

Decolonizing the Presentation of Research Findings: Amplifying Epistemic Authority Through Poetic Re-Storying

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Article abstract

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SPECIAL ISSUE:
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Decolonizing the Presentation of Research Findings: Amplifying Epistemic Authority Through Poetic Re-Storying

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Western-centric epistemologies are often deemed to be more legitimate than non-western ones for driving academic research and knowledge production. As a result, non-western epistemologies are often colonized or silenced during the research process. Decolonizing research practices, such as robust collaboration, mutual respect, mindful listening, and co-constructed interviews offer meaningful opportunities for researchers vested in engaging in research which honors and amplifies a diversity of storied experiences and non-dominant epistemologies. This paper focuses on decolonizing research report writing through poetic re-storying and will include a rationale for and excerpts from a poetic re-storying of research findings from a narrative inquiry project with Parvana, an Afghan woman who until recently was living in Afghanistan; the narrative study is theoretically and conceptually informed by postcolonial feminist theory and the decolonization of research methods. By carefully and collaboratively crafting the research findings in poetic form using original excerpts from open-ended interviews, co-constructed interview conversations, Parvana's written stories, conversations about artifacts, and other data sources, Parvana and I worked together to amplify and honor her epistemic authority and literacy practices. In addition to presenting the research findings in research participants' own words, creative re-storying through poetry makes research findings accessible to academic and non-academic audiences alike while also cultivating emotional engagement and empathy.

Keywords:

western-centric, non-western epistemologies, co-constructed narratives, poetry, empathy

COLONIZING RESEARCH PRACTICES

Although WEIRD populations (western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic) only make up about 12% of the world's population, as much as 80% of published research in the social and behavioral sciences is based on and generalized from their lived experiences (Azar, 2010, p. 11). This tendency to privilege the experiences of WEIRD populations in academic research, even though these populations are “unrepresentative of humans as a species” (p. 11), results in the frequent exclusion of non-western epistemologies, or the marginalization of the lived experiences of what is, in fact, the majority of the world's population.

Numerous examples from cross-cultural research illustrate how hegemonic “colonial/colonizing research about the Other” casts “the Other into roles of victims, needy, [and] helpless,” essentially disempowering and silencing non-western epistemologies in the process (Mutua & Swadener, 2004, p. 13). In effect, because western-centric epistemologies are deemed to be more legitimate for driving academic research and knowledge production, epistemologies that do not conform to these more so-called legitimate ways of knowing are often colonized or silenced in the process of conducting research (Darder, 2018, p. 97).

Postcolonial theorist Edward Said (1978) describes this harmful process of “Othering” in his analysis of “Orientalism,” or the “subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arab-Islamic peoples and their culture” (p. 7). In his analysis, Said identifies power imbalances and resulting erasures manufactured by Orientalist discourse. In his description of the French invasion of Egypt in 1798, for example, Said describes how Napoleon chose not only to include soldiers in the invasion but also historians, scientists, philosophers, and a range of other *experts* who were tasked with documenting everything they could discover about Egypt. The resulting portrayal of Egypt and Egyptian culture was constructed almost entirely through the lens of the French conquerors, and the final master narrative, the so-called *truth* of Egypt, was created by western *experts* who had “the power to be there and see in expert ways the things the natives themselves can't see” (Said, 1978, p. 43). Since the Napoleonic invasion, those stereotyped and unidimensional images of Egypt have been replicated repeatedly over time by experts in literature, art, popular culture, and media (Said, 1978).

In his analysis, Said reveals a complex discursive strategy whereby the west positions “Orientalist” cultures as *primitive* and *uneducated* while simultaneously portraying western cultures as *civilized* and *educated* in contrast (Said, 1978, p. 9). Through the establishment of this “positional superiority” (p. 7),

the west has often engaged in efforts to make “ideological claims to having a superior civilization” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p. 67). By defining non-western cultures as “developing,” or “underdeveloped,” for example, the west could then be cast as “developed,” or positionally superior, by implication (Mohanty, 2003, pp. 21, 40). A similar discursive strategy positions so-called *underdeveloped* cultures as “Third World” cultures; by implication, western cultures were portrayed as “First World,” resulting again in a manufactured positional superiority of western cultures over non-western ones. Over time, this construct of positional superiority of western versus non-western cultures resulted in the constructed dichotomy of *us* versus *them*, or an *Othering* of non-western cultures which allowed the west to occupy and maintain a superior position (see, e.g., Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Said, 1978; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

To disrupt this linguistic hegemony in this paper, I will refer to non-western populations as “majority world” (Norsworthy, 2017, p. 1036) populations and not as “Third World” or “developing world”; I will also use lower case letters when referencing the west or the western world unless the capitalized version of those terms appears in a quotation.

