflects the social, historical, and political realities of post-postcolonial Pakistan, which is bursting with ethnic, provincial, and religious discrimination. During the narrative of the novel, Salaamat only paints one bus, which he calls his “chronology” (Khan 2003, 255). But that bus is burnt in a riot led by two different ethnic groups in Karachi. After the bus is burnt, Salaamat feels that a significant part of his life is finished, and he joins a violent regional gang. But he soon gets disgusted with the violence he experiences and perpetrates as a part of that group, so, he leaves that crew and joins Dia's household as a car driver (his beloved whom he could never get because of the class difference, as his father works as a cook at Dia's house and his sister works at Dia's mother's silk farms). Salaamat's involvement with vehicle art, in this novel, chronicles a transhumanist posthuman tragic journey of heartbreak, discrimination, deprivation, and Salaamat's iron will to survive against all odds.

Drawing insights from the theorists on posthumanism and transhumanism, this study hypothesizes that the text under discussion, *Trespassing*, is a transhumanist posthuman text because it reinscribes human subjectivity in relation to the material body of a truck (a machine) and it utilizes the transhumanist motif of consciousness uploading to unpack the possible posthuman interpretations of a literary text. With this in mind, we can begin our analysis of Uzma Aslam Khan's novel *Trespassing* in the quest for the narrative strategies, symbols, metaphors, and motifs that can further explicate the transhumanist posthuman subjectivity of Salaamat—one of the main protagonists. Salaamat's transfer of his memories is akin to the transhumanist trope of consciousness uploading and configures a transhumanist posthuman subjectivity that coevolves in connection with a machine.

This transhumanist posthuman textual analysis of *Trespassing* is divided into three sections. The first section explores the affinities between consciousness uploading and truck art, and by applying Katherine Hayles' insights, it argues that Salaamat is a transhumanist posthuman character. The second part traces the similarities between graphic representation of mindscapes in MUSF and *Trespassing*. Drawing insights from Bruce Clark, Manuela Rossini, and Karan Barad's essays about the significance of nonhuman materialities in posthuman analyses, the last segment demonstrates the congealing agency of the matter (the body of the bus) through the intra-activity between humans and the nonhuman others. The textual analysis pays special attention to the exploration of the onto-epistemological and teleological shifts that happen due to the intermediations, collaborations, and negotiations between vehicles and humans in this narrative and demonstrates how these themes are coupled with the problematization of transhumanism, anthropocentrism, posthumanism, and humanism in technologically backward countries in South Asia.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONSCIOUSNESS UPLOADING AND TRUCK ART IN *TRESPASSING*

The main affinity between transhumanist aspiration to whole-brain emulation and Salaamat's transfer of memories onto the material body of the bus is the inherent desire for self-preservation associated with the futurist hopes of obtaining the ability to upload one's mind on a technological device. He archives his consciousness on a machine to preserve his authenticity, ethnicity, and originality in the overwhelmingly large city of Karachi. Mind uploading is one of the most ardent aspirations of the transhumanist movements, which aims at immanence and transcendence (Sorgner 2014, 31; Levchuk 2019, 86; Manzocco 2019, 195–196).

Mind uploading, one of the many preoccupations of transhumanism, has long been one of the most popular motifs of Euro-American science fiction. However, the incorporation of transhumanist themes is almost nonexistent in the literature produced in South Asia. Therefore, the field of transhumanist literary criticism has been overwhelmingly dominated by Western academia. This article explores the representation and figuration of the transhumanist posthuman condition of a fictional character from the technologically backward world.

Mind uploading is also known as mind transfer or whole-brain emulation, which is one of the many popular themes in science fiction produced in Europe and America. For instance, *Neuromancer*, by William Gibson (1984), initiated this transhumanist dream of memory uploading in cyberspace, which kept on resurfacing in contemporary dystopian novels and movies such as *The 100* (Rothenberg 2014–2020), *The Matrix* (Wachowski and Wachowski 1999), and *Transcendence* (Pfister 2014). Additionally, some episodes of popular TV series, such as “Silence in the Library” (Lyn 2008, Season 4, Episode 8) from *Dr. Who* and some episodes from *Black Mirror* (Welsh 2011; Harris 2013) envision a future where mind uploading is a reality. An entire Netflix season, *Carbon Altered* (2019), focuses on a dystopian universe where mind uploading is a part of normal human existence and human beings live on for hundreds of years with the same consciousness but in different bodies.

