

Feminine Identity Negotiation Opposed by Familial Authority in Emtiaz Hussain's Play Blood: A Postcolonial Feminist Reading



التفاوض على الهوية الأنثوية في مواجهة السلطة الأسرية في مسرحية "دم" لإمتياز حسين: قراءة نسوية ما بعد استعمارية
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Abstract

Gender-based oppression practiced against women is deeply rooted in traditional societies. In British contemporary drama, there are numerous depictions of it, particularly in the work of writers with migrant histories whose characters are confined between the culture of the country



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of origin and the one of the hosting countries. Accordingly, they struggle to situate themselves within specific social and cultural spaces. Emteaz Hussain's play *Blood* 2015, explores the strained relationship between two young British-Pakistani Muslims, Sully and Caneze, and the various cultural impediments they encounter. The central thesis presented in this work posits that *Blood* illustrates the systematic hindrance of feminine identity, specifically the desires, ambitions, and self-perception of Caneze, through a complex web of familial and patriarchal influences tied to the experiences of the British-Pakistani diaspora.

The analysis is grounded in two theoretical perspectives. The foremost lens is informed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's discussion of the "subaltern woman", whose ability to voice her concerns is structurally hindered from realizing social impact. Secondly, Avtar Brah's ideas on "diaspora space" will be relied on to highlight how women within immigrant communities serve as symbolic protectors of cultural integrity. A common thread among these theories is the assertion that gender and diasporic power are intertwined; Caneze's oppression cannot be categorized solely as sexist or merely postcolonial, but arises at the convergence of both.

This study articulates four interrelated claims: first, that Caneze embodies Spivak's subaltern woman, whose experience does not translate into tangible social change. Second, that the family dynamic in *Blood* functions not only as a site of personal harm but as an ideological structure perpetuating patriarchal dominance through its female figures. Third, that the mother's submissiveness illustrates the deep internalization of patriarchal values. Finally, that the play's intentionally ambiguous conclusion opts for an honest depiction of the ongoing challenge faced by women rather than providing narrative resolution.

In conclusion, this analysis contends that *Blood* makes a noteworthy contribution to the field of postcolonial feminist theatre and that its critical neglect reflects a larger trend of marginalization affecting British-Asian women literary works, which necessitates further scholarly attention.

الملخص

إنّ العنف الأسري ضد المرأة متجذر بعمق في المجتمعات التقليدية، في الدراما البريطانية المعاصرة، نجد العديد من الصور، لا سيما في أعمال الكُتّاب ذوي الخلفيات المهاجرة، لشخصيات محصورة بين ثقافة بلدها الأصلي وثقافة البلد المضيف، تسعى جاهدةً لتحديد هويتها





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ضمن فجوة اجتماعية وثقافية معينة. مسرحية "دم" (Blood)، التي كتبها "إم تيز حسين" عام ٢٠١٥، تروي قصة العلاقة المتوترة بين شابين بريطانيين وباكستانيين مسلمين، "سولي وكانيز"، والحوازر الثقافية المختلفة التي يواجهانها.

الموضوع الرئيسي لهذه الدراسة هو أن مسرح الدم يُظهر عوائق منهجية أمام الهوية الأنثوية، وخاصة رغبات "كانيز" وتطلعاتها وتصوراتها الذاتية، من خلال شبكة معقدة من التأثيرات الأسرية والذكورية المرتبطة بتجارب الشتات البريطاني الباكستاني.

يستند التحليل إلى منظورين نظريين، ينبع جوهر الفكرة من مناقشة "غياتري تشاكرافورتى سبيفاك" لمفهوم "المرأة الخاضعة"، التي تُعيق قدرتها على التعبير عن مخاوفها، بنويها، تحقيق التأثير الاجتماعي. ثانياً، تعتمد هذه الدراسة على أفكار "أفتار برا" حول "فجوة الشتات" لتسليط الضوء على دور المرأة كحارسة رمزية للسلامة الثقافية داخل مجتمعات المهاجرين. والقاسم المشترك بين هذه النظريات هو التأكيد على ترابط النوع الاجتماعي وسلطة الشتات. لا يمكن تصنيف اضطهاد "كانيز" على أنه انفصالي أو ما بعد استعماري منفرد، بل ينشأ من التقاء كليهما. تُبرز هذه الدراسة أربع أفكار مترابطة: أولاً، تظهر شخصية "كانيز" لسبيفاك كمثال على "المرأة الخاضعة" التي تعجز كلماتها عن إحداث أي تغيير حقيقي في الواقع الاجتماعي. ثانياً، في رواية "دم"، لا تُمثل الأسرة مصدرًا للمعاناة النفسية فحسب، بل هي أيضًا مؤسسة أيديولوجية تُعيد إنتاج النظام الأبوي من خلال النساء أنفسهن وتُرسخ سلطة الأب. ثالثاً، يعكس خضوع الأم تعميقاً للقيم الأبوية. رابعاً، يختار القسم الأخير من المسرحية عمداً الغموض الذي يصور بصدق التحديات التي تواجهها النساء، بدلاً من الرغبة في منح المسرحية نهاية سعيدة لإرضاء الجمهور.