The project of decolonization

Mutua and Swadener (2004) argue that the “need to decolonize the Western academy that privileges Western knowledges over indigenous epistemologies” is a vital part of the “decolonizing project” (p. 10). Academic researchers who wish to push back against colonizing research which privileges western over non-western epistemologies must actively engage in decolonizing research practices which disrupt hegemonic structures and corresponding underlying assumptions about power, access, and knowledge production. Some strategies for decolonizing research include the following and more:

- engaging in “radical reflexivity” (Norsworthy, 2017, p. 1040) of researcher positionality as well as corresponding underlying assumptions regarding power, access, and knowledge production in academic research;
- consciously disrupting “imperial privilege” (Falcón, 2016, p. 184), or the power imbalance which “solidifies a global citizenship hierarchy for the minority of the world’s population and differentiates US citizens discursively and literally from virtually everyone else in the world, including other non-US academics” (p. 177);

- participating in “concrete acts of redistribution,” whereby social and cultural capital are seen as resources to be shared between researchers and participants (Falcón, 2016, p. 182);
- challenging dominant research practices by incorporating collaborative and inclusive practices, such as interactive interviewing and “interactive consent,” which encourages research collaborators “to make any changes and modifications they see fit to the transcript or even to revoke the interview entirely” (Falcón, 2016, p. 183).

In short, decolonizing research magnifies practices which focus on collaboration, trust building, mindful listening, cultural humility, shared knowledge production, self-reflection, solidarity, mutuality, and non-linear approaches to research writing, among others (For more on decolonizing research methods, see, e.g., Doecke, Anwar, & Illesca, 2017; Falcón, 2016; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Norsworthy, 2017; Raymond, 2021; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

For decolonial research practices to be most effective, researchers and participants must critically and iteratively self-reflect on how privilege, access, and power interact, so the potential for disrupting power imbalances can be optimized through more inclusive and respectful research practices. Adopting decolonizing research practices can open space for more authentically recognizing and celebrating a diversity of epistemologies and lived experiences while simultaneously questioning and destabilizing western-centric assumptions about researchers’ authority status.

Narrative inquiry: A methodological tool for decolonizing qualitative research

I would argue that narrative inquiry is uniquely suited to the project of decolonizing qualitative research. Because narrative inquiry places a high value on close collaboration, researchers and participants naturally prioritize trust building and respectful relationships; this collaborative tone often extends across all phases of the research, including practices related to research questions, analysis, findings, and writing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 12). Some narrative researchers have even noted the potential for transformative consciousness-raising if researchers and participants iteratively collaborate on “sorting out the complexities, ambiguities, and contradictions in [their] experiences” (Bruce, 2008, p. 330).

At the heart of narrative research is the idea that the story is central to human experience (see, e.g., Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2016; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) and that human beings are “storytelling organisms who, individually

and socially, lead storied lives” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Because narrative researchers believe that humans make sense of their everyday lived experiences through storytelling, narrative inquiry pursues a “narrative way of knowing” (Kim, 2016, p. xv) and looks not only at the fully formed stories but also at “the everyday, the ordinary, the quotidian stories that have frequently gone unnoticed” (Kim, 2016, p. 23). Finally, narrative researchers understand that storied experience is contextualized within the “social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals [sic] experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 68).

I would argue that the above-mentioned features and more make narrative inquiry uniquely suited as a methodological tool for decolonizing research. With its focus on deep explorations of individual human experience, contextualized storytelling, and storied meaning-making, narrative inquiry frequently focuses on a small number of participants (see, e.g., Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell & Poth, 2018), thereby creating opportunities for more authentic explorations of diverse lived experiences which might otherwise be ignored or go unnoticed — whether intentionally or not.

Furthermore, because of the strong collaborative component in narrative studies, relationships between researchers and participants frequently become central to the study itself (see, e.g., Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertova & Webster, 2020). Finally, narrative report writing is frequently not “a third-person ‘objective’ representation or mirrored reflection” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 19) of a person’s life story, but “dialogic productions” (p. 19), or a creative, dynamic, and often interactive process fueled by the desire to create compelling and realistic portrayals of life. These elements of dialogue, collaboration, and creativity offer concrete opportunities for engaging in meaningful decolonizing research practice.