I argue that Salaamat paints his memories on the material body of the bus, which is akin to the transhumanist vision of consciousness uploading. As compared with the developed world’s futuristic notion of transfer of one’s consciousness onto a computer network or into cyberspace, Salaamat’s projection of his “self” onto this very basic automobile technology might sound incomparable, but this study demonstrates an alternate way to study transhumanist motifs in South Asian literature. The only bus he paints in the narrative of the novel is really significant, because this vehicle is Salaamat’s life story and a demonstration of his inner life. He uploads his mind onto a bus through truck art and motifs of personal significance.

The text explains that he uses the “body of the bus” (Khan 2003, 239) as a “private canvas” (Khan 2003, 239). When he is given the assignment to paint his own bus, he wants to be a part in everything that happens to that bus. He adds all the decorations with his own hands. Salaamat starts working lovingly on his bus as he “cut(s) steel strips into floral shapes ... the newspaper in fish shapes and stuck them on” (Khan 2003, 241) the bus. The text implies multiple time that this vehicle is fused with Salaamat’s subjectivity. The bus is referred to as “the hidden life of a native” (Khan 2003, 243) and his “chronology” (Khan 2003, 255). This vehicle is not a mere machine for him but is his private canvas, which

he uses to transfer his consciousness onto this material body. He wants to be one of those “workers who poured their lives on the bus art” (Khan 2003, 131). Jahanara Ananya Kabir (2011) expounds that this novel delineates “geography of mind” (181) in which “Salaamat’s indigenous and intuitive knowledge is transplanted onto the small-scale economy of lurid and expressive truck art” (182). She further asserts that truck art becomes “a source of emotional and symbolic re-rooting” (Kabir 2011, 173). Transhumanist motif of mind uploading implies a desire to evade physical death by storing human memories in a computer or cyber space (Manzocco 2019, 195–196), similarly, Salaamat also maps memories of his dying culture on a machine to immortalize it.

Drawing on the insights of some prominent posthuman theorists into the study of cybernetics, such as *How We Became Posthuman* by Katherine Hayles (1999), I argue here that Salaamat is depicted as an “information-processing mechanism” who has stored his personal and communal memories on the body of a bus; therefore, he has transhumanist posthuman subjectivity. Hayles, in her seminal posthuman critique of science fiction, argues that human characters in MUSF can be identified as posthuman because they have been portrayed as “information-processing systems” (Hayles 1999, 113), where the “body ceases to be regarded primarily as material object and instead is seen as an informational pattern” (Hayles 1999, 104). Salaamat, who stores the informational patterns of his past on the material alterity of a bus, is also a posthuman subject in the transhumanist sense. Salaamat chooses the body of a vehicle and the technique of truck art to transfer his memories and creates a back-up file of his mind for the preservation of his individual as well as communal memories from his past, which is in danger of extinction because of growing capitalism, globalization agendas, commercial benefits, and politics. He chooses the type of materiality and technique that was available for him and possible in his situation. However, in the context of this study, I argue that the bus onto which Salaamat paints his memories is the technological artifact and mechanical body that he chooses for transferring his consciousness instead of cyberspace or some advanced scientific device. I contend that the main character uses the art of bus painting to transfer his memories, and the researchers who study truck art also argue that most Pakistani painters project their remembrances onto the vehicles they paint (Elias 2005; Malik 2018; Nawab 2017). In this sense, painted automobiles depict the psychosocial and political dilemmas of their painter who use these vehicles as their canvases. Nevertheless, in Euro-American MUSF, most of the time, highly advanced computational and cybernetic systems are illustrated to provide contextualization and description of memory uploading in imaginative universes. The exposition of Salaamat’s character as a transferable data processing mechanism can be compared to the depiction of whole-brain emulation in MUSF such as *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Neuromancer*.

GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF MINDSCAPES

This article further argues that the vehicle art in the novel can be compared with MUSF because of its motif of graphic representation of mindscapes, which is very popular in this subgenre of science fiction. For instance, in the TV series *The 100* (Rothenberg 2014–2020), Season 6, Episode 5, “Nevermind” depicts the mind of the antagonist (Josie) as a giant library where 230 years of memories are categorized systematically while the mindscape of Clarke (the main protagonist) is filled with the significant spatial locations in her life, such as The Ark, Mount Weather, and Shallow Valley House. In another fantasy TV series, *Locke and Key* (Cuse et al. 2020–2022), Season 1, Episode 3, “Headgames,” the mind of a young child (Bode) is illustrated in the form of a colorful, noisy arcade and the interior of his teenage sister (Kinsey’s) mind is like a weird mall. So some writers and film creators have already tried to represent the interior of someone’s mind graphically in more tangible and visible forms. Taking a cue from these science fiction narratives, I contend that the decorated bus stands as a graphic representation of Salaamat’s mindscape and truck art has been used as a metaphor for consciousness uploading. Each step he takes in adorning his bus is a layer of encoding on the material body of the bus. He transfers the informational patterns of his memories onto the material body of the bus through the choice of colors, motifs, and pictures, which he paints onto the vehicle.

The first layer of mapping of Salaamat’s memory and personality characteristics is shown through the color that he chooses for his bus. On a symbolic level, the color selection represents attributes of Salaamat’s personality and his will to gain a powerful position in the overwhelmingly hostile environment. Colors have always been identified as having a symbolic value in our daily lives and especially in literary critiques (Becker 2000; Zimmerman 2009). Even the TV representations of the mindscapes in *The 100* and *Locke and Key* use colors according to the mental disposition of a character. For instance, the mindscape of Bode (the youngest child) is filled with bright colors that demonstrate his happiness and optimism with life (*Locke and Key*, “Head Games,” Season 1, episode 3). Similarly, the color that Salaamat selects for his bus is a symbolic statement of his unique personality among dominant Punjabi⁵ and Pathan⁶ groups of vehicle artists. He mixes the “blue and red Diko cans to get a different shade” (Khan 2003, 241). He plans to prepare the “city’s first purple bus” (Khan 2003, 242). Purple is a symbol of regality, royalty, divine kingship, and supernatural powers (Zimmerman 2009, 65), which thus implies “power and high rank” (Becker 2000, 241). This signifies Salaamat’s will to stand out from the crowd on one level, and on another level it signifies his unique personality and artistic capabilities in a multitude of Punjabis who do most of the metal

work and Pathans who paint the buses; he is an alien, an “ajnabi” (Khan 2003, 131). Once he is finished with the bus he is happy that now “his purple vessel would parade the hidden life of a native in the city of ajnabis” (Khan 2003, 243). He wants to assert his individuality, the uniqueness of his marginalized coastal region’s culture. The two colors, red and blue, that he mixes to achieve purple color signify another layer of symbolism embedded in this text. Red symbolizes the passion of his personality because red symbolizes passion, fire, and life (Becker 2000, 65; Zimmerman 2009, 68). Blue is associated with the sky, which evokes the idea of the divine, eternal, immortal, and superhuman (Becker 2000, 65; Zimmerman 2009, 64), which further extends the motif of a desire for immortality and going beyond human limitations. The color blue in this mixture stands for two different meanings. On one level, it is a reminder of the color of water near his coastal home town, which he adores. The blue color also signifies Salaamat’s love for the sea and its creatures such as turtles and fish. On another level, blue reminds us of the sky and imagination and it signifies the power of Salaamat’s imagination and artistic faculties. Thus, the unique choice of colors for the painting of Salaamat’s first bus unravels the basic characteristics of Salaamat’s consciousness, which are dominated by his imagination and his association with his native land.

