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Unspoken Thresholds: Exploring Spatiality and Invasion in Zoya Pirzad's *Things We Left Unsaid* and Vanessa Chan's *The Storm We Made*

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ABSTRACT

In the context of architecture, spatiality signifies dichotomies of interior and exterior, domestic or private and public or social domains, which are socially and psychologically meaningful. In a similar thread, spatiality within the literary context draws on elements that create boundaries between internal and external spaces within a text. This paper delves into the interior and exterior spaces presented by Zoya Pirzad in Things We Left Unsaid and Vanessa Chan in The Storm We Made. With distinctive references made to racial and ethnic conflicts within the respective nations, this paper seeks to examine how the female characters within the margins of society are represented when encountering the invader. Additionally, through the examination of spatial divides, we explore the notion of the threshold as a tangible and intangible idea or construct, acknowledging the distinction between the interior and exterior domains presented in both texts. In both works, the threshold within the spaces occupied and the characters' identities become intelligibly connected through various encounters, thoughts, and decisions drawn. The findings of this paper ultimately emphasise how thresholds in works of fiction, like these two novels, create a sense of comfort, safety, belonging, and the consciousness of self within the created space, as characters jostle between the invasion of the established threshold and the restructuring of the ruined threshold.

Keywords: Iranian literature; Malaysian literature; spatiality; threshold; invasion

INTRODUCTION

Spatiality and literature have close connections. The history of English literature has precipitated different types of poetic and fictional literary works in which a place offers significant value to its interpretations (Alves & Queiroz, 2015). Geographical landscapes contribute to the meaning of a text either naturally or artificially (Kang et al., 2021). It indicates whether real, like Khaled Hosseini's Afghanistan, Charles Dickens's London, Tan Twan Eng's Cameron Highland, or James Joyce's Dublin, or imaginary and fictional, as Achebe's Igbo, Dante's Inferno and Hell, or Lewis Carroll's Wonderland, a place gives a particular structure to the whole narrative. In other words, literature, apart from the element of setting, is a form of mapping that states where the reader stands, how characterisation develops, and why the narrative or story takes place. Tao (2022), alluding to Albert Einstein's theory, emphasises how much a place in a literary work influences a reader's understanding of that work in terms of the physical, psychological, and social references to a space.

This familiar sentence that says 'you are here', therefore, signifies the social, cultural, and psychological representational association of a space and a place in humanity's foregrounding the thought that a particular space is far from a metaphorically imagined frame to fit the story; it is, but, a product which dynamically creates and inserts meanings (Tally, 2013). In the same way, the idea of 'home sweet home' has never lost its physical and psychological influence. Hillis (2006) emphasises that spatiality covers any assumptions about a place, including materials, sense of jurisdiction, real, virtual, or metaphorical ideas, and even hegemony and globalisation, giving the space a sense of agency and subjectivity. Tally (2013) in 'Spatiality' states that being in a space means being in the world, which is contrary to being disoriented because being lost or not having a place is frustrating and unpleasant. Mentioning the attention of nineteenth-century literature on the concept of time, he refers to spatiality as having "a new aesthetic sensibility" concerning postmodernism.

The changes in the world in terms of wars and revolutions, and the increasing number of people who have been moving, highlight the "distinctiveness of a given space" (p. 13). The choice of a place, furthermore, emphasises its connection to the human unconsciousness or consciousness because a place has characteristics of continuity, homogeneity, isotropy, quantifiability, and subjective observability. Goldstein, enumerating those features, as quoted by Tally (2013), refers to the influence of capitalism, which emerged "new ways of seeing space" (Goldstein, 1988, pp. 20-21; Tally, 2013, p.18). It indicates that social relations and psychological forces are at work connecting an individual to a specific place/space. This new position of architecture, structural aspects of a building, and the physical environment in the humanities has made it influentially connected to literature in interdisciplinary methods and practices. Critically studying the space/place in a literary work would mean investigating what makes the real and the imagined world close.

Despite the home's plain idyllic emotional meaning, studies in the humanities have argued that there is more to it, and this spatial existence and its components, such as the threshold, cannot be randomly selected, described, and referred to. In line with this, this research attempts to elaborate on the concept of spatiality, related to the threshold, in two selected novels, *Things Left Unsaid* and *The Storm We Made*. What makes Zoya Pirzad and Vanessa Chan's novels comparatively similar is the representation of the families who are regarded as minorities in their societies. The new encounters of these families in their respective societies create a visible platform for deeper emotional engagement. While in both novels, the two Iranian Armenian and Malaysian Eurasian families seem physically safe, emotionally secure, and psychologically stable within the boundaries of their home, their home threshold plays a pivotal role in transforming the inner and outer connections between and within the family members.