In fact, the opportunities offered by narrative inquiry for re-storying research findings in creative ways open avenues for sharing research with academic and non-academic audiences alike. In their volume on *Decolonizing Research in Cross-Cultural Contexts*, for example, Mutua and Swadener (2004) present “steps toward developing decolonized language/modes of representing/decolonizing research” (p. 13). They speak to developing appropriate modes of representation in decolonizing research and encourage researchers to “present their work in ways that best meet the need of the message of their contribution,” including “poetry, [...] story vignettes” (p. 13), and others.

Although the project of decolonizing qualitative research can involve all stages of the research process, this article will focus primarily on decolonizing the presentation of narrative research findings through poetic re-storying. In the

following section, I will offer a brief overview of a collaborative narrative research project I conducted with Parvana, an Afghan woman who until recently was living in Afghanistan. Then I will provide the rationale and steps followed for representing our narrative research findings through poetic re-storying. Excerpts from the data analysis and poetic re-storying will be provided to illustrate.

EN/COUNTERING STATIC IMAGES OF AFGHAN WOMEN

Since 2004 I have worked on a variety of education projects with Afghan faculty, researchers, students, and citizens. In my work as *TESOL Methodology Specialist* for a *Fulbright Educational Exchange* between Kabul Education University and Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, for example, I designed teacher training, English language courses, and workshops for Afghan English language educators; as *TESOL Coordinator/Visiting Faculty*, I worked on the *Afghan Higher Education Project* (HEP), where I traveled to Afghanistan and identified candidates for master's degree programs in the United States and spent the following two years teaching graduate level courses, mentoring, and supervising students through their academic programs; for seven years, I then worked as *English Program Director* and then *Executive Director* at a non-profit organization that coordinates virtual English language courses for Afghan girls and women living in Afghanistan.

Early in my work with these and other education projects in Afghanistan, I noticed a startling disconnect between images of Afghanistan in western news reports and the stories I was hearing from Afghan colleagues, students, and friends about their daily lives in Afghanistan. Afghanistan was (and still is) frequently portrayed in western news as a country of terrorists, for example, and Afghan women were either ignored in news reports or portrayed as silent victims in need of saving. The “epistemic violence” (Spivak, 2010, p. 35) against Afghan women, or the phenomenon whereby nondominant ways of knowing are often “absorbed or destroyed” (Darder, 2018, p. 97) by dominant epistemologies, has been widespread in western news reports about Afghan women (see, e.g., Chowdury, 2016; Cloud, 2004; Fowler, 2007; MacDonald, 2016; Rasul & McDowell, 2015; Terman, 2017; Zeiger, 2011).

Post 9/11 western news reports about Afghanistan and Afghan women were also replete with colonialist rhetoric, and arguments in favor of “saving the brown women from the brown men” (Cloud, 2004, p. 289) developed in tandem with a pro-war discourse after 9/11. This “gendered orientalism” (Terman, 2017, p. 489) resulted in the virtual non-existence of documented life experiences *by* or

about actual Afghan women. Just like the Egyptians referenced earlier in this paper who had had little control over how they were portrayed by their French conquerors, Afghan women had little input into or control over how their stories were being told in the days and years following 9/11. As postcolonial feminist theorists might argue, Afghan women and other non-white majority world women suffered under a double colonization which occurs not only through patriarchal discursive strategies but also through colonial ones (see, e.g., Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Mohanty, 2003).

Around 2010, I started working online with a young Afghan woman while I was *English Program Director* at the non-profit organization that coordinates virtual English language courses for Afghan girls and women living in Afghanistan. . As we shared stories about our lives, cultures, and daily experiences, Parvana and I started developing a friendship. Through our conversations, I learned, among other things, that Parvana, too, was deeply troubled by monolithic images which portrayed Afghanistan as a primitive country, Afghan men as terrorists, and Afghan women as silent and in need of saving. Our friendship grew over time, and, in 2019, we decided to collaborate on a small narrative study which explored a counter-narrative to the static image of Afghan women by exploring Parvana's life story.