The second layer of his memory transfer can be observed in the choice of the truck art motifs and pictures that Salaamat chooses for his bus adornment. Pictures, pictograms, motifs, and holograms are some of the popular ways to store and transmit human memories. Salaamat does the same. Here, an analogy can be drawn between *Trespassing* and an episode of an American sci-fi dystopian TV program, *Black Mirror* (Welsh 2011). In this episode, the characters live in a highly advanced universe where a memory chip has been implanted at the backs of their necks below one ear. This chip, which is named “grain,” stores all their memories in video and pictorial form. Their memories are organized according to years, weeks, and days with thumbnails. They can connect their “grain” to any electronic device and rewind and review their memories, which they call “re-do.” The characters discuss the possibility of deleting and implanting memories. Moreover, one of the female characters also chooses to go “grain-free.” She does not want a hardware device to be implanted in her system for storage of memories. So it is implied that the characters have the choice to survive without this extension. The main protagonist, Liam, doubts the fidelity of his spouse Fi, and he coerces her lover Jonas to do a “re-do” of his memories with his wife. When he gets hold of Jonas’s memories of Fi, he finds out that the child which he considers his own is actually the biological daughter of Jonas. All this becomes too painful for him to bear, so he removes his memory chip from his body and chooses to get rid of all these painful memories. The case

of Salaamat's uploading of his memories onto a vehicle is not so scientifically advanced as to be identified an actual memory upload. But the thumbnail pictures that are used to sort out the memories in the memory upload system introduced in this episode are analogous to the pictures that Salaamat uses in the embellishment of the bus.

Two of the most significant motifs that Salaamat chooses for decorating the bus are "Fish" and "Turtle." Fish is a common truck art motif that stands as a symbol of good luck in Pakistani vehicle decoration traditions (Elias 2003, 193). A fish is usually perceived as a symbol of "life and fertility" (Becker 2000, 114). But Salaamat's choice of fish as a motif for his vehicle art has a deeper meaning: it highlights his ancestral profession of fishery. He paints a very significant feature of the geography of his coastal region by painting fish on the vehicle. In this way, he preserves the geographical memories of his native land as well as his ancestral profession of fishery, which is in danger of extinction because of the onslaught of big capitalist fishing trawlers. For the front fender, he chooses the image of a turtle from his native coastal town because it is an object of personal significance for him. He has special emotional association with them. At the beginning of the novel, he receives a severe beating while saving eggs of a turtle in his homeland that were being smashed by foreigners (Khan 2003, 2). In fact, the demolition of turtle eggs at the beginning of the novel and the later depiction of this creature on the bus also foreshadow the upcoming doom of the bus that Salaamat loves so much. The turtle not only denotes his regional affiliation to his native land but also stands as a symbol for Salaamat's perseverance and ability to remain silent and survive in most of the difficult situations in his life, because this species is famous for its perseverance, patience, wisdom and long-term survival (Sax 2001, 255; Werness 2006, 412). Turtles have long lives and they are also "a symbol of immortality" (Becker 2000, 311). The painted turtle on the bus is a manifestation of Salaamat's strong will to survive and perseverance. The turtles stand as an extended metaphor for further explicating the motif of human aspiration of immortality and consciousness uploading.

Salaamat decorates the interior of the bus with graphic representations of memories from his native place. He paints colorful boats, loitering dogs, and scenes from his past. The inside of Salaamat's bus is a projection of his precious memories from his village life and childhood. He decorates it with "with boats decked in flags, as during the annual *Mela* (Fair) at his village. Dogs lolled on sand dunes or chased baby turtles scrambling out to sea; women loitered outside the thatched-roof teahouse" (Khan 2003, 242). He depicts everyday common objects and places from his home town and the objects that he has loved, such as boats, baby turtles, dunes, and women at