Although the novels' historical, geographical, political, and religious significance is highlighted, the notion of threshold introduces a new understanding of them. It is assumed as an in-between space through which people, in terms of family members, neighbours, friends, and acquaintances, can pass, and this passage would be not only physically relevant but also psychologically and emotionally definitive. In both novels, the idea of an invader who was once welcome as a guest also becomes reflective of the dynamic created in the families in terms of the relationships and mindsets. The threshold is considered to be the point of invasion of the whole boundaries that invisibly encircle the families. The invaders in *The Storm We Made* and *Things Left Unsaid* influence the two mothers, Cecily and Clarice, emotionally and psychologically, making them question their roles as wives and mothers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

IRANIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Iranian literature can be divided into two distinguished categories. The first category consists of works written in English mainly by writers who reside outside the country as immigrants. The second includes the works translated from Persian into English. Poetry, novels, and short stories are associated with different styles and schools, and literary theories that result from those writers' attempts at expressing themselves and their conditions (Khayrullayeva, 2024). Such literature has significantly contributed to World Literature since, regionally and historically speaking, the country has been experiencing huge socio-political changes for years. In this respect, while gender, identity, tradition vs modernity, resistance, diaspora, and war are the prevalent themes among the novelists, spirituality, faith, mythology, and love are among the themes explored by the ancient Persian poets. Islam and religious thoughts and disciplines affected the writers' styles, and the literary works became infused with such tradition (Soltani, 2017). Yet, Taheri et al. (2023) argued that the Iranians had sought to preserve their Persian identity despite Arab influences. Similarly, since the 19th-century West was mesmerised by the Orient, Persian poetry captured their attention, and Western scholars sought to understand the oriental patterns by conducting direct translation (Yohannan, 1952). Persian literature has inspired several European writers such as Goethe and Lord Byron. Feeling deeply connected with Hafez and his poetic tradition, Goethe created his 'West Eastern Divan' in the form of a spiritual conversation between the Persian poet and himself (Behjant, 2005). Lord Byron used Persian/ Islamic terminology, mythology, images, and Persian concepts of love, wine, and joy for the purpose of enhancing his attraction with the Oriental themes (Khayrullayeva, 2024).

Iranian writers, furthermore, have discussed the socio-political influence of the Revolution of 1979 and the changes that have been brought about ever since (Hillmann, 1982). The new state referred to Western culture as alien and aimed at replacing it with an Islamic culture foregrounding the priority of the religion. Shakeri (2024), outlining the history of novel writing in Iran, states that many novelists wrote according to the historical themes due to the country's undergoing challenging transformation and its proclivity to acquiring a modern identity. He refers to the novels created between 1920 and 1940 as "social problem novels," which portrayed the problems of society, such as poverty, corruption, marginalisation of minorities, and prostitution (p. 150). Following the years of war, literature became a platform to maintain its role in presenting the sacredness of particular incidents related to the Iran-Iraq war. Both events made a huge number of people migrate, building the body of the Iranian diaspora. Accordingly, one may find the element of resistance against the hegemony of the existing domination and oppression in Persian literature in English. This literature covers topics that are related to prison, asylum, memoirs, and forced immigration (Alinouri, 2021). Mousavi Razavi and Allahdaneh (2018) connected this resistance to an ideological belief of Iranians towards the war. In this manner, it can be considered as heroism if it means the struggle against aggression and tyranny (Kamarposhti & Soleymanpour, 2021). The forced immigration causes noticeable and unnoticed effects, and the Iranian literature in English explores them because an Iranian immigrant becomes exposed to different social and psychological challenges. This literature includes narratives that are multiculturally meaningful and reflective of the hardships that Iranian young adults experience in the host country as a result of displacement (Aghapour, 2022).

WOMEN'S WRITING IN IRAN

Women's writing has played a vital role in the presentation and development of women's place in Iranian literature and culture. Pirzad, coming from an Iranian Muslim father and an Armenian mother, has depicted an Iranian contemporary woman in a male-dominated culture. This literature predominantly presents Iranian women who are culturally and socially assumed to be configuring their place in their homes and society (Rahimieh, 2010). Women's silence, domestic violence, restrictions, taboos, polygamy, tradition, modernity, and patriarchy are among the topics that have been explored in Iranian Women's Narratives (Goldin, 2015). Femininity in these narratives involves a religious discourse about the institutionalisation of suppression (Beidollahkhani & Farkhari, 2024). It implies that Iranian gender writings have been advocating for the rights that had been taken for granted because of women's marginalisation in speaking up. Such works are intended to emphasise their oppression and women's innocence, especially if the literary works are written by female writers (Mehrpouyan & Zakeri, 2023). This status has affected women's participation and role as well as their possible activities, leading to their being perceived as excluded and undeserving. Thus, gender stereotyping sounds essentially common due to the established social forces and religious ideology, and the Persian literature confirms the gender-biased attitude toward women (Karami, 2020). Women become minorities and are considered as the others, and when they belong to other types of religions other than Islam, in Iran, they have to create a sense of belonging in their community. Javadi (1985) addresses these women as a general, and the fact that they should struggle and fight for their voice. Pirzad's writings, similarly, portray a patriarchal society in which males are dominant, and her stories are the expression of women's family, sexual, social, and cultural issues, women's struggle to grow, and their struggle against patriarchy and their identity.