أخيراً، يجادل هذا التحليل بأن مسرحية "بلود ثياتر" تُسهم إسهامًا كبيرًا في المسرح النسوي ما بعد الاستعماري، وتواجه إهمالا نقدياً يعكس تأملاً أوسع وتهميشاً يؤثر على الأعمال الأدبية للنساء البريطانيات من أصول آسيوية، ويتطلب مزيداً من البحث العلمي

Introduction

1.1 General overview

Emteaz Hussain's play *Blood* (2015) explores the impact of religion, culture and even socioeconomic situations on a young woman's identity when the people closest to her seek to hinder her journey towards self-realization. Set within the British-Pakistani Muslim community in the English Midlands, the narrative follows Caneze as she navigates her emotions for Sully, her dreams, and the uncompromising influence of her brother Saif, who has predetermined her marriage attempt and the

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trajectory of her life. At its core, the play examines the complexities of feminine identity amidst negotiations that are dictated entirely by external forces. Eventually, a journey of hardship, pain and misery begins in which Caneze is obliged to opt between the love of her life and the possessive desire of her brother. Blood ties of traditional Pakistani society travel beyond geographical location and space to clash with the liberal freedom of contemporary Britain.

Hussain composed *Blood* in response to the riots in England during 2011, a period of social turmoil that thrust working-class youth from minority backgrounds into sudden and often skewed public focus. Her clear intent was to counter the narrow portrayal of working-class youth and to reflect 'the complexity of their lives and the bold, spirited manner in which they navigate their identity within a broader framework' (Hussain, 2015). The concept of identity negotiation is central to the dramatization in *Blood*, with the tension between family authority and that negotiation propelling its main conflict.

The play is grounded in the framework of Postcolonial Feminism, a choice that is not made lightly. Caneze's predicament cannot be fully grasped from a purely feminist perspective, as the patriarchal challenges she confronts are specifically influenced by the unique concerns of British-Pakistani diaspora existence, the cultural pressures resulting from migration, and the tendency of diaspora communities to tie their cultural persistence to the decisions and lives of their women. Conversely, a strictly postcolonial approach is inadequate as well; Caneze's gender is intricately tied to her oppression rather than being merely incidental. A comprehensive framework that acknowledges both aspects simultaneously is necessary to address the particular circumstances of her existence.

The structure of *Blood* is designed as a two-hander, with the only speaking roles being Sully and Caneze. This is a protest against societal injustice treatment towards women and their quest for agency, Hussain seems to, intentionally, give voice only to the two main characters while other characters are voiceless and do not even have dialogues. The three individuals who wield the most influence over their lives Saif, the mother, and Yousuf remain silent. They exist as physical entities and consistently occupy the thoughts of the protagonists, but they do not contribute verbally. This choice in the narrative is not simply a stylistic one. It effectively empowers the young, mixed-identity, ambitious characters who possess the least social authority while those with greater power communicate through mute presence and intimidation. Ironically, their silence serves as the clearest sign of their dominance: they require





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no words because their desires have already been embedded within the social environment that Sully and Caneze navigate. The play has garnered minimal consistent scholarly attention, even though it has been successful in theater and engages with issues critical to current literary and cultural studies. This lack of focus is noteworthy in itself. The scarcity of academic discussions surrounding *Blood* is not merely coincidental; it highlights the same exclusionary frameworks that the play critiques. Neglecting to seriously address *Blood* in scholarly circles would merely perpetuate the suppression of feminine perspectives that Hussain illustrates within societal contexts.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study is driven by three primary objectives. The foremost and most direct goal is to present the initial comprehensive postcolonial feminist interpretation of *Blood*. This interpretation utilizes the full breadth of this theoretical framework to analyze the play's portrayal of feminine identity and familial power dynamics, demonstrating the analytical advantages gained when postcolonial and feminist perspectives are integrated rather than examined independently. The second objective aims to advocate for the inclusion of *Blood* in significant academic discourse. The play's relegation in scholarly discussions is both critical lacuna and intellectually detrimental. *Blood* provides vital insights into the experiences of British-Pakistani Muslim women that are not found in other dramatic works and presents these themes with formal sophistication and emotional authenticity that merit critical examination on its own merits. The third aim is to advance and assess the theoretical frameworks of postcolonial feminism as they apply to contemporary British theater. This includes showcasing how the ideas of Spivak and Brah can engage in meaningful dialogue, and how such interactions yield analyses that none of the theoretical frameworks could achieve independently.