Over the next several months, I interviewed Parvana over WhatsApp about her life story, and she shared stories with me of growing up as a girl in a very conservative Afghan city, of moving by herself to the capital city Kabul after high school, of studying at university, and of surviving a violent and harrowing terrorist attack on her university. The stories she shared were filled with tales of Parvana's daily struggles as a girl and woman in a highly patriarchal society, but they were also filled with richly detailed accounts of her creativity, agency, and persistence. My understanding of Parvana's life deepened as I learned more about her rich life experiences and her complex family and social relationships. My commitment to amplifying her diverse lived experiences through a narrative study grew, and we decided to embark on a larger study from 2019 until 2021. During this time, we explored Parvana's story more deeply, and Parvana maintained control over how she wanted to share her story. The storied data included the following and more: two stories that she had written—one about the attack on the university and another about a harrowing bus trip she had taken with her mother and sister from Kandahar to Kabul; discussions about artifacts that were important to her life, including her earbuds, pictures, drawings, and books; and book chats about books she had read that had been transformational to her.

Because the spirit of collaboration guided our research together, we worked closely on every aspect of the project: We developed the research questions together; Parvana chose how to tell her story and what elements from her life she wanted to share; we reviewed transcripts and data analysis together and jointly made changes if Parvana felt her story was not being accurately represented. When the data analysis was complete, I asked Parvana how she felt about portraying the research findings as poetry. I knew how often Parvana turned to poetry for comfort, and I wanted to represent and amplify her story in a way which was fitting for her personality and her life experiences. We worked together to craft, review, and revise a poetic re-storying from excerpts from the data and findings.

RESEARCH PROJECT WITH PARVANA—A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The narrative research project with Parvana was a single-subject narrative study conducted entirely online through WhatsApp, Gmail Google Meets, Email, and Skype. Data collection took place over a two-year period from spring 2019 to spring 2021. The project was informed by postcolonial feminist theory and the decolonization of research methods. The lens of postcolonial feminist theory sharpened the focus away from an *Othering* and towards an *Honoring* of the experiences and “epistemic authority” of non-western women (in this case one Afghan woman—Parvana) who have historically been marginalized by western hegemonic discourse (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997, xl). This shift from *Othering* to *Honoring* highlights Parvana’s storied experiences and helps to shift the narrative from a monolithic stereotype of Afghan women as silent and in need of saving to a narrative based on the experiences of a relatable human being—creating openings for understanding, compassion, and empathy in the process. Simultaneously, the focus on decolonizing research methods magnifies the centrality of relationship building, cross-cultural collaboration, shared knowledge production, self-reflection, solidarity, mutuality, and non-linear approaches to research writing, among other things (for more on decolonizing research methods, see, e.g., Doecke, Anwar, & Illesca, 2017; Falcón, 2016; Mutua & Swadener, 2004; Norsworthy, 2017; Raymond, 2021; and Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

In our project, the complimentary lenses of narrative inquiry, postcolonial feminism, and decolonizing research strategies offered us powerful collaborative opportunities for focusing on Parvana’s storied experiences, her creative agency, and her epistemic authority. Our research questions focused on the “larger gulps,” or key moments, from Parvana’s life story as well as the “smaller sips,” or the smaller stories of Parvana’s daily lived experiences (Raymond, 2021,

p. 75), which included “the everyday, the ordinary, the quotidian stories that have frequently gone unnoticed” (Kim, 2016, p. 23).

Research questions included the following: 1.) What key moments have shaped the life of a young Afghan woman? 2.) What nuances, complications, and tensions do her storied experiences of everyday life as an Afghan woman living in Afghanistan reveal? And 3.) What do her stories reveal about her multiple literacy practices for navigating daily life?

Data for this research project was primarily participant-generated and included the following and more: open-ended life story interviews, a mutual interview regarding project goals and design, co-constructed interview conversations, Parvana’s written stories, peer coaching sessions, and book chats. Data analysis included a variety of narrative analysis approaches, including enthymematic/syllogistic analysis, three-dimensional narrative analysis, thematic analysis, design analysis (available designs, designing, the redesigned), artifactual analysis, and poetic re-storying. Throughout each step in the research process, Parvana and I worked collaboratively and iteratively as we reviewed the data, interview transcripts, and narrative analyses and incorporated Parvana’s input and modifications as the project progressed. The collaborative and participant-focused nature of the study also extended to the findings section, and Parvana and I collaborated on the writing and review of that section as a poetic re-storying in her own words.