ZOYA PIRZAD: THINGS LEFT UNSAID

Zoya Pirzad is an Iranian-Armenian contemporary writer who won the 2002 National Hooshang Golshiri Literary Award for her novel *Things Left Unsaid*. The story takes place in Abadan, one of the southern cities in Iran, in the 1960s. Clarice Ayvazian, the protagonist, is a married woman with three children and lives comfortably. As a devoted housewife and mother, she carries out all the responsibilities related to her children, husband, and house, in addition to partially taking care of her mother and sister. Getting to know a new neighbour, she encounters new experiences which make her life physically, emotionally, and psychologically turbulent. Pirzad intends to report the characters and incidents precisely, faithfully, and realistically, which has been a significant point for some critics (Gheytanchi, 2007). She predominantly portrays the Iranian women in their regular, usually dull, domesticity, whose roles as mothers or wives subdue their individualities. These women are, more often than not, so consumed in their roles that they forget their identities and dreams, and Pirzad shows how they turn to someone else. Iranian women, like Clarice, represent the fluidity of identities due to the cultural and social entanglement of gender roles (Yaghoobi, 2019). In this way, however, the meaning of a complete family can be fulfilled. At the same time, men are ironically unchanged and are presented in a complete, independent, and superior manner as if they do not need to think about shaping and developing their identity because it has been unquestionably established and accepted.

CONTEMPORARY MALAYSIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Malaysian literature has a distinct place in historical and postcolonial discourse due to its portrayal of the national identity formation, inflicted trauma, and the colonial legacies. Malaysian contemporary literature set in WWII serves as a critical site for examining the collective trauma, cultural memory, and identity struggles that were engendered by this particular period. This literature presents particular insights coming from the present perspective, which draws from the "thematics of violent communal upheavals" (Pillai et al., 2023). Malaysian authors, unlike Western war narratives, foreground the perspectives of marginalised communities with themes that concentrate on morality, ethical dilemmas, memory and psychological trauma, suffering, the brutality of the war, discrimination, resistance, and resilience. The narratives portrayed elements of folklore, traditional lifestyle, and the socio-cultural syncretism of Malaysia's multi-ethnic environment. Philip Holden (2009, p.64) draws on the effects of trauma that is prevalent in the works of significant Malaysian writers such as Lloyd Fernado and K. S. Maniam, whose works strive to give emphasis on the impact of colonialism and indentured labour. Now, even more than 70 years after British imperialism and Japanese occupation, lingering memories have still haunted the people and their stories. These narratives, according to Saxena (2022), "undo the linear historiography that moves from one event to the next" (p. 3). The effects of war on the multi-ethnic Malaysian writers could be found differently; yet, more often than not, they would stick to the notion of identity and identity formation. They, in addition, show local people in aggravating situations as labourers. People were displaced and migrated, especially if they belonged to minor communities. "The ideology of racial inferiority, the pacification of the ruling class, and colonial monopoly over trade and economy alienated the local Malay community and disintegrated the socio-economic fabric of Malaya" (Saxena, 2022, p. 8). Quayum (2008) further argues that the thematic choices of Malaysian writers over time have also further contributed to the "process of nation formation in a positive and constructive way", while also "apprehending" Malaysia as a significant space for the development of authentic and realistic representations of the people (p.164-65). In doing so, Malaysian writers of various backgrounds, genders, cultures and identities become key players in the representation of Malaysian national and cultural identity.