1.3 Research Questions

The following questions will inform the research:

1. In what ways does Hussain's portrayal of Caneze exemplify Spivak's concept of the (subaltern woman), and what insights does this provide regarding the structural factors that challenge feminine identity within the play?
2. How does Caneze resist patriarchal norms, and does resistance prevail over submission?
3. How does the mother's passive agreement highlight the extent of ideological absorption central to the subaltern experience?
4. What connection does exist between Caneze's identity negotiation and the postcolonial state of cultural hybridity, as discussed by Brah?
5. What insights does the play's formally unresolved conclusion offer regarding the ongoing, incomplete nature of the struggle for feminine identity in the context of familial authority?

2. Literature Review

The sidelining of *Blood* in academic discussions is no coincidence; it is part of a double-bind dilemma experienced by British-South Asian Writers. Chambers (2011) states that there is a systemic devaluation of Black and Asian theater practitioners in Britain within mainstream dramatic scholarship. Dramatically, Griffin (2003) extends this analysis specifically to Black and Asian women playwrights, whose works exist at the intersection of racial marginalization and gender bias. In that respect, *Blood* aligns precisely with this trend: it is a small-scale touring production created by a British-Asian woman, focused on the distinct experiences of a British-Pakistani Muslim woman, and is produced by Tamasha, a company dedicated to showcasing contemporary British diversity. From a postcolonial feminist perspective, the lack of scholarly visibility for *Blood* goes beyond a mere oversight; it signifies the presence of the same ideological constructs critiqued by the play. The exclusion of British-Asian women writings from substantial critical discourse replicates within academic culture the very silencing of feminine voices and experiences that Hussain's work elucidates in social contexts.

As illustrated earlier, *Blood* has attracted limited scholarly peer-reviewed analysis; the existing commentary is primarily descriptive, appearing in theatre reviews and brief references in broader studies of British-Asian performance. Simeilia Hodge-Dallaway, a British author



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and theatre director compares the tragic experience of Sully and Caneze to Shakespeare's iconic play *Romeo and Juliet*, and perceives it as a, "Muslim tragic love story" (2016). While useful as contextualization, this commentary does not develop a theoretical argument about the play's engagement with gender and familial authority. Conversely, Qari (2016) offers a personal and ethnographic account of South Asian theatre in London that includes a brief reflection on *Blood* as a formative experience of cultural self-recognition. Qari's testimony is valuable evidence of the play's affective power on British-Asian audiences, but it does not constitute a scholarly analysis.

3. Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial Feminism names the theoretical tradition that insists on the inseparability of gender analysis and postcolonial analysis; an argument that the experiences of women in postcolonial and diaspora contexts cannot be adequately understood through either feminist or postcolonial frameworks operating in isolation. Given that, those experiences are constituted by the simultaneous operation of both gendered and colonial/diasporic structures of power. On the one hand, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), that was lately revised and expanded to "A Critique of Postcolonial Reason" (1999), is the foundational text of postcolonial feminist theory and the primary theoretical framework for this study's analysis of Caneze. Furthermore, her central argument is that the category of the subaltern encompasses those with the lowest positions in colonial and postcolonial social hierarchies. They cannot speak in any politically or socially efficacious sense, because the conditions necessary for their voice to be heard and to produce real social effects are systematically denied to them. The subaltern woman faces a doubly determined silencing: she is marginalized both by the colonial structures that position her community as subordinate and by the patriarchal structures that position her as subordinate within that community. Spivak's argument has been widely misread as a claim that subaltern people do not or cannot speak. Her own later clarifications (1999) emphasize that this is a misreading: her point is not that subaltern people are literally silent but that their speech is not received within the dominant structures of representation in ways that allow it to produce social effects. The subaltern speaks, but is not heard or is heard and immediately disregarded, overruled, or reinterpreted in ways that serve the interests of those in authority. This distinction is crucial for the analysis of Caneze, who speaks throughout *Blood* with considerable eloquence and force. Her speech consistently fails to change her situation because the social



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structures that surround her deny it efficacy.

Equally important for this research is the analysis of the ideological mechanisms by Spivak through which subaltern women come to reproduce the very structures that constrain them. Drawing on Gramsci's concept of hegemony, she argues that ideological domination operates most effectively not through overt coercion, but through the internalization of dominant values by the dominated. It is a process through which subordinate subjects come to understand the world through the conceptual frameworks of those who exercise power over them, and to evaluate themselves according to standards that serve those power holders' interests. For Spivak, this internalization is one of the most devastating features of subaltern existence. This means that the subaltern woman is not only oppressed from without but has absorbed her oppression into her own self-understanding. The most painful evidence of this process in *Blood* is Caneze's persistent defense of her brother's authority, even as she suffers its consequences.