Decolonizing the presentation of research findings through poetic re-storying: Rationale

The rationale for focusing on poetic re-storying to re/present our research findings is closely tied to the postcolonial feminist and decolonizing underpinnings in our project. While one of the main goals of postcolonial feminism is to “recognize and honor epistemic authority and majority world knowledge and literacy practices” (Raymond, 2021, p. 128), on the one hand, representing research findings as a poetic re-storying simultaneously decolonizes the writing process by presenting the findings not in the researcher’s words but in Parvana’s own words. As Cutts and Waters (2019) note, “While all research is the interpretation of one voice through yet another voice, poetic inquiry offers the opportunity for participants to truly speak for themselves” (p. 145). This shift towards honoring and amplifying Parvana’s epistemic authority results in a decentering of researcher positional authority and pushes against “Western knowledge and privileged ways of knowing” which have historically resulted in the frequent marginalization of

non-western epistemologies (Mutua & Swadener, 2004, p. 9). In short, re/presenting the findings in poetic form offered us a non-traditional non-linear approach to knowledge production which is “concerned with producing situated and partial knowledge, accessing subjugated voices, decentering authority, and paying attention to the discursive practices that shape experience and our articulation of the human experience” (Leavy, 2015, p. 79).

The collaborative spirit inherent to narrative research is also highlighted through a poetic representation because it offers “a fuller representation of the research, placing the voice of the participants, the researcher and the literature on an equal level within the whole story of the research report (Byrne, 2017, p. 36).

In addition to amplifying Parvana’s epistemic authority and the collaborative nature of our research together, a poetic re-storying also intensifies the sensory representation of Parvana’s lived experiences through the strategic placement of spaces, words, and silence to highlight key moments and emotions. This embodied presentation has the potential to interrupt and challenge the traditional report writing paradigm associated with a more structured academic presentation style. As Leavy (2015) aptly notes:

Poems, surrounded by space and weighted by silence, break through the noise to present an essence. Sensory scenes created with skillfully placed words and purposeful pauses, poems push feelings to the forefront, capturing heightened moments of social reality as if under a magnifying glass (p. 77).

The preceding passage demonstrates how researchers and participants can turn to poetry, paying close attention to the sounds of language, including silence, noise, line breaks, or strategic spacing, for example, to intentionally draw attention to the unique moments in participants’ lived experiences, epiphanies, emotions, and changing notions of self. This creative approach to re/presenting findings can also make academic research and findings more accessible to academic and non-academic audiences alike, ultimately leading to a greater sense of verisimilitude, or “good stories that are lifelike” (Kim, 2016, p. 10).

Our decision to re/present the findings as poetry serves to amplify Parvana’s lived experiences in her own words while also provoking “emotional engagement and human connection between the author; the person being represented, and the audience” (Leavy, 2015, p. 92). As Saldaña and Omashta (2018) note, “The elegant, carefully selected content and form of poetry can generate emotional and aesthetic response from readers and listeners. In a way, poetry achieves the same goal of phenomenology—to capture the essence and essentials of the meanings of lived experiences” (p. 300). In sum, poetic re-storying

offers a kind of decolonizing symphony of sound which amplifies Parvana's lived experience, appeals to academic and non-academic audiences, and inspires emotional engagement and empathy.

The multi-step narrative analysis and poetic re-storying

In our collaborative research project, the multi-step narrative analysis process started with a review of all storied data, including Parvana's written stories, transcripts of our co-constructed interview conversations, book chats, open-ended life story interviews, and so on. I carefully worked through the data through the lens of our research questions, writing marginalia as I worked through the coding process, including in vivo and process codes as well as analytic notes (Saldaña, 2016; Saldaña, & Omashta, 2018). Passages, words, and phrases which emerged thematically were then sorted into thematic groups, and I engaged in robust analytic memo writing to reflect on, analyze, and synthesize the data. Parvana and I continued to meet regularly throughout this process as we reviewed the emerging themes and categories; this messy, iterative, and recursive process helped us reach a deeper understanding of Parvana's complex storied experiences.

The narrative analysis strategies we employed included "a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form" (Riessman, 2008) as we aimed to better understand surface and hidden meanings in Parvana's stories. These analytic strategies included the following and more: enthymematic/syllogistic analysis, three-dimensional narrative analysis, artifactual analysis, design analysis (available designs, designing, the redesigned), thematic analysis, and poetic re-storying (as analytic act) (Raymond, 2021).

A final codebook with main themes and sub-themes was developed from the complex interwoven narrative analysis, as seen in Figure 1 below.

The emerging themes and sub-themes highlighted a complex picture of Parvana's daily life, key moments from her life across time, and changing reflections of self over time. When the narrative analysis was complete, it quickly became clear that we needed to find an alternative approach to report writing which would most authentically amplify Parvana's lived experiences. Gee's (1991) linguistic approach to narrative provided the foundation for reconstructing the narrative analysis using Parvana's own words in the form of meaningful poetic stanzas.

Figure 1: Final codebook main themes and sub-themes

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
Navigating social expectations for women	Social expectations for women
	Internalizing social expectations for women
	Resisting social expectations for women
	Complexities of working professionally with men (past and present negative experiences)
	Complexities of working professionally with men (past and present positive experiences)
Personal epiphanies	Complexities of working professionally with men (ideas about future possibilities)
	Attitudes about societal change
	Realizations about own feelings
	Realization about including men in gender equity efforts
	Realization about strategies for empowering women
Creating strategies for coping, finding strength, resisting, and persisting	Realization about personal potential
	Coping by taking a break
	Coping through music
	Coping through stories
Creating strategies for coping, finding strength, resisting, and persisting	Coping through nature
	Finding strength through others' examples
	Finding strength through own experiences
	Finding strength through helping others
	Finding strength from the support of others
	Finding strength through resistance
	Finding strength through challenges
	Finding strength through writing, telling, hearing stories
	Finding strength through leadership
	Finding strength from positive support from men
Creating strategies for coping, finding strength, resisting, and persisting	Resisting the status quo for women
	Resisting by creating alternative pathways for women's clothing market
	Resisting to make a difference in society

Creating strategies for coping, finding strength, resisting, and persisting	Persisting by being ready for challenges
	Persisting by drawing on experience
Navigating family complexities	Perceptions of mom
	Perceptions of dad
	Perceptions of traditional Afghan families
Managing complex feelings	Impatient
	Angry
	Distrusting
	Isolated
	Exposed
	Depressed, anxious
Reflections of self over time	Past
	Present
	Future

(Raymond, 2021, pp. 99-101)

By reviewing key themes and sub-themes and revisiting the original data, it became possible to select and highlight key words and phrases and rearrange them in aesthetic ways to co-create the standalone poetic story which captures the big gulps, or large life moments, as well as the sips, or smaller moments from Parvana’s daily life (Raymond, 2021). These large gulps and small sips from Parvana’s life story were then rearranged with the following conceptual organizational pattern which aligned our research questions with the findings (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Conceptual organization of poetic re-storying in alignment with research questions

Research Questions	#1 What key moments have shaped the life of a young Afghan woman?	#2 What nuances, complications, and tensions do her storied experiences of everyday life as an Afghan woman living in Afghanistan reveal?	#3 What do her stories reveal about her multiple literacy practices for navigating daily life?
Findings	#1 Key moments in the life of a young girl in a conservative city in Afghanistan. #2: Complexities of life at the university in Kabul. #3 Navigating work life during and after university in Kabul	Navigating social expectations for women; personal epiphanies; creating strategies for coping, finding strength, resisting, and persisting; navigating family complexities; managing complex feelings; and reflections of self over time.	Nuanced multiple literacy strategies for coping, finding strength, resisting, and persisting in the face of precarity; for finding peace and calm; for memorializing her experiences; for documenting her life; and for bearing witness.

(Raymond, 2021, p. 131)

Once the poetic re-storying was complete, Parvana and I worked collaboratively to review and revise the final version. As we worked, Parvana reflected on our turn to poetry to represent the findings more authentically:

I mean, the other great thing about this is its authenticity and how true each and everything about this piece is. I think that makes it even more powerful because there is nothing that is made up or is just said out of nowhere. (Parvana, 2021, as cited in Raymond, 2021).

After we finished writing, reviewing, and revising the poetic re-storying, I asked Parvana again how she felt about the poetic re-storying in place of a traditional academic findings chapter. Her comments reinforced my conviction that poetry was the most fitting way to honor and amplify Parvana's story:

I think it wouldn't have been explained this well if you had chosen another form other than poetry. I think it is the best fit for the story. ... It takes you to the different times back and forth, like the character, and personally for me. It really shows how much a person has transformed. I mean always. It represents a lot, a lot, a lot about a person. ... It's the story of so many Afghan women—what they go through, but they are usually not

represented in such an ordered and great way. ... I love it. [...]
It's quite powerful" (Parvana, 2021, as cited in Raymond, 2021,
pp. 128-134).