the teahouses. He tries to preserve the dying tradition of fishing fairs which belonged to the distant past of his birthplace, the geographical features of dunes, and thatched-roof teahouses, which were a specialty of his region. The pictorial representations of significant cultural events, geographical features, and public places are emblems of his past that he wants to protect. He wants these important spatio-temporal sites of his endangered cultural memory to be saved in a material form so that it can get a new life and be reborn and regenerated in the form of vehicle art motifs. He also paints two most significant memories related to the two dearest women in his life, “at the back, exactly where his Rani was painted on the outside, he made a pair of old hands holding a hookah” (Khan 2003, 242). He paints his first encounter with Dia when she was playing cricket with her father. That first meeting with her was permanently imprinted on his mind because out of all available memories in his consciousness he chooses this specific memory to paint on the bus (Khan 2003, 242). The hands of his grandmother on her hookah are also one of the most beloved memories etched onto his brain. So both these paintings are snapshots from his memories that he recreates on the body of the bus. He places both these women in very high esteem and he transfers and preserves them on the material body of his bus. Thus, pictures of fish, turtles, his grandmother’s hands, and Dia (Salaamat’s beloved) are akin to the thumbnails/ mindscapes/ imprints graphically illustrated in Euro-American consciousness uploading science fiction.

NONHUMAN INTIMATE ALTERITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS UPLOADING SCIENCE FICTION

Another affinity between the transhumanist thematic structure of *Trespassing* and various MUSF texts is the use of a physical device/alterity to store human memories for backup. Mind uploading refers to transferring memories onto any mechanical object—“a technological artifact” (Gaitán 2019, 403) or “a robotic body or another biological body synthesized for the occasion” (Manzocco 2019, 196). It is an aesthetic tradition of consciousness-uploading science fiction that there is almost always a material or technological device (ranging from a tiny chip to a large hive mind) that carries the backup of the human memories. For instance, in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984), huge artificial intelligence software called Neuromancer stores the consciousness of the humans and creates virtual reality scenarios based on the uploaded memories in its huge database. In the TV series *The 100*, the microchip that stores a human being’s memory is called “flame” (Rothenberg 2014–2020). In *Black Mirror* (Welsh

2011), the memory storage device goes by the name of “grain.” In the TV series *Altered Carbon* (Kalogridis 2018–2020), the human memories are recorded in a disc-shaped device called a “cortical stack.” Nonetheless, in some MUSF, human equivalents are created by storing data in mechanical devices, for instance, the android versions of humans in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (Dick 1968). Actually, in some science fiction narratives, matter comes even closer to replacing a human being. For instance, *Black Mirror*’s episode “Be Right Back” (Harris 2013) depicts a universe where the materialization of a deceased human being’s body by analyzing the available data of his voice notes, videos, and social media trails is possible. In this episode, a human named Ash dies and his grieving beloved (Martha) reluctantly uses artificially intelligent software that first emulates his text messaging style and word choice, and then copies his voice with the right tone and inflection, and finally the software company offers to develop a humanoid version of Ash who would look exactly like him. Hence, a material/nonhuman body is always present in MUSF narratives that carry the traces of human consciousness.

In *Trespassing*, the material body of the bus that Salaamat creates is analogous to memory chips, disks, and cyberspace where Western fictional characters store their memories. The bus becomes a cyborg, a symbiosis of man and machine. Donna Haraway (2010), one of the many pioneering posthuman theorists, defines “Cyborg” as follows: “[B]y the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics” (2191).

After Salaamat transfers his memories onto the bus, the vehicle becomes a metaphoric cyborg, a transhumanist posthuman foil to Salaamat’s character, whose subjectivity is symbolically attached to the automobile he has decorated. He has projected his hidden unconscious life onto this bus, so this machine carries bits and pieces of his valuable memories. He leaves traces of his being, his subjectivity, on this automobile, which makes Salaamat’s bus an aesthetic transhumanist cyborg body. The bus can be compared to the electronic consciousness-uploading system present in *Neuromancer* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*? Moreover, it can be compared to the motif of memory chip/“grain” (Welsh 2011) and subjectivity configuration software (Harris 2013) in *Black Mirror*.