The concept of the 'double bind', that is theorized by Spivak, is directly relevant to the analysis of feminine identity in *Blood*. The subaltern woman faces a situation in which all available options for speech and action are already inscribed within structures of power that constrain and devalue her. If she speaks within the terms of the dominant cultural framework defending her brother, valorizing family loyalty, and accepting the discourse of honor and cultural authenticity, then she reproduces the ideology that oppresses her. If she speaks outside those terms asserting her desires, challenging her brother's authority, choosing Sully over Yousuf, she risks social exclusion and violence. Moreover, she loses familial connections on which her social existence depends. There is no clean or cost-free path out of this bind; there is only the ongoing, painful, and often self-defeating negotiation that constitutes Caneze's experience of feminine identity formation. A significant critical limitation of Spivak's framework, as several commentators have noted (Morris, 2010, Landry and MacLean, 1996), is its tendency to emphasize the structural determination of subaltern experience at the expense of attention to the forms of agency, resistance, and self-expression that remain possible even within conditions of oppression. This dissertation addresses this limitation by attending carefully to the moments in *Blood* when Caneze does exercise agency when she asserts her desires, plans an escape. She insists on Sully over Yousuf and by arguing that these moments of partial, constrained, and sometimes self-defeating agency are fully consistent with a Spivakian analysis.

On the other hand, Avtar Brah's "Cartographies of Diaspora:



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Contesting Identities” (1996) offers a theorization of diaspora experience that is at once philosophically sophisticated and sociologically specific and that is, this study argues, directly relevant to the situation of Caneze and her family in *Blood*. Brah's central concept of 'diaspora space' designates not merely the physical location of diaspora communities but the complex social and psychic space that is produced by the intersection of migration, cultural memory, and the politics of location in both the homeland and the host country. Two aspects of Brah's framework are of particular importance for the analysis of *Blood*. The first is her distinction between the 'homing desire' the aspiration for a stable location of cultural identity and emotional belonging and the 'myth of return' the idealized image of the homeland that is maintained as a source of cultural authority even by those who have never lived there. In *Blood*, these concepts map precisely onto the play's central generational conflict. Caneze and Sully embody the homing desire: they seek to create a new form of belonging within their hybrid British-Pakistani identities, one that does not require the sacrifice of either their cultural heritage or their personal aspirations. Saif, by contrast, embodies the myth of return: his insistence on the norms of Pakistani cultural life arranged marriage, female submission, the authority of male family members over women's choices represents an attempt to maintain a fiction of cultural purity that is increasingly at odds with the lived reality of a community that has been formed by migration, hybridity, and cultural encounter.

The second crucial aspect of Brah's framework is her analysis of the gendered dimensions of diaspora space. Brah argues, with great precision, that women in diaspora communities frequently become the symbolic custodians of cultural authenticity. This includes their dress, their marriage choices, their domestic behavior, and their sexuality all become sites on which the community's cultural boundaries are contested and enforced. This gendering of cultural authenticity is not incidental to diaspora experience but constitutive of it: it is because the community's cultural identity is felt to be under threat from the assimilating pressures of the host society. This is evident from the hybrid identities of the second generation, from the inevitable transformations that accompany migration that the impulse to shore up that identity through the enforcement of cultural boundaries becomes particularly intense. Additionally, a woman's body and behavior become the primary terrain on which those boundaries are drawn. In *Blood*, this dynamic is visible in every aspect of the opposition between Saif and Caneze. Saif's authority over his sister is not simply personal cruelty or individual misogyny; it is a culturally structured response to the anxiety of diaspora. This could be

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observed as an attempt to preserve, through the control of his sister's choices, a form of cultural identity that he fears is being dissolved by the conditions of British life. The formula that Hussain has Caneze repeat "It starts with family, ends with family, family in the middle, blood is thicker than water" (p. 46) is not merely a statement of personal loyalty; it is the ideological expression of Brah's diaspora anxiety. It articulates a worldview in which the individual's desires are always subordinate to the collective's claim to cultural continuity. A limitation of Brah's framework, as this research acknowledges, is its tendency to operate at a level of theoretical generality that can obscure the specific religious dimensions of cultural authority in Muslim diaspora communities. Brah's 'diaspora space' is a secular analytical category, and its application to a community in which Islamic beliefs and practices play a central structuring role requires careful supplementation with attention to the specific ways in which Islamic norms are invoked and contested within the play.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is concerned with the interpretation of meaning, the analysis of language, and the exploration of social and cultural phenomena in their complexity and context, rather than with the measurement or quantification of variables. This approach allows the researchers to attend closely to the specific language, structure, and ideological content of Emteaz Hussain's *Blood* (2015), and to produce analytical claims that are sensitive to the text's particularities. The primary analytical method employed in this study is discourse analysis. Discourse analysis, as a method, is concerned with the ways in which language is spoken, written, or dramatic form constructs, reproduces, and contests social meanings, identities, and power relations. It proceeds from the foundational premise that language is never neutral: every utterance reflects and reinforces particular assumptions about the world, particular distributions of power, and particular constructions of social identity. In the context of literary and dramatic analysis, discourse analysis focuses on the specific linguistic choices made in the text: lexical selection, syntactic structure, rhetorical patterns, modes of address. It examines what these choices reveal about the ideological positions, power relations, and subject positions encoded within the work. This method is particularly well suited to the analysis of *Blood*, which is a play whose central concern is precisely the relationship between language and power: who speaks, who is heard, whose words carry social weight, and whose do not.