The following excerpts from the poetic re-storying are taken from the
three chapters of the poetic re-storying:

Chapter I: Afghan family and childhood

Excerpt: I had forgotten I was a girl

Chapter II: There are many reasons you should live

Excerpt: After the attack

Chapter III: I exist, and I have an idea

Excerpt: I am a different me

Excerpt from Chapter I: Afghan family and childhood

I had forgotten I was a girl...

My dad has gone through a lot of struggles in his life.
All our parents in Afghanistan have gone through a lot,
but they're still not as open as my dad.

When his father passed away, he left to Pakistan.
I guess maybe it's the impact of that experience.
Over there, he was exposed to this environment.
He was very young when he left.
So maybe it's that?

I had forgotten I was a girl...

When I was 10 years old...

Because we were the eldest,
my dad *encouraged* me and my sister
to work in the television at children's club
where we would
visit schools,
interview children,
play games with them,
hear about their future goals.

We were talking to students about their dreams,
so that we could show it to other kids and

entertain them at the same time.
Show them the commitment—
the *importance* of education to other parents or students
who were watching us through the TV.

I had to face the camera.
But it wasn't only the camera that I had to face.

I had to face so many people who were watching me.
In one of the most conservative parts of Afghanistan.

I did not think that I would get so much reaction while being *ten*,
I could not realize this bitter truth for a year.
But slowly I could feel the reaction from people—
the talks behind my back.
I had forgotten that I was a *girl*.

Every day the harassment cases and these things were there,
People were against me as a girl doing something.
I was going every day to the school,
but I was still harassed.

I was thinking, OK, this is a *habit* of people.
When I came and showed up on television,
I realized one thing.

These people cannot see a girl...
to talk for rights,
to just inspire other people,
to be independent,
to be so *strong*.

They really cannot see it.

They will do everything...
to degrade you,
to defame you,
In every possible way they can

I had really forgotten that I was a girl.
I was excited.
I wanted to learn something.

I wanted to learn about people,

I really was mistaken that people would really
listen to me,
love me.

They did not really want that.

Most people—even the women—
did not like another girl or me to appear on TV
because it looked like defamation to them.
It looked very negative to them.

Every Thursday when we were going to these schools,
and we would request to talk to the
 ten,
 eleven,
 twelve years old girls...

They weren't ready to come in front of the camera,
they were hiding their faces.
It was very difficult.

I never knew that it would affect me this much.
I remember one evening.
I was sitting with my dad.
I was crying.
I said,

"I don't want to go anymore there. I don't want to work on TV and show up.
 People are really bad here. They really don't want me to do that."

He tried to encourage me,
 but I really could not accept it
 because of the society and every day's reaction that I would get.
 People saying they were thinking me as
 very bad while working in a TV.

Although it was an *educational* program,
this concept of the girl
coming in front of a camera
is just very negative in people's mind.
They label you as a 'bad girl' if you show up...

Slowly it made me to give up what I was doing...
I took all of those things for one and a half years,
but then I had to back up because I could not really do that.

But one thing that it *taught* me was...
I will give it a break.
I wasn't *really* losing it
because this was *my dream* to become a journalist one day...

Tell the stories. Because everybody has a story

That's what we were aiming to show...
the story of every young kid
--whether it's male or whether it's a female.
We were just trying to show that.

I really could not give up on it.

I had this commitment that one day when I grow up,
I will be able to fight.
I will be able to have the courage.
I will be standing on my feet.
.... and I will fight back to get to where I started.

Excerpt from Chapter II: There are many reasons you should live

After the attack...

The university was on break
for almost seven or eight months,
and after the attack happened—
I was living all alone in Kabul.

I did not want to go back to the provinces...

I wanted to *do* something.
I could see no future while staying in the provinces.
There are no opportunities for me to go there and work
compared to the opportunities that I could get here in Kabul.

I wanted...
to work on myself and build myself and then when I build myself,

In the future I can bring that to the provinces and build other people.

I applied for a journalism training program...

It has been my dream since I was 13.
I submitted my applications to them.
I have worked, and I told them that I want to work.
I want to tell more stories.

Although I was going under a lot of pressure after the attack,
I did not want it to stop me from what my goal is
because I thought even if I stayed at home for seven months and do nothing,
it will affect me more...

It's better to
go out,
talk to people,
present more stories,
speak on behalf of other women,
tell people that...

Living matters in Afghanistan for a woman.

After the attack...
I joined the journalism training program,
and I received the training,
and I decided to write.

We published the stories.
I was thinking about *each and every woman*
that lives in the provinces
who has dreams,
who wants to achieve them,
but they don't have opportunities
or they're not allowed...

Whenever I was doing it in Kabul,
I could not forget the provinces.

Sometimes you may lose it.
Sometimes there may be barriers in it.

You have to fight them—fight to get those opportunities.

There are so many reasons in this world
that you should live.

I thought life—you should *live*.

After the attack...
I was so pressured.
I also wanted to have some peace.

I decided to go to a music class
because this was the only thing
that could distract my mind for a while.

I attended music classes.
I started learning guitar
at the National Institute of Music.
I was going every morning.
I was going there every day.

There were people playing the drums,
playing all the other instruments,
the violin—
so many instruments!

In this *whole building*,
there was some kind of beautiful noise.

Peace was coming from each room.

Excerpt from Chapter III: I exist, and I have an idea

I am a different me

When I was ten...
I wouldn't think about improving other lives,
Or having the idea of improving other women's lives.

I mean I wanted it, but I really could not figure it out.

Most of the time I would forget even thinking about myself,
so how would I think about other women?

Harassment was there. I told you.

Although I was ten—even smaller—
I was being harassed by the men in the streets,
and even men who followed me to home.
Wrote me letters and slipped it inside my house's door.

That time I was so scared,
 And I thought I did not have a voice to speak.
I thought it is a shame to talk about it.
To really care for yourself.
To really think about what you really want to be yourself.
To have that freedom of walking in a street.
 I could not talk to anyone about it.

Society influences you in a way
that you forget who you really are.
You don't get that feeling from nowhere.
People do not tell you,
you should have a purpose in life.

They will try to take that purpose from you
even if you have it,
but they would never encourage you
to have it.

Today...

I can say I am a different me—a totally different person.
Today who I am is I think how to improve.
I think what changes to bring,
 which ways to choose,
 which differences to bring.

Today when I see something, I fight back.
I do not remain calm even if it gets to physical fight.

I have done that with men a lot in the bazaars
although there's a huge threat to doing that
because these men can do anything to you.

But I do not back off.
I mean, what's the purpose in your life,
your goal as a woman,
as a human being?

I think I have a voice today,
And I think I can speak for others also.
I can totally see myself being very very very strong now.

So this is the different self that I think that I changed a lot.

A different *strong* me.
(Parvana, 2019-2021, as cited in Raymond, 2021)

CLOSING REMARKS

Western-centric epistemologies are often deemed to be more legitimate than non-western ones for driving academic knowledge production; as a result, non-dominant epistemologies are often ignored or excluded from the research process. Researchers vested in engaging in decolonizing research which honors and amplifies a diversity of storied experiences and non-dominant epistemologies understand the importance of embracing critical self-reflection, close collaboration, cultural humility, and relationship cultivation. By examining and challenging complex connections between power, privilege, and representation which often result in the marginalization of non-dominant groups, for example, decolonizing research can contribute to the “transformation of relationships, selves, communities, and the practices of daily life leading to self-determination and autonomy for all peoples” (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997, p. xxviii).

With its emphasis on close collaborations between researchers and participants and in-depth explorations of individual storied experiences, narrative inquiry is uniquely suited as a methodological tool for researchers dedicated to decolonizing research practices. In addition, narrative inquiry report writing is often not an unbiased researcher-authored account of the findings but rather an interactive and creative process which can draw upon multiple creative genres, such as personal narrative, fiction, or poetry. Incorporating creative practice in narrative

research offers alternatives for re-presenting traditional findings in ways which promote connection and understanding. As Leavy (2015) notes, the arts “can connect us with those who are similar and dissimilar, open up new ways of seeing and experiencing, and illuminate that which otherwise remains in darkness” (p. ix). In essence, along with other forms of arts-based research, narrative inquiry and poetic re-storying have the potential to “jar people into seeing and/or thinking differently” (Leavy, 2019, p. 9). This powerful methodological tool holds great promise for disrupting stereotypes, cultivating emotional engagement, and increasing empathy.

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