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**The Affective Construction of Female Other in Javeri's Nobody Killed Her: A Study of the Performativity of Disgust**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This article discusses the affective production of otherness in Sabyn Javeri's debut novel Nobody Killed Her (2017) using the theoretical framework of Sara Ahmed's performativity of disgust as developed in The Cultural Politics of Emotion (2004), specifically in Chapter Four. According to the article, disgust in Javeri's novel is not a spontaneous psychological response to its bodies and objects' "repellence" but rather a "socially performed" and "repeatedly circulated" affect that is "institutionally consolidated" throughout the novel and thus actively constructs the marginal status of the novel's protagonist, Nazneen Khan, or Nazo, a lower-class Pakistani refugee woman whose body becomes a sticky surface onto which layers of class, gender, sexual, and political disgust accumulate throughout the novel. The main analytical lenses used in the article, such as Ahmed's affective economies, stickiness, contact zone, and performative speech act of disgust, and briefly by Judith Butler's performative speech act theory and Simone de Beauvoir's Other, focus on the ways Nazo's otherness is produced and sustained in three overlapping areas: class and embodied abjection, the gendered body as a site of accumulated disgust, and institutional disgust as a mechanism of silencing and erasure. Repeated social disgusts are enacted in key scenes, such as Nazo's self-positioning on the floor, her confrontation with Balgodi, the rape and the ensuing politics and finally the trial in the court room, where Nazo's accumulated disgusts render her ineligible to be her own body. The article ends by concluding that Javeri's novel is a powerful literary production of Ahmed's argument that no one is responsible for the killing of the female Other because the affective economy of disgust has already done the job, invisibly and completely.*

**Keywords:** *Performativity, Disgust, Female Othering, Affective Economies, Stickiness.*

**Introduction**

Nobody Killed Her (2017) by Sabyn Javeri is a clear, politically charged and hard-to-classify narrative that enters the realm of South Asian women's fiction. A courtroom thriller, a postcolonial feminist bildungsroman, and a psychological character study all rolled into one, the novel follows the life of two Pakistani women: Rani Shah, a charismatic, western-educated politician who is based on a real person who was probably Benazir Bhutto, and Nazneen Khan, or Nazo, a poor, semi-literate refugee whose entire family was murdered in a military coup. The novel starts in the middle and follows two voices: one, a courtroom interrogation, the present, and the other, an intimate second-person account addressed directly to Rani, in which Nazo traces their decades-long history, both together and apart, across continents and betrayals. It is

this double narrative that is formally unique and politically charged in Javeri's novel. The voice of the courtroom is cold and institutional and abusing, it takes away Nazo's interiority and makes her an object of legal examination and judgment, a body to be judged, disposed of, by the machinery of the state. In contrast, the intimate second-person voice is devotional, warm, and rife with feeling, such that it brings Nazo's subjectivity from within and gives the reader access to her contradictions, devotions, and gradual build-ups of pain and loyalty. The formal innovation of the tension between these two voices is not limited to the novel, but is rather a structural enactment of the central political argument of the novel: that some bodies are never allowed to be simultaneously objectified and condemned in court, that the woman whose body has been objectified and condemned in a court of law is denied the recognition that her intimate self-narration requires. This formal tension, between the institutional gaze that creates Nazo as an object of negative affect and the interior voice that demands her subjectivity, is precisely what makes *Nobody Killed Her* a rich and nuanced place in which to work out an analysis that is central to Sara Ahmed's affective theory, which focuses on how social and institutional formations produce certain bodies as objects of negative affect, while making it seem as though they are merely describing them. *Nobody Killed Her* is a provocation. It is a reminder that Rani's death is not the responsibility of any one person, and it communicates the overarching ideological message that in a society that is ruled by patriarchy, a class system, religious fundamentalism and colonial history, women like Nazo are not slain by a single person. Rather, their bodies, their desires, their ambitions, and their identities are slowly, affectively, systemically broken down by the burden of social structures which consider them repulsive and inescapable and attempt to control, expel, and erase them. The title itself, *Nobody Killed Her* is a provocation. It is a reminder of how Rani's fate is not a single person's doing, but of the broader ideological message: In a society where patriarchy, class hierarchy, religious fundamentalism and colonial history hold sway, women such as Nazo are not killed by any single person. Instead, their bodies, their desires, their ambitions, and their identities are little by little, affectively, systemically deconstructed by the weight of social structures that consider these an inescapable repulsiveness to be controlled, expelled, or erased.