5. Analysis and Discussions

5.1 Feminine Identity and the “Weight of Cultural Expectation”

Hussain establishes the conditions of Caneze's feminine identity formation from the earliest pages of *Blood*. The play's linguistic world a creolised blend of English, Mirpuri-Punjabi, and urban slang is itself the first and most immediate evidence of the cultural hybridity within which Caneze's identity is formed. Hussain's authorial note that the Mirpuri-Punjabi words used in the dialogue are not translated into English is a deliberate artistic decision; the ancestral language persists within the English-speaking world, untranslated and unexplained, marking the presence of a cultural inheritance that Caneze carries, but cannot fully inhabit, and that simultaneously shapes and constrains her sense of self.

The weight of that cultural inheritance is made explicit in Caneze's description of the self she is expected to become. She says: “Like I was before just like my Amma and all my cousins, be more conscientious get organized sort it out, stay in control, keep it all ticking over nicely” (Hussain, p. 25). Read through a Postcolonial Feminist lens, this statement is rich with analytical significance. The comparative framework “just like my Amma and all my cousins” locates the standard for feminine identity not in Caneze's own desires or aspirations but in the prior generation of women who have already submitted to the cultural expectations of the community. The verbs she uses “get organised,” “sort it out,” “stay in control,” “keep it all ticking over” describe feminine identity as a management practice rather than a form of self-expression; the self to be performed is defined by its functional utility to the family rather than by its own interior life. The phrase 'keep it all ticking over nicely' is, in this context, particularly revealing. It suggests a mechanical, managed performance of cultural identity of a self that operates like a well-maintained domestic machine, smoothly and without disruption. This is precisely the feminine ideal that Brah (1996) identifies as characteristic of the gendered dimensions of diaspora anxiety; women are expected to be the living embodiment of cultural continuity, their own desires suppressed in the service of a collective identity that requires constant maintenance. The gendered labor of cultural preservation the work of being the right kind of woman is naturalised as a form of competence rather than recognised as a form of constraint.

Yet Caneze's use of the past tense “Like I was before” is the small but crucial mark of a developing critical consciousness. She is not simply describing the self she has always been; she is describing a self she was, and from which she is, however tentatively, beginning to distance herself. This temporal displacement is the first indication in the play that Caneze's



feminine identity is not fixed but in process negotiated, contested, and potentially transformable. The cultural expectations that govern Caneze's femininity are reinforced not only by her brother but by the entire social world that surrounds her. When Yousuf asserts his future claim on her "I'm going to be your husband / And what do you think your mother's going to do / She's my best 'auntie' isn't she?" (Hussain, p. 52). He is invoking not merely his own desire or Saif's authority but the entire social network of the community; the "auntie" relationship, the friendship with Saif, the endorsement of the mother. Caneze's feminine identity, in this context, is not a matter of personal choice but a site of collective negotiation in which she is the object rather than the subject the terrain on which others' social relationships are confirmed and reproduced.

5.2 The Subaltern Caneze

The most structurally significant expression of Caneze's subaltern condition is the gap between the sophistication and force of her speech and the consistent failure of that speech to produce the social effects that would constitute genuine agency. Caneze speaks throughout *Blood* with intelligence, passion, and precision she in-articulates her desires, analyzes her situation, identifies the injustices she faces and yet her speech changes nothing. This is not because she lacks the words; it is because the social structures that surround her deny those words the efficacy they would need to matter. Spivak's theorization of the subaltern woman is directly relevant here, what prevents Caneze from speaking in any socially efficacious sense is not the absence of language but the absence of the structural conditions that would make her language count. Her brother does not engage with her arguments; her mother does not act on her suffering; the state institutions that nominally exist to protect her are revealed to be complicit in the community's patriarchal authority. Caneze is heard but not listened to; she speaks and is overruled. This is precisely what Spivak means by the subaltern condition: not silence but unheard speech. The moment in which Caneze reflects on the impossibility of seeking police protection encapsulates this condition with devastating economy:

"Saif's got friends in high places, truss, me and Amma had to make chai and samosa for the police chief at our house once..." (Hussain, p. 56-57).

This observation reveals that Caneze's subaltern position is not merely the product of her family's personal authority, but of the extension of authority into the corrupted institutions of the state. The social networks that constitute the community's power the friendship between Saif and the police chief, the "chai and samosa" diplomacy of the mother





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are the mechanisms through which the community's patriarchal norms are protected from challenge by official institutions. Caneze is not simply excluded from her family's decisions; she is excluded from the institutional frameworks that are supposed to provide protection against precisely the kind of coercion she faces. Her subaltern condition is total in the sense that Spivak intends: there is no position of authority, formal or informal, from which her voice could reach the social ears that would make it matter.