WOMEN'S WRITING IN MALAYSIA

Given the rich tapestry of the nation, Malaysian literary writings are often produced by writers of diverse backgrounds, races, ethnicities and social identities. While the glaring differences between cultures and traditions cannot be dismissed, it is crucial to explore how Malaysian writers are able to navigate through these different discourses. Raihanah M.M. (2009) argues that, while within a multicultural world, writings or art produced may be personal to a particular experience, there is no denying that such works remain "anchored" to the "lived context of culture, history and environment" (p.44). This becomes particularly important when examining the works of Malaysian women writers. In terms of works produced by women writers in Malaysia, Saxena (2024) delves into the works of two Malaysian Chinese women writers who postulate the underlying problems that surround the Malaysian woman; "from a prescriptive sense of "how it should be for the third-world women" to a consideration of national and global frameworks of development that limit the choices and agency of women". Delving into the works by Chuah Guat Eng and Yang-May Ooi, Saxena reveals how the writings give a perspective into how postcolonial writings delve into the realm of colonialism while emphasising "exploitative racial and gendered identities" (p.180). Such trajectories become the crux of most writings produced by Malaysian

women writers, as the characters are often revealed to jostle between the realities of colonialism and patriarchy. Significant attempts have also been made to examine these representations of women, especially when they are written by women writers, as examined by Manaf (2015), who discusses the role of submissive women in Malaysian writings. While the stereotypical view has always been placed on the subservient role played by women, Manaf further challenges this notion by drawing examples of how Malaysian writings over the years have begun to depict women in various forms, from mother to daughter, from wife to prostitute, from worker to fighter. Further exploration also reveals how the Malaysian woman's identity is remoulded and re-represented within literary works. Rajandram (2024) presents insights into the works of Malaysian Muslim writers whose works negotiate between ethnic and cultural diversities within Malaysian society. The further development of writings produced by Malaysian women can also be seen through the works of the likes of Hanna Alkaf, whose writings explore the voices of the Malaysian young adult while addressing pertinent issues relevant to society in contemporary Malaysia. Similarly, the works of Shivani Sivagurunathan, such as *Yalpanam,* provide a glimpse into the comprehension of the Malaysian women and the ever-changing landscape of the nation, as told through the representation of characters from various ethnic backgrounds. One of the more recent works that continues to explore the voices of the unheard is Vanessa Chan's novel, which dives not only into the painful past of Japanese occupation but also through the representation of a Malayan family whose culture and ethnicity are representative of the multicultural facets that shape the nation of today.

VANESSA CHAN: THE STORM WE MADE

Vanessa Chan is a contemporary Malaysian writer whose *The Storm We Made*, a debut novel, draws a historical picture of Malaysia (Malay Peninsula) during the 1940s, especially during the tumultuous time of World War II and Japanese occupation. Revolving around the life of Cecily, a housewife and a mother to three children, the novel examines the role the mother plays as a spy for the Japanese during the Second World War. Governed by the belief that the Japanese would liberate Malaya from British Rule, Cecily's role reveals the further devastation and a deeper impact, especially when her son Abel, like many young boys in the country, is kidnapped to be forced to work on the Death Railway. The novel unveils the ways in which Cecily and her daughters suffer the consequences of the war and harsh realities that jeopardise their lives every day. Given the novelty of the book and the issues it presents, there is little research done on the significance of the themes underlined. Oza (2024) emphasises how Chan's novel serves as a novel on power play- in which Cecily strives to instigate change, allowing herself to be manipulated by the promises of a Japanese General "who woos her with dreams of 'an Asia for Asians'". What is pivotal in noting is how the power play that exists within the text becomes further evident through the exploration of the thresholds. In examining this text, this study not only shifts the focus on examining the thresholds, but also onto the new emerging literary voice within the Malaysian literary scene.

SPATIALITY

Past studies have also employed the examination of spatiality within architecture, literature and media. When drawing on this examination of spatiality, Pillai (2008) delves into space as a site of power and contestation. Pillai argues that colonial space was meticulously structured to manufacture docility and maintain hierarchies. Yet, as Pillai demonstrates, these spatial formations

were never wholly inviolable. She interprets K. S. Maniam's diasporic characters as reconfiguring their relationship to Malaysian space—not as alien or borrowed, but as contested and co-created. These literary representations allow for a "reterritorialisation of identity", where former sites of oppression are transformed into spaces of cultural negotiation and belonging. Similarly, Pillai (2021) also explores the material and symbolic intersections between Catholic sacred space and Malay cultural geography through her examination of the trope of the house—both as architectural form and as metaphor for home, belonging, and spiritual communion, creating a strong sense of belonging within Malaysia. She traces this through the physical presence of Catholic churches in traditional Malay-style wooden houses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These built environments become spaces of synekism, where religious faith, vernacular architecture, inter-ethnic cooperation, and national identity converge. In a similar thread, Mohammadi and van den Scott (2023) examine the borders of privacy and power dynamics as found within Iranian homes in Iranian movies. Through the scrutiny of thresholds in traditional Iranian houses that unify the main areas, *andarooni* (private space) and *birooni* (public space), their findings reveal that thresholds hold the power to create both unity and a disruption of order, focusing on the power dynamics exhibited within the selected movies analysed.

METHODOLOGY

The study seeks to employ the examination of the concept of the “threshold” and its interconnectedness to the idea of safety. Drawing from geocriticism and spatial studies, a place can be a representative of a concept, either physical or psychological. This perspective pushes the boundaries that might have been traced for a place. In literature, whether real or imaginary, the threshold plays a meaningful role in determining the relationships and connections among the people who are inside and outside a home. Edward Soja (1940-2015), in ‘Postmodern Geographies’, argues that space is not a passive, neutral backdrop to the connections and processes, but an active and dynamic force that shapes human life. A particular space can emphasise inequality, power, and identity apart from its containing meaning (Soja, 1989). In other words, it is a hybrid experience that is a combination of observing, perceiving, conceiving, and signifying a space as a living and contested phenomenon. The threshold can be connected to Soja's notion of the third space or as a liminal (in-between) space (Soja, 1989). He states that a threshold, as a transformative phenomenon, can indicate ambiguity and hybridity because it is an in-between space where social meanings are negotiated and psychological connectedness takes place. This in-between status foregrounds contingency, which challenges the fixed meanings and enables a dynamic process of meaning-making. On the one hand, it is an indoor place expressing safety and assurance; on the other hand, it symbolically stands for psychological and emotional interconnectedness. Social relations and psychological and emotional certainties reconstitute and reconfigure. However, when the threshold is breached, the sense of safety, predictability and assurance becomes disrupted, leading to a form of invasion.

The idea of invasion can be both physical and psychological. In this study, the invasion is exemplified through how invasions into the home space, relationships, and mindsets are made. As a result of these invasions, the characters are now rendered helpless as the safe thresholds become violated, especially through engagement with the invaders. All in all, through the representation of the characters within both novels, this study examines the way in which the threshold serves as a negotiation between safety and invasion experienced by the characters.

DISCUSSION

THINGS LEFT UNSAID BY ZOYA PIRZAD

THRESHOLD (SELF, COMMUNITY, AND NATION)

Clarice Ayvazian in Pirzad's *Things Left Unsaid* is depicted as a perfect daughter, mother, and wife. Faithful and dependable, she is also an essential figure among her friends. She is predominantly occupied with domestic activities and carries them out thoroughly and flawlessly. A precise example is when she "slid the cake off its cardboard disc onto the serving dish," which was contrary to what other Armenian women used to do, according to Ms Simonian (Pirzad, 2012, p.33). Her worries concerning minute matters, such as wondering what the girl had been "staring (at) so intently?" and whether she had "spotted any dirt" or perhaps she "thought "of the kitchen as "old-fashioned or cluttered," are reflective of such attitudes (p. 10). The title of the story indicates the fact that Clarice, similar to many other women, has things left unsaid, which shows her submissiveness as an Eastern woman. Readers are given an impression that their family house is regarded as the epitome of safety in which not only does her family live guarded from the physical harm of the outside, but every member also develops their skills and is nourished and nurtured (Pirzad, 2012). Within the threshold of the home, Clarice is regarded as safe and well within a familiar space, as she "did not need to look at the kitchen clock" because she already knew it was time for her children to return from school (p. 9). The safety projected here is further exemplified as she is able to perform her role as a nurturer by preparing her children for bed and through the habit of telling bedtime stories (p. 15). It is also within her home domain that she is revealed as one who is able to channel her talents; a bookshop always sent her books to study or review, and most of these books were written in the Armenian language (p.20). She is projected as a different woman even while wearing her wedding ring, and according to her sister, "…how would people know that Miss Clarice is not like every other woman?" (p. 13). Their home, to which every one of the members turns at the end of the day, is the place that Clarice has prepared. Whoever enters their home feels the safety of a supportive, trustworthy, kind, and motherly woman and the stability of a life. Additionally, the kitchen, where Clarice spends most of her time, is revealed to appear like the heart of the house. She unconditionally prepares all meals and makes sure her children love the food. Every time, her people gather around the table and conveniently report and share what they experienced, felt, thought, and decided upon. Pirzad also paints an image of safety within the community through the revelation of the area in which they reside, which is mostly occupied by the Armenians, who are considered minorities in Iran. Despite being in the margins, they have formed a well-connected community, celebrating their events and supporting each other. Their community, regardless of its size, is united, congenial, and safe, and the families who are close to each other meet regularly, share their thoughts and decisions, and enjoy each other's company.

INVASION

Nevertheless, the notion of invasion implicitly reveals itself when a new family of three members begins living in the house opposite Clarice's. A new family comprising an old woman, her son, and her granddaughter, who have recently moved to the house across the street, brings about some changes (Pirzad, 2012). G-4, the house, was once Clarice's close friends', and the way that the newcomers moved inconspicuously can be referred to as a form of invasion. Arousing further

suspicion, the whole family behaves in an inexplicably strange manner during a dinner invitation extended by Clarice, which makes Clarice and her family feel uncertain. Each of these three members invades the Ayvazian family's threshold in a different form.

The first is seen through Emily, the young girl whose strange behaviour and appearance make Clarice constantly sceptical about her having connections with her daughters and son, who, himself, becomes a victim of Emily's mischievous and demanding attitude, leaving him heartbroken. Clarice's mind is full of scepticism as she is hesitant and visibly reluctant to welcome Emily over, exclaiming to her family, "You didn't tell me we have a guest" (Pirzad, 2012, p.9). This physical arrival of Emily into the private location of the family, in other words, leads to Clarice's unconscious disapproval. Her motherly sense suggests her protectiveness against anyone who might jeopardise her children's safety. In addition, the fact that Emily's family had been moving around and she had attended schools in different cities was perplexing for Clarice because it suggested that those new people did not belong anywhere (Pirzad, 2012). Unable to fathom how different this family is, Clarice experiences a strong sense of invasion of the calm and serenity she upholds in her household.

Another subtle invasion takes place through Emile Simonian's attitude. Emile, one of the newcomers, is portrayed as enigmatic, gentle, and ambiguous in addition to being from an aristocratic lineage and having a strange past. Although his presence at Clarice's house is mainly confined to visits for the purpose of socialising, Clarice is influenced by his meticulous attention and delicate manners. The manner of attention psychologically and physically surprises and attracts her because she feels that he can understand her complexities. Intimately calling her by her first name for lending her a hand “clearing the dinner table”, he is revealed to value and admire her poetic potential, which creates a vision for her, suggesting his feelings and emotions are exceptionally more powerful than her husband’s (p. 79). As a result, the subtle invasion takes form as she begins to think that Artoush, having taken her for granted as his wife, has disregarded her abilities, emotions, and energies. In different situations, as both families gather, Emile is seen as always commenting on Clarice's choices positively and giving her a hand in the kitchen while Artoush is occupied with a board game. He is also seen as saving the day by fixing the wires, believing that "maybe the electrician will need a hand", saving Clarice from locusts, and accompanying Clarice in politics and other matters (p.84). As a result, Clarice takes solace in thinking about him and wanting to find out whether he might reciprocate her feelings. His constant validation and compliments, such as telling her, "I know why. Everyone enjoys talking with you. Talking with you is comfortable," emphasise his gradual breach of her home and marriage (p.87). The fact that she confusedly digs into her memories to trace her emotional moments with her husband suggests that she is reevaluating her relationship with her husband. (Pirzad, 2012). In this sense, the privacy of a marriage between two people is invaded, as Clarice enables thoughts pertaining to someone else and the possibility of changing things in the space she once considered to be her safe domain. Nevertheless, Emile is revealed to be interested in someone else, making Clarice come to the realisation that her misjudgment could have ruined her peaceful life and that the end might have been much more devastating.

RESTRUCTURING & RECONCILIATION

Pirzad, in her novel, presented the protagonist, Clarice, as a perceptive character. Before her marriage, she used to translate Armenian poetry into Persian, which she put aside because of the household work. This idea contributes to her conscious perception of Emile’s hints. Then, while she is emotionally involved, she appears to be evaluating and observing the situations and

movements. Clarice seems to be exposed to desires that were different from her because of their nature. While Emile gives Clarice a sense of agency, hope, significance and a voice in a confusing way, Clarice wishes she had not met them because she had a "calm life" before their residing in G4 (p. 159). Furthermore, his accessibility, helpfulness, gentle qualities, respectfulness, and sense of appreciation make Clarice think of herself as an unhappy married woman, reiterating the idea of an invasion of her seemingly safe space. She explains that "things were hectic these days, with constant guests, taking care of the children, the heat and humidity," which eventually wore her out (p. 159). However, when she realises that what he had been doing is merely an act of deception to get closer to one of Clarice's friends, she recognises her misjudgment and, as an educated woman, re-evaluates her thoughts. Later on, while reading a book, she contemplates the novel's couple's lack of a sense of good judgment and ultimately identifies herself with them as such (Pirzad, 2012). Clarice then proceeds to restructure her life by restricting her interactions with the Simonians to the extent that when they suddenly disappear without saying goodbye, she has no regard for their absence. In doing this, she is able to once again restructure her threshold between the public and private space, ensuring that there are no further invasions in her safe space. This sense of safety is further expanded when she chooses to learn more about her husband's activities and willingly partakes in them. The final act takes place when she expresses her dissatisfaction to her husband, marking her initiation for the reconciliation and rebuilding of the family relationships (Pirzad, 2012). Thus, her strong sense of recognition contributes to her reconciling with what she experienced in terms of domesticity, motherhood, and being a housewife, making her restructure the threshold of the thought of victimisation into a sense of understanding. What another character, Mrs Nurollahi, says regarding the fact that one must "take care of what" one has can be considered as pivotal in marking the prominent role of a threshold when maintaining the boundaries between the inside and outside world.