The body of the bus, which represents the exteriorization of Salaamat’s memories, becomes a transhumanist posthumanist alterity. The notions of the “nonhuman” (Clark 2017), “matter” (Barad 2003), and the “body” (Rossini 2017) are significant in the exploration of symbiosis between human beings

and materials around them in narratives about consciousness uploading. In the whole-brain emulation context, “technology” cannot be dismissed as an insignificant object, a tool, or the material (Ornella 2015, 338) because technology “is always ‘lived’—always historically informed by political, economic and social content, and always an expression of aesthetic value” (Sobchack 2004, 220). *Trespassing* depicts “Salaamat’s struggle to survive in a highly material way that is associated with a particular place in a global context” (Rahman 2011, 269). Since Salaamat is trying to preserve his ethnic memories on the nonhuman body of the bus, that material alterity becomes a significant symbolic object in the overall tragic struggle of the main protagonist. It is also a recurrent theme in MUSF that the material device becomes very valuable because of the storage of human consciousness on it and various characters struggle with either saving or destroying these memory uploading devices. For instance, in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* the androids who carry human memories are being hunted. Similarly, in TV series *The 100*, the memory saving device called “flame” is always in danger of being destroyed. It is this desire to become immortal associated with the material device that makes it valuable.

Trespassing is a transhumanist posthuman tragedy because the body of the bus where Salaamat stores his cherished memories (the transhumanist aspiration of Salaamat) is burnt down on the roads of Karachi,⁷ which devours Salaamat’s hope of surviving. The city of Karachi here has been used as a microcosmic representation of the entire postcolonial Pakistan, where groups from ethnicities and races (especially Muhajir and Pathan) were jockeying for power (Kennedy 1991; BBC 2011; Gayer 2012; *Dawn* 2016) in the 1990s. These ethnic riots were quite violent and usually public transport was set on fire by angry mobs (*Dawn* 2016). Drawing insights from Karen Barad (2003), I argue that in MUSF “matter” really starts to “matter” through “iterative intra-activity” (Barad 2003, 822). It becomes important to save matter because matter constitutes and conserves significant portions of human consciousness. The bus was not a passive nonhuman object, but the dynamics of intra-activity transformed this material entity into an active agent in the ongoing materialization of Salaamat’s subjectivity and consciousness. Salaamat was exiled from his native land and culture. Moreover, he faced hostility and discrimination from the people around him in Karachi—a metropolitan land. The body of the adorned bus (through ongoing intra-activity between his vehicle art motifs, sociopolitical milieu, and nostalgia for his childhood) emerges as a posthuman matter that is valuable for the survival, preservation, and immanence of Salaamat and his culture. Therefore, the destruction of this “intimate alterity” (Clark 2017) matters to

the main protagonist of the novel and can be considered a potential point in this text which can be extrapolated for posthuman critique.

For Salaamat, the burning of the bus is not simply destruction of a machine, it is a “death” (Khan 2003, 245). The use of the word “death” (Khan 2003, 245) for the demolition of the mechanical body of the bus implies that it is more than a machine because it carries the consciousness of a human. The word “death” is usually used to imply the demise of a living, thing but the choice of this word for the devastation of a mechanical entity might be interpreted as another indication that since the vehicle now holds particles of human memories, a more appropriate word for its devastation is “death.” The obliteration of the vehicle is not simply deterioration of the bus that Salaamat painted, but is symbolic demolition of Salaamat’s past and present—his consciousness. When Salaamat looks closely at the burning bus, he sees that “The paint, metal, and pictures were all singed and furled ... Orange flames rose around it half-heartedly. They’d bored into the iron, shattered the disco lights, stripped the plastic seats, gorged the tinted windows, blackened the silver steering wheel” (Khan 2003, 245).

At this point in time, the destruction of the bus and Salaamat’s optimism are symbolically fused together and mutually inform about the devastation of both human subjectivity of Salaamat and the nonhuman entity of the bus. In the light of the insights of Rossini (2017) and Clark (2008; 2017), it can be argued that the body of the vehicle that Salaamat paints is an important and essential part of his distributed identity in this novel. He exteriorizes his memories, his consciousness, by archiving them on the nonhuman body of the vehicle. The material body of the bus might be read as the mechanical representation of a human subjectivity. Figuratively speaking, the iron of the bus can be read as the perseverance of Salaamat, which has been destroyed by the burning of this bus. The bright disco lights might be read as a metaphor for the colorful hopes and dreams of Salaamat, which have been shattered. Moreover, it could be argued that the blackened steering wheel stands as a symbol for the moral deterioration of Salaamat’s character, because the steering wheel is the main tool that steers a journey. At this point, the man and the machine that he has painted become one. The novel narrates, “Salaamat walks around his bus. *His*. His months of barely any sleep; his runny eyes; his hands sliced by steel; his glittery fish; his Rani; his chronology” (Khan 2003, 255). This excerpt from the text confirms that this bus is a posthuman body (the way transhumanism uses this term), which carries Salaamat’s identity afloat. This bus is his technological autobiography: an electronic tablet on which he has inscribed his subjectivities with the help of personal codes, symbols, and metaphors. After the destruction of the bus, Salaamat finds himself broken-hearted and loses touch with his

aesthetic self. Salaamat is beaten badly twice in the narrative of the novel but he always recovers. But the burning of the bus is a symbolic representation of the breaking down of his soul, which is now beyond recovery:

He shut his eyes, overcome by an exhaustion that was absolute. There was not one thing around him that suggested the order he'd slogged to construct since the day he'd left his village. No, before that: since the trawlers and his attack ... There was no beautiful thing to focus in his life. He had to begin another. (Khan 2003, 255)

The tragic tone of this excerpt conveys a sense of doom. The tragic narrative strategy of the author which has been used to describe Salaamat's overwhelming sense of loss at the burning of bus establishes the significance of the material alterity of the bus in this text. Salaamat is the main tragic protagonist of this transhumanist posthuman text, who aspires to go beyond his human limitations like the character of Doctor Faustus in Christopher Marlowe's play (1604). Ultimately all his hopes to transcend his human condition are dashed to the ground.

In conclusion, this essay demonstrates that one of the possible ways to conduct transhumanist posthuman literary critiques might be to find out the points of convergence between the fiction produced in the developing countries and MUSF from the developed countries. The textual analysis explains and contributes to a more cohesive understanding of the transhumanist connotation of the "posthuman." A transhumanist posthuman textual analysis of *Trespassing* illustrates thematic similarities between MUSF and the motif of truck art in Khan's text. This examination discovers that the delineation of intermediation between the human subjectivity of Salaamat and the mechanical entity of the bus that he decorates with the help of truck art motifs and objects of personal significance is a possible analogy for consciousness uploading. By analyzing the color symbolism, animal motifs, and material body of the truck, this research extrapolates the possibilities of a transhumanist posthuman inquiry into the literature produced in non-Western/South Asian/technologically underdeveloped countries. Moreover, the graphic representation of Salaamat's memories on the body of the bus resembles the ways in which mindscapes are configured in science fiction TV. Furthermore, this article also asserts that the body of the bus becomes a matter that matters for the survival of Salaamat in his hostile environment. Hence, by comparing the truck art motif's kinship with consciousness uploading, this article develops a blueprint for expanding the horizons of transhumanism and explores the possibility of posthuman connections between humans and the material world in the literature which is being produced in technologically backward countries.

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NOTES

1. Pakistani truck art is a world-famous genre of art. Although it earned its popularity because of the attractive adornment of the bodies of trucks by Pakistani artists, gradually it has emerged as a distinct type of regional handicrafts and decorations. In contemporary Pakistan, many other vehicles are also decorated by emulating truck art motifs, for instance, buses, rickshaws, and horse and donkey carts. Moreover, truck art has become a lucrative business enterprise and a diverse array of clothing, souvenirs, trinkets, handicrafts, and decoration pieces are sold by exploiting truck art as a brand name.
2. This short story was written in Hindi, but a short film based on it is available on YouTube (Ghosh 2017).
3. This short story is written in Urdu and it has never been translated into English to my knowledge.
4. In *Trespassing*, characters are involved in painting buses and not trucks, but since “truck art” now stands as a distinct regional art genre, this paper will use the alternative terms “truck Art” and “vehicle art” for referring to the decoration of buses in this novel.
5. The Pakistani people who live in the province Punjab are called Punjabi.
6. The Pakistani people who live in the North-Western Frontier Province (NWFP) are called Pathans.
7. In the 1990s, Pakistan’s metropolitan city of Karachi was rife with ethnic conflicts. Buses were frequently burnt during the ethnic riots as a sign of protest and to instill fear in the conflicting groups.

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