In this sense, the title is not just a plot device/plot twist, but a proposition of theory of the sort Ahmed has the tools to answer. The subject of the question is not who is the person who is the agent of violence against Nazo, but what is the affective and social system through which her body is produced as so thoroughly Other that its destruction seems not to be violence, but the resolution that is natural, inevitable, of a social system. The main idea Ahmed argues: that disgust is not a response to a pre-existing quality of the body, but is a social performance that creates such a quality through repetition, which is how the mechanisms of Nazo's destruction are spread so widely across bodies, institutions, language, and everyday affective performances, and no single actor can be identified as responsible because the entire social order has been involved in the slow, accumulated, and relentless production of a woman who was always already nobody. The aim of the present article is to theorize this process of affective construction. The article theorises disgust as performative, circulatory, and as a political affect, rather than as a spontaneous psychological reaction, principally based on Sara Ahmed's work *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) and also briefly quoting Judith Butler's notion of performativity and Simone de Beauvoir's idea of the Other. Disgust, as Ahmed argues, is not a natural quality of objects or bodies, but rather, it is produced by repeated social performances which make some bodies sticky with negative affect, polluting, threatening, inferior. *Nobody Killed Her* is a tale in which the body of Nazo becomes just such a sticky surface. All of her attributes, her poverty, her scarred face, her refugee status, her lower-class origins, her sexual history, her ambition, become objects

of disgust for her, for Balgodi, for the Jihadists, for the courtroom, and for Pakistani society at large. All of these gestures of revulsion contribute to the making of Nazo the ultimate female Other, who is never heard, never seen, never known. The aim of the present article is to theorize the process of affective construction. The article aims to theorize disgust as performative, circulatory, and as a political affect not as a spontaneous psychological reaction, based largely on Sara Ahmed's work *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), and also drawing on Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Simone de Beauvoir's concept of 'other'. As Ahmed contends, disgust is not an inherent property of objects or bodies, but rather is created by repeated social performances which render some bodies sticky with negative affect - polluting, threatening, inferior. *Nobody Killed Her* is a story in which Nazo's body turns into a sticky surface. All of these characteristics like her poverty, her scarred face, her refugee status, her lower-class origins, her sexual history, her ambition, become objects of disgust from Rani herself to Balgodi, to the Jihadists, to the courtroom and to Pakistani society at large. Each of these acts of disgust helps to create Nazo as the ultimate Other, as a woman whose subjectivity is never acknowledged, who always gets her voice cut off, whose body is always subject to violation, use and disposal. This argument needs to be placed in the particular postcolonial context of Pakistan society where Javeri's novel is set. Colonial legacies, the reproduction of class hierarchies, the instrumentalization of religious authority, the subordination of women through traditional and modern institutional structures, are deeply operative in the social world of *Nobody Killed Her* that is implicated in Nazo's othering. The novel is clearly a reflection of the political history of Pakistan, and especially the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in 2007, which permeates the novel as a historical figure and political icon. Javeri makes radical formal and political choice to narrate this history via Nazo's life experience rather than the powerful female politician's; he insists that the most important story to be told of the murder of a female leader is not the story of her but the story of that woman whose life and death are not commemorated and mourned by a society that left its mark on her. This point of view is in itself a performative action of Ahmed's argument, one that makes the suffering of some visible and the suffering of others invisible, and is what makes the novel especially powerful as a text for the kind of analysis that this article offers.

### **Research Questions:**

This research article addresses following questions:

- 1) How does Sabyn Javeri make Nazneen Khan the Other in *Nobody Killed Her*? How does she 'theorize' the performativity of disgust?
- 2) How do class, gender and body overlap in the affective sphere of otherness of Nazo in the postcolonial Pakistani social sphere?
- 3) What kinds of institutions, the courtroom, the political power structure, the medical system, are places of affective disgust that perpetuate and validate Nazo's Otherness?

### **Objectives of the Research:**

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

Using the theoretical framework of the performativity of disgust (Sara Ahmed), to analyze the affective construction of female otherness.

To investigate the spatial, linguistic and physical workings of class-based disgust, which makes Nazo into a perpetual social underdog in the novel.

In order to explore the ways in which Nazo's gendered and racialized body is a location of the accumulation of disgust, especially in the context of the rape scene and its political aftermath within the post-colonial Pakistan of Javeri.

### **Literature Review:**

This topic of female othering and marginalization has attracted significant attraction from scholars in past several years. Since its publication, *Nobody Killed Her* has gained critical currency, as scholars have taken on political, postcolonial and feminist perspectives. Jabeen and Waseem (2023) place the novel in the larger context of the political struggles of Eastern women, claiming that Javeri's story reveals the "entrenched patriarchal obstacles to women's true political power" (225). According to their study, the class structure within the novel is not a peripheral element but also a key feature in the oppression of women: affected not only by the elite Rani Shah, but also by the lower-class Nazo in different ways. Importantly, Jabeen and Waseem (2023) argue that women's efforts to participate in politics, fail to substantially alter the conditions of their participation, as women are continuously confronted by the patriarchal forces as a dominant and self-reinforcing challenge, which undermines women's self-confidence and creates a deep psychological reliance.

The political aspect of the novel is also explored in Ashraf et al.'s (2020) reading of the novel using Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern. Although of vastly different class status, both Nazo and Rani Shah are subalterns, says their study, who are silenced and marginalized by the superposition of patriarchy, class hierarchy, and religious fundamentalism in Pakistani society. Ashraf et al. (2020) show how Nazo is marginalized through a close reading of the text; the marginalization is double as she is marginalized not only by the society dominated by men but also by Rani Shah herself, who is a woman and a victim of patriarchy but yet denies Nazo her humanity repeatedly and exploits her labour and loyalty for her own political gains. Ashraf et al. (2020) cite the oppression of women by women as one of the most powerful and unsettling understandings of the novel; the understanding of how even those who are most oppressed by the system of patriarchy are themselves oppressed by it. Azam et al. (2026) further broaden this feminist critique by focusing on the institutions involved like family, law, religion and state, that are used to sustain and validate patriarchal violence against women in the novel. In their study, Javeri does not emphasize male acts of aggression against the woman, but rather, identifies patriarchy as a self-reproducing, self-perpetuating system of power where violence is just as conducted through silence, moral policing, legal indifference, and social stigma. According to Azam et al. (2026), "*Nobody Killed Her*" is not just a silencing of female voices by individual powerful men, it's the systematic delegitimization of the voices of women, an organization of a society that treats women as disposable and their suffering as invisible. The structural aspect of patriarchy is what renders the novel a feminist power, the scholars claim, because it does not allow the reader to find one villain or one act to blame for women's pain, but pushes instead for pervasive and systemic oppression of women.

The idea of otherness is a concept that has been embraced by scholars to give a theoretical framework to understand the affective construction of the female Other in *Nobody Killed Her*. Zevallos (2023) concludes that difference does not exist naturally or biologically, but is instead a social construct created when groups are represented in an unequal way by people in power. Based on the foundational work of Bauman, Zevallos (2023) illustrates how social identities are always constructed as two-sided dichotomies (woman versus man; abnormality versus norm; stranger versus native), and how these dichotomies are constructed as natural and inevitable precisely to naturalize and obscure the dynamics of power that create them. This insight is immediately applicable to the way in which Nazo's otherness as a poor, refugee, lower class woman is perceived by her surroundings as a natural entity rather than the result of a social system designed to deny her recognition as such.

Despite the many important contributions to scholarship on the novel's relationship to patriarchy, subaltern identity, political feminism and gendered violence, there is a gap in the

critical analysis of this novel. Jabeen and Waseem (2023) investigate the political limitations imposed upon the Eastern women, but do not theorize the emotional and affective processes that help to impose and internalize these limits. Ashraf et al. (2020) effectively use the subaltern theory of Spivak to emphasize the double marginalisation of Nazo, but they do not consider the specific function of disgust as a socially diffused affect that sustains and produces her otherness as a politically useful emotion. While Azam et al. (2026) offer a feminist critique of patriarchy and institutional violence in the novel, they do not consider affective economies as the technologies of social exclusion that operate in the background and through institutions, such as the performativity of disgust. Likewise, the theoretical essays gathered in *Voices of Interdisciplinary Critical Explorations* (2023) provide robust conceptual tools for the understanding of othering in general, as a process socially constructed, institutionally reinforced, and psychologically damaging; but none of these provide an account specific to *Nobody Killed Her*, nor do they engage with Sara Ahmed's unique contribution: that disgust is not just a response to otherness, but its own mechanism of production. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) by Ahmed has never been engaged in a sustained dialogue with Javeri's novel, and no prior work has explored the intersection of Ahmed's performativity of disgust, Butler's concept of performativity and de Beauvoir's idea of women as 'other' to examine the otherness of the female protagonist in *Nobody Killed Her*. The present article will focus on this invisibility and argue that the affective mechanism through which Nazo constitutes the permanent female Other of postcolonial Pakistani society is rather disgust which is a feeling that is performed, circulated, and institutionalized in the society, and that it is this feeling of disgust that has not been seen in the existing scholarship, just as Nazo is not seen in the world of the novel.

#### **Theoretical Framework:**

The theoretical framework employed in this research article is mainly Sara Ahmed's concept of performativity of disgust from her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) with secondary focus on Simone de Beauvoir's concept of 'Other' and Judith Butler's idea of performativity. The starting point of Sara Ahmed's theoretical work in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) is a radical and transformative critique of the dominant understanding of emotions as private, interior, psychological states; as feelings that are uniquely the property of the person, produced within the person, and experienced outward in the social world, as a secondary effect of the interior world. This inside-out way of thinking about emotions has been the shared basis of popular and many scholarly approaches to the nature of emotions: I feel disgust whenever something unpleasant enters my perceptual field, I feel fear when something threatened approaches my body, I feel love when something loved enters my heart. In each instance, the emotion is a reaction, a natural, spontaneous and fundamentally private response to qualities which are pre-existing and exist on their own, apart from my feeling toward them. In this model, there are disgusting things in the world, threatening things, and loveable things, and my emotions are the correct registrations of these pre-existing qualities. Ahmed gives this model a searing and critical reading and finds it fundamentally misleading as both an account of emotion and the politics it does. She shows that the inside-out model is not only theoretically problematic but also politically and sharply contentious, transforming the focus from the internal to the external and from the individual to the social production of the object or body by externalizing the social, cultural, and political processes in which the qualities of an object or body come to be felt as intrinsic. The strategy of naturalizing disgust as a natural response to an object that is disgusting in itself is a strategy of concealment of the political arrangement that made such an object disgusting. Ahmed's theoretical intervention is to insist that we focus not on the objects of emotion but on the social processes by which certain objects and bodies are thus constituted

as emotional objects, that is, as targets for disgust, fear, or contempt; and to ask what interests are served by those constitutions and what social hierarchies they produce and maintain. But emotions are not just about what happens within the individual, and then is shown outwardly, says Ahmed (2004); they are produced in the social, in circulation, in politics. This rethinking of emotion as social, relational, and not primarily as individual and interior is the key to Ahmed's analysis of the emotion as a political phenomenon, as a tool through which social power plays out, social hierarchies are reproduced, some bodies are deemed legitimate subjects worthy of recognition and protection, while other bodies are produced as objects of fear, contempt, and disgust, can be excluded, violated, and eroded, and are socially impugnable. The idea of 'outside-in' or 'circulatory' model of emotion is not a rejection of reality of personal feeling (Ahmed does not argue here that people do not actually feel what they feel), it is a reconceptualization of the personal feeling in the social and political processes that have organized it, and shaped it, and have directed it toward something else, and have made it valuable to the very same processes that have shaped it, that they are valuable to. This reconceptualization is fundamental and immediate for the analysis of *Nobody Killed Her*: it turns the analytical question from why do characters feel disgust toward Nazo (which could imply that the disgust they feel is a natural reaction to the fact that she has some qualities; thus, the characters' disgust is naturalized as a reaction to the real traits of her person) to how has the social world of the novel organized the circulation of disgust to flow toward Nazo's body and what political arrangements does this organization of feeling maintain and reproduce?

One of Ahmed's most important and original theories, developed in the context of a long-term engagement with and transformation of Marxist analysis of the circulation of capital, is that of affective economies. In Marx's analysis, capital does not exist as a fixed property of any single commodity, but rather as a process that takes place between commodities, through exchange and circulation, gaining value as it circulates and that which appears as the inherent property of a commodity is actually socially produced. In Ahmed's analysis there is no property inherent in any body or object, but rather in the process of its circulation, gaining value as it circulates, and that which appears as property of the body or object is actually socially produced. The emotional significance that any body or object possesses is not a property of the body or object but has been created by the affectively charged encounters that have occurred in its past, the feelings that have been directed to it, the cultural imaginations that have shaped it, the official assessments that have been made about it, and the practices of revulsion, fear, or rejection that have designated it as a specific type of affective object. By the novel's opening, her body already has an affective history, before she has even allowed any of the distinct characters in the novel to make a personal judgment on her because she has been the object of disgust in Pakistani society for poor bodies, refugee bodies, lower class bodies and female bodies. The body she enters as is not a neutral body to be judged on its own merits, but is a body already shaped by the negative effects that circulate in the social world she is part of, which is an appropriate target of disgust. To understand this pre-marking, Ahmed identifies the social organization of feeling as the affective economies of Nazo's otherness prior to any particular act of othering directed at her; he does this by showing how the affective economy of a social process produces certain bodies as already disgusting before any encounter confirms that disgust.

The idea of "affective economies" is important for a different reason, too, because it allows to understand how negative affect is spread unevenly across the social body: not all bodies fill up with the stickiness of the disgust, some remain smooth and relatively free from this accumulation. This differential distribution, Ahmed (2004) argues, is not random or natural, but rather is a product of the contours of social power, which exacerbate negative emotions for

bodies that are already marked as Other through race, class, gender, religion or postcolonial identity. It is the very social formation that successfully circulates negative emotion through the poor body, the female body, the refugee body, the colonised body, each of which becomes a terrain of affective accumulation to the greatest extent because of the social formation's most concentrated activation of the negative emotion in it. The political effect of this differential distribution of negative affect is to make social hierarchies seem like natural consequences of the differences that exist between bodies, rather than an ongoing and organized political process enacted by the constant and organized functioning of affective circulation. In the poor body, when disgust is present in its natural form, when it is lower, servile, not one to be trusted, the poverty that is there is natural, not social; the social arrangements that have produced and maintained it are natural expressions of an inherent hierarchy, not political choices that could be made otherwise. Reading Ahmed's notion of affective economies, then, is a way of becoming aware of the political role of disgust, its not just about social hierarchy but one of the most important means by which hierarchy is reproduced and naturalized, making the constructed seem inevitable, the politically organized seemingly natural.

The concept that most often surfaces during the analysis in this article and to which it ends up returning most insistently is the elaboration of disgust as a performative, rather than a reactive affect, which is the argument developed most fully in Chapter Four of *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), to which disgust is no more than an "inaction". It is an argument that builds on, and extends, Judith Butler's theory of performativity, which suggests that some social realities are not described but produced by the speech acts and social practices that appear only to name them, but with this concept, it applies to the domain of affect, showing that the emotional life of a social formation is as thoroughly performative as its gender arrangements or its political identities. What disgusts is always relative to a social context: what is disgusting in one social context is not in another, so disgust is not a response to essential properties of its objects but rather a social production that varies with the social conditions of its performance (Ahmed, 2004). To name something disgusting does not report an uncharged perception of an intrinsic property of the body; it is a social act which constitutes the body as the kind of body "disgusting" as a sign on it. This performative aspect of disgust is what makes it transparent, so as to mask its political role; when disgust seems to be just "reacting", just "reacting" to what is already "there", its productivity is hidden, its capacity to "act" and to create conditions, even the capacity to create what it seems to "react" to. The disgusting body is produced by a disgustful social body, which seems to be a natural reaction to the body's properties and the disgustful social body is the product of the disgustful body. The political ramifications of Ahmed's point on the performativity of disgust are huge and profound, and they are clearly applicable to all aspects of Nazo's life in *Nobody Killed Her*. If disgust is performative, if it generates more than it responds to, that is, if it is a "quality" that is constituted, then the entire social construction of the novel, in which Nazo's inferiority, her danger, her untrustworthiness and her violability are accepted as facts about her person, is uncovered as a political product sustained through the unceasing performance of disgust by people, institutions, and cultural products. All acts of class contempt towards her, every time she's called a maid instead of a secretary, when her speech is deemed presumptuous and silenced, when her presence in a space is declared inappropriate, are performances of disgust that do not simply reflect a pre-existing social prejudice of her inferiority, but generate and reinforce it as a seemingly objective fact. Each institutional judgment made against her such as, the legal indictment, the psychiatric diagnosis, the political dismissal, is a performance of institutional disgust, magnifying and cementing the various social performances of individual disgust, each given the power and authority of official truth. The sum

of all these performances over the many decades and in all areas of Nazo's social life is the creation of a body so saturated with the stickiness of accumulated disgust that it can no longer be perceived as anything but what the performances of disgust have made it: an object, a nobody, a disgusting thing whose violation and destruction seemed less an injustice than the resolution of the social arrangement that is producing her.

Stickiness is a term very similar to, and as crucial to understanding, performativeness of disgust; it is one of the most analytically fruitful notions in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) and one that is inescapable if one is to understand how Nazo's othering works throughout the length of Javeri's novel. Stickiness, for Ahmed, is the quality of bodies that, because of the repeated application of negative affect towards them, come to become sticky surfaces that can pick up more and more of negative affect (increasing ease at which more attach and increasing resistance to negative affect), or it is the quality of bodies that remain relatively smooth, less marked, less saturated with accumulated negative affect, easier to perceive as a neutral or positive presence in the social world. Stickiness, Ahmed argues, is not a natural or intrinsic quality of any body, it comes from the repetitions of negative affect created in a social encounter and transmitted, repeated, through language, gesture, spatiality, cultural representation, and institutional judgement (Ahmed,2004). The stickiness of the body's surface is not created by one instance of disgust, or disgust over its face or its back, but by the accumulation of a series of disgusts over time, each layer of disgust making the other more visible on the body's surface, until it feels like this is not the result of a history of social performances, but the body's natural quality. The temporal aspect of stickiness is what makes Nazo's otherness so deeply inescapable throughout the novel, so she's viewed as a redeeming quality, but only ever as a sign of her danger and transgression. All these qualities are absorbed into the economy of disgust that is already on her skin, into the economy of the spaces that are already suspect, into the economy of her worthlessness inscribed onto her body, and so are not received as qualities of her worth, but instead, as signs of her threatening overreaching, her dangerous ambition, her fundamental unsuitability for the positions she has held. The affective economy of disgust's most politically devastating quality is the stickiness, its self-reinforcing quality of making resistance seem as if it is another proof of the need for control, another accusation of transgression, another way to structurally be unable to perform out of the position that disgust has given the marked body.

Ahmed further argues that stickiness does not only work between individual bodies