THE STORM WE MADE BY VANESSA CHAN

THRESHOLD (SELF, COMMUNITY, AND NATION)

Cecily, in Vanessa Chan's novel, hails from a Eurasian family, a community often placed within the minority margins of mainstream Malayan society. Cecily is described as having "descended from Portuguese men" and is vividly conscious of her "unnoticeable" presence in terms of beauty and superiority (Chan, 2024, p. 19). From the start of the novel, we are given the impression that from a young age, she is destined to "lead a quiet" life (p.20). As a woman in society, she is expected to learn "all the skills that would attract a good husband" and later, as a wife, she had to know how to keep "the household organised" (p. 20). Like Clarice, she is described as a perfect mother and wife who would do "all chores that stimulated a quiet, small world of domestic bliss" (p. 20). However, inwardly, she is dissatisfied with the routine work at home, and she constantly feels “a sudden urge to scream” (p. 20). Her inability to voice her inner thoughts echoes the sentiments felt by Clarice, who, despite being in a safe space, questions the complacency she has accepted. Cecily's house with "an orange roof", though small, is described as functional, and they have a comfortable life. While Cecily is described as living a life that is relatively safe within the confines of her home, her obsession with the sense of being insignificant affects her whole life, leading her to experience a monotonous sense of tediousness and lifelessness. In this sense, the invisible threshold between her life as a wife and mother clashes with her sense of individuality because she finds herself lacking sufficiency, purpose, and self-esteem - she desires more meaning in life as an individual.

The fact that Cecily and her husband are Eurasian also contributes to their otherness in the Malaya of that time. Gordon, her husband, was a "middle manager for the British administration" who "focused on geology and land use," which made him sufficiently respectful in the colonised Malaya (p. 24). He was also "a British loyalist and believer" who had faith that the British colonisers would make their region "like the neighbouring islands of Singapore and Penang" (p. 25). Hence, having been connected to the colonisers made this family appear guarded to the locals. Apart from the safety which is received from her family description and household, their region, Bintang, is also portrayed as peaceful and safe, as the "local administrator", "Frank Lewisham", made "sure Bintang made its tin-ore and rubber-tapping quotas" (p. 25). In this sense, Cecily's life is painted as one that is both safe and familiar within her private and public domains.

INVASION

Nevertheless, Cecily's life is painstakingly uprooted through the introduction of a new character. Like Clarice, Cecily's life is injected with the presence of Fujiwara, who disguises himself as Bingley Chan when he is introduced to Cecily at a Christmas party in 1934 (Chan, 2024, p.26). He is presented in a spectrum of features in the novel, precipitating a sense of suspicion in the reader. Initially referred to as "a merchant from Hong Kong specialising in the trading of goods from the Orient", he slowly invades the lives of Cecily and Gordon as he is invited into their house (p. 26). Given Gordon's penchant for a nightcap, the house visits usually result in Gordon falling asleep after consuming too much alcohol. Cecily, like Clarice, is given the impression that Fujiwara is "a nice gentleman, helping her get her husband to bed after a friendly night" (p. 27). This physical involvement extends into his lingering presence that remains even after her husband is asleep, allowing her to talk to him about ordinary matters in the neighbourhood, her concerns about the British residents and thoughts, and the future of her children. Fujiwara, in the same way, shares some of his thoughts and feelings enough to make Cecily accept him and drop her guard. This move accentuates the invasion of the threshold as boundaries become blurred when Fujiwara is encroaching, albeit with permission, into Cecily's private space. This is also visible when Cecily states, "long after everything had come to pass, she would realise this was the moment when any resistance she'd possessed had been worn down" (p. 29).

Once Fujiwara is certain of his effects on Cecily and her trust, he reveals to her his true name and his "Japanese-accented English" along with his "true affiliation with the Japanese Imperial Army," whose dream had been "an Asia for Asians" (p. 29). His surreptitious intrusion, earning Cecily's trust and his manipulative idealism fabricate a sense of purpose in Cecily to fight the British by feeding him information from her husband's letters or notes. Cecily, who has always suffered because she is overlooked, enjoys being a part of a big change. This is especially significant once Fujiwara announces that the emperor has put him "in charge of the invasion strategy for Malaya", because Cecily envisions herself as someone who will be "standing next to Fujiwara as he introduced her to the emperor as the key to Japan's overthrow of the British" (p. 174). Thus, Cecily not only makes the decision to allow Fujiwara to invade her home, but also herself and ultimately her nation. Their intimate relationship, which also results in Cecily's pregnancy and the possibility of Fujiwara being the father, confirms the fact that Cecily's home and life are invaded physically, psychologically and ethically. In addition to this, Cecily's act of spying and feeding information to the enemy is also nationally damaging.

Another palpable invasion of the threshold is closely tied to the abduction of Cecily's only son, Abel and the other boys in the neighbourhood. The novel foreshadows this occurrence with a catastrophic line saying that "teenage boys had begun to disappear" (p. 12). Chan also further

demonstrates the Japanese invasion by showing that the Japanese brought "the British forces to their knees in under seven weeks" just by cycling from the north (p. 12). Despite the Japanese's brutal actions, Cecily paradoxically looks forward to seeing better colonisers. Ironically, Cecily's life is upturned when Abel is abducted on his birthday and taken to work on the Death Railway along with other boys. This not only demonstrates the impact of the Japanese occupation, but it also creates inner turmoil for Cecily, who now becomes certain that "what she had done would come for her, that retribution was always a day away" (p. 13). In admitting this, Cecily comes to the conclusion that the intrusion not only shifts the boundaries of her safe space within her home, but also her community and country.

RESTRUCTURING & RECONCILIATION

Ultimately, despite the initial victories, the Japanese forces eventually surrendered. Several incidents make Cecily understand how her character and decisions have influenced her territories; her identity and integrity, her family and household, and, ultimately, her nation in the broader sense. Fujiwara's reference to Malaya as "your country" indicates his loyalty to the emperor, solidifying the fact that the invasion of Malaya was never for the betterment of the people, but for sheer political gain (p. 192). It becomes evident that Fujiwara worked according to a "political, economic, and ideological" agenda while Cecily's was domestically oriented. The final chapters of the novel reveal Cecily's realisation of Fujiwara's invasion, the "brokenness" of his promises, and the lies of the "brighter world he wanted to build" (p. 214). When he meets Fujiwara again in 1945, she no longer views him the same as before because he is now a man who "splintered women who loved him so they became warped versions of themselves that they could no longer recognise" (p.235). She eventually understands that what he thought of himself was a delusion that ruined her physically and emotionally.

Due to her act of conspiring with him, her family encounters three drastic losses in the span of three years; losing her husband, her son and eventually her youngest daughter; all that she believes is "the cost of the lie of a new Asia" (p.219). Ultimately, while Cecily realises that she has lost everything, her need to hold on to her remaining family in the form of her eldest daughter, Jujube and her son, Abel, whose escape from the Death Railway and return to Bintang becomes a sign of hope. Chan (2024) employs the metaphor of the moonlight and sunlight, as well as the notion that looking directly at the light can harm one's eyes, to convey the idea of attaining ultimate truth, which is rooted in the concepts of recognition and acceptance. Cecily then chooses to "look directly into the light of truth" by reconciling with her own past by coming to terms with her loss, along with the news of Fujiwara's trial and his capital punishment "for war crimes in the Philippines," (p.267). The closing of the novel thus paints the possibility of the family restructuring their threshold within their home, emphasised by the reconnection between Cecily and her two remaining children, as well as through the departure of the Japanese from Malaya.

CONCLUSION

The discussion, ultimately, attempted to reveal the various ways in which both Pirzad and Chan's narratives engage with the spatial and emotional thresholds that frame their lives. The novels portray the lives of two women of minorities whose guests, clandestinely, turn out to be invaders. Through nuanced depictions of invasion—whether social, familial, or psychological—the authors highlight their characters' fragility and resilience as they navigate spaces of marginality. Since

these women characters as wives and mothers experience a sense of not belonging, their conceptualisation of the physical threshold is magnified psychologically and emotionally. Clarice and Cecily's similarities in terms of domesticity, dissolved identity and double suppression emphasise the vitality of the threshold. These texts invite a deeper consideration of how reconciliation and restructuring emerge not from grand gestures, but from the persistence of everyday experiences and quiet negotiations of identity. Such observations may also be relevant in the exploration of other Iranian and Malaysian novels, which delve into the lives of the communities left within the margins of society.

While marked by longing and dislocation, the thresholds within these narratives are not irreparably fractured. Rather, they serve as liminal sites where a sense of comfort, belonging, and self-awareness can still be nurtured. Eventually, Pirzad and Chan foreground the significance of the ordinary as a site of resistance and connection, reminding us that marginal lives are neither silent nor severed from the communal and national fabric—they remain essential to its reimagining.

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