A second and equally revealing instance of Caneze's voicelessness occurs in her account of Saif's plans for her marriage. The contrast she draws between her brother's freedom and her own constraint is articulated with precision and bitterness:

"Tells me he's doing right by Amma and how I should meet his mate cos 'Yousuf is A-grade' and 'Sully is a downgrade baffoon' / I take no notice, / Then he really starts putting the pressure on telling me how he's gonna marry his girlfriend 'Anastasia' / I laughed cos I thought that int gonna work, she's just this Russian money-grabbing whore and Amma isn't going to have that..." (Hussain, p. 39).

This passage is remarkable for several reasons. First, it articulates clearly and with evident awareness the double standard that governs Caneze's situation; Saif claims for himself the freedom of romantic choice that he denies to her. Second, it reveals the partial and self-defeating character of Caneze's resistance; she sees the injustice of her situation but describes Anastasia in exactly the misogynistic terms that are used to police women's choices within her own community. She applies the weapon of patriarchal judgment to another woman even as she suffers from its application to herself. Third, it shows the mother's anticipated complicity in Saif's hypocrisy; Caneze assumes "Amma isn't going to have that," suggesting that the mother's compliance with the community's patriarchal norms extends even to overlooking her son's own violation of those norms. This internalization of misogynistic language is precisely what Spivak identifies as the most devastating feature of the subaltern condition: the dominated subject comes to see the world through the ideological framework of those who dominate her, and to apply that framework's judgments even in ways that harm herself and others like her. Caneze's subaltern position is thus not merely externally imposed but partially self-constituted a feature that makes it both more painful and more analytically complex.

5.3 The Mother's Silence: Complicity, Internalization, and the Subaltern

The figure of the mother in *Blood* is, paradoxically, one of the play's most important characters despite having no lines. Her theatrical silence is the formal expression of a social silence that Hussain presents as both the product of decades of ideological formation and one of the primary mechanisms through which that formation is reproduced in the next generation. The mother is simultaneously a victim of patriarchal authority subordinated to the will of her son in a way that, within any framework of Islamic theology or simple human dignity, represents an inversion of proper family order and an agent of that authority's reproduction, through her failure to intervene in her daughter's suffering. The mother, who represents traditional Muslim women is silenced by her own son. The mother represents a generation of submissive women whose only sacred duty was to obey and follow the orders silently, even when coming from their own sons. Hussain's invocation of the Islamic saying "Paradise is at the sole of your mother's feet" (Hussain, p. 38) is the play's most concentrated and most devastating irony. The saying is genuine and deeply held expression of the honour accorded to mothers in Islamic culture; it would be familiar to every Muslim member of the play's audience. But in the specific context of *Blood*, it functions as a measure of the gap between what the mother's cultural role is supposed to be and what it actually is.

According to Spivak, the mother's complicity is not primarily a moral failing but a symptom of the depth of her ideological formation. She has so thoroughly internalised the patriarchal values of her community values that position male authority as natural and necessary, and female submission as a form of cultural fidelity that she cannot conceive of her role as including the defence of her daughter's autonomy against her son's will. This is not indifference but a form of blindness that has been produced by a lifetime of living within a social system that makes certain forms of perception impossible. As Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which underlies Spivak's analysis, suggests: the most effective forms of domination are those that have been so thoroughly absorbed into the common sense of the dominated that they are no longer experienced as domination at all. The mother's silence therefore represents not the absence of a postcolonial feminist subject but the presence of a fully subaltern one; a woman who has been so successfully shaped by the cultural forces that constrain her that she has lost the capacity or the will to resist them on behalf of her daughter. Her condition is what Caneze's condition risks becoming. This is why



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Hussain's invocation of the mother-daughter relationship is so structurally central to the play's postcolonial feminist argument: the mother is the living image of what female subjectivity looks like when the negotiation of feminine identity has been entirely suppressed, when the subaltern has ceased to speak even to herself.

5.4 Familial Authority as Cultural Institution: Saif and Patriarchal Closure

Saif is never seen or heard on stage, but his presence saturates every scene. His authority is exercised through others' accounts of his actions and through the physical consequences of those actions most starkly, in the hospitalization of Sully. This theatrical strategy is itself analytically significant, by refusing to give Saif a voice or a face, Hussain suggests that the kind of authority he represents does not require individual articulation. It operates through social structures, cultural norms, and the internalized expectations of those it governs, rather than through the speech acts of any particular individual. Saif is less a character than a social force the embodiment of patriarchal cultural closure operating through the institution of the family. The formula through which this closure is articulated is one of the play's most structurally important pieces of language: "If you have not got family what have you got, starts with family, ends with family, family in the middle, blood is thicker than water" (Hussain, p. 46). The relentless anaphoric repetition of 'family' starts, ends, middle is the rhetorical enactment of a worldview in which the individual has no existence outside the collective, and in which the collective's authority over the individual is not merely social but ontological: without family, there is nothing. This is the ideological foundation of Saif's authority over Caneze: he is not simply asserting personal preference or cultural tradition; he is invoking a framework in which Caneze's very existence as a social being is predicated on her compliance with the family's authority. The conjunction of 'blood' and 'family' in this formulation and in the play's title is, as this study's analysis has been noting throughout, far from innocent. *Blood* evokes simultaneously kinship (the ties of consanguinity that bind family members to one another) and violence (the physical reality of what happens to those who violate those ties). The play's title names this conjunction directly, *Blood* is what connects the characters, and blood is what is spilled when those connections are challenged. Hussain's choice of this title is a postcolonial feminist statement; it names the violence that is inherent in familial authority as an institution, refusing the sentimental idealization of the family that disguises its coercive dimensions.



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The most revealing expression of how familial authority functions as an ideological institution one that recruits its own victims to serve as its agents is Caneze's recurrent defence of her brother's actions:

“Saif would never hurt me, I'm his sister / Just does what he's got to do to look after his family that is all, / You could do with taking a leaf out of his book” (Hussain, p. 48).

This statement is made in direct proximity to the acknowledgement that Saif has had Sully beaten and hospitalized. The claim that Saif “would never hurt me” is objectively false; the claim that he is simply 'looking after his family' is a rationalization of violence. And yet Caneze makes both claims, and adds remarkably that Sully could learn from Saif's example. This is not stupidity or naivety; it is the evidence of how thoroughly Caneze has internalized the ideological framework that defines Saif's authority as care. Within this framework, violence exercised in the name of family loyalty is not violence but protection; the man who hospitalizes your lover is not a threat but a guardian. The framework is, as Spivak and Gramsci would both recognize, hegemonic in the fullest sense: it has been absorbed so deeply into Caneze's common sense that she cannot, at this moment, perceive the reality of her situation. In that respect, Narayan (1997) provides a useful framework for understanding this dynamic in her analysis of “death by culture” the way in which cultural norms are invoked to naturalize and justify the violence done to women within particular communities. Narayan argues that appeals to cultural tradition function to make the harms done to women in the name of culture appear as natural, inevitable, and even desirable features of communal life, rather than as violations of individual rights. Saif's authority over Caneze operates precisely in this mode: it is presented to Caneze, to their mother, to the community as the natural expression of familial care rather than as the exercise of coercive patriarchal power.

5.5 Sully and the Limits of Male Allyship

Sully represents an alternative form of masculinity emotionally articulate, egalitarian, and respectful of Caneze's agency that stands in explicit contrast to the patriarchal authority embodied by Saif. His articulation of love is premised on mutuality and shared becoming when states: “Love ain't something you just say, just this word, it's something you do, and then you just be, and we just wanna be together, doing things together” (Hussain, p. 18). This conception of love as processual and relational 'something you do' and 'something you be' is a direct challenge to the transactional model of marriage that Saif seeks to impose on Caneze. The exchange in which Sully and Caneze together rewrite the





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dominant cultural script represents the play's most hopeful postcolonial feminist gesture as illustrated in the following dialogue between Caneze and Sully:

Sully: "Water can exist without blood; you know this one: 'blood makes relatives'"

Caneze: "Love Makes family"

Sully: "And I'm your family now, going to cook for you, Caneze, it'll be good" (Hussain, p. 69).

However, a postcolonial feminist reading of Sully must also attend to the limitations of his allyship the ways in which his good intentions do not fully exempt him from the structures of patriarchal thinking that pervade the social world he inhabits. His decision to withdraw from loving Caneze in order to protect her "I thought it was for the best, believe, Caneze / they said they hurt you dint want them to hurt you I'd come back when things died down" (Hussain, p. 49), is motivated by genuine concern, but it is also a paternalistic decision made on her behalf without her participation. He decides what is best for her, acts on that decision unilaterally, and in doing so increases her exposure to Yousuf's pursuit and Saif's pressure. The road to the subaltern's increased vulnerability is sometimes paved with the good intentions of those who claim to protect her. Furthermore, Sully's moments of fear and doubt his concern about his own social position, his anxiety about the violence of Caneze's community are moments in which his own sense of masculine identity becomes, however briefly, a competing concern alongside Caneze's welfare. He is not Saif; but he is not outside the patriarchal social world that Saif represents. His allyship is genuine but partial and imperfect, and a postcolonial feminist reading must be honest about those imperfections rather than idealising him as a simple hero in contrast to Saif's villainy.

5.6 The Unresolved Ending: Feminine Identity Deferred

Blood ends without offering a clear resolution. The fate of Caneze's feminine identity whether she achieves the freedom of self-determination she seeks, or whether the familial authority that has opposed her throughout the play finally prevails is left deliberately open. This formal openness is, this study argues, *Blood's* most important and most theoretically resonant artistic decision. Conventional romantic drama and particularly the Romeo and Juliet tradition to which critics have likened *Blood* offers resolution as its formal and emotional telos, the lovers, either unite, or are separated; the forces arrayed against them are either defeated or victorious. Hussain refuses both forms of resolution, and her refusal is not evasion but argument. A tragic resolution Caneze forced



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into marriage with Yousuf, or physically harmed for her resistance would offer the consolation of moral clarity, we would know who the victims are, who the villains are, and what the play is saying about feminine identity under familial authority. A triumphant resolution Sully and Caneze safely escaped, free to build their chosen family would offer the different consolation of hope, the suggestion that individual love and agency can prevail against structural cultural force.

In refusing both consolations, Hussain insists on something more demanding and more honest: the recognition that the negotiation of feminine identity under conditions of familial authority is not a problem that gets resolved but an ongoing struggle that must be renewed in every interaction, every choice, every act of cultural self-definition. This insistence is directly consistent with Spivak's theorization of the subaltern condition: the subaltern's situation is not resolved by individual acts of resistance, however courageous. The structural conditions that constitute Caneze's subaltern position the cultural authority of the community, the passivity of institutional protection, the depth of her own ideological formation are not changed by her and Sully's flight from their hometown. They follow her, because they are not merely external constraints but dimensions of her own subjectivity. The formally open ending is, in this sense, the play's most feminist gesture: it refuses to grant its audience the pleasure of a resolution that would substitute narrative satisfaction for genuine engagement with the conditions it depicts. It invites the audience not to celebrate a victory or mourn a defeat, but to recognize a condition and, in that recognition, to understand both the urgency and the difficulty of the collective work required to transform it. Unlike her mother, Caneze resembles futuristic hope, yet that future remains ambiguous as the story ends mysteriously. As if the author gives power to the readers to ascertain which conflicting power prevails.

The title of this study captures precisely this dynamic: feminine identity is 'negotiated,' but the negotiation is 'opposed by familial authority' and at the end of the play, that opposition has not been overcome. What has changed is Caneze's awareness of her situation: the development across the play of a critical consciousness that, however incomplete and contradictory, represents the beginning of the insurgent practice that Spivak identifies as the only form of subaltern resistance available. Whether that beginning leads anywhere is a question the play leaves deliberately, honestly, and with great political intelligence unanswered.

6. Conclusion

This research has offered the first sustained Postcolonial Feminist





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reading of Emteaz Hussain's play *Blood* (2015). Organized around the integrated theoretical framework of “subaltern” framed Spivak, and Brah's “diaspora space” with Postcolonial Feminism as the governing critical perspective it has developed five interconnected analytical arguments across six sections of close textual analysis. First, the analysis demonstrated that Hussain's characterization of Caneze instantiates theorization of the “subaltern woman” by Spivak with remarkable precision. Caneze's speech is consistently sophisticated, emotionally acute, and analytically clear and yet it consistently fails to change the social conditions it describes. Her subaltern condition is constituted not by silence but by the structural denial of the social efficacy that would make her speech matter.

Second, the analysis demonstrated that Caneze's relationship to patriarchal norms is neither simple resistance nor straightforward submission, but a deeply conflicted and structurally constrained negotiation between the two. Caneze resists: she asserts her desires, challenges her brother's authority in speech, and pursues her relationship with Sully in defiance of community expectation. Yet this resistance is consistently undermined by the very ideological formation she seeks to resist. She defends Saif's authority even as she suffers its consequences, internalises the framework of ‘blood’ and family even as she chafes against it, and ultimately finds that her acts of resistance do not alter the structural conditions of her oppression. The analysis concluded that this is not a personal failing but a structural condition; the subaltern's resistance, however genuine, cannot on its own dissolve the ideological and social architecture that contains it. Caneze both resists and submits simultaneously, and it is precisely this irresolvable tension that Hussain presents as the defining condition of her existence.

Third, the analysis of the mother's passive complicity demonstrated the depth of ideological internalisation that characterises the subaltern condition. The mother is not indifferent to her daughter's suffering; she has been so thoroughly formed by the patriarchal norms of her community that she cannot act on Caneze's behalf without contradicting the framework through which she understands her own social existence. Fourth, the analysis drew on Brah's concept of diaspora space to situate Caneze's identity negotiation within the specific conditions of British-Pakistani diaspora life, demonstrating how the anxiety generated by the perceived dissolution of cultural identity under diaspora conditions is channeled into the control of women's bodies and choices and how Caneze's desire for Sully is read by her community as a threat to the community's cultural survival. Fifth, the analysis argued that the play's

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formally unresolved ending is its most politically serious gesture an insistence on the ongoing, unfinished, and structurally resistant nature of the struggle for feminine identity and autonomy that refuses the false consolation of narrative resolution.

In conclusion, the negotiation of feminine identity opposed by familial authority, which is the subject of Hussain's play and of this study, is not a historical curiosity or a marginal cultural phenomenon. It is one of the central experiences of a significant and growing portion of the British diaspora population, and it raises questions about cultural authority, gender, the family, and the conditions of individual freedom that are of the widest possible social and ethical significance. The scholarly work of taking this experience seriously, and of bringing to it the full resources of critical analysis, is both an intellectual imperative and a political responsibility that this dissertation has sought to meet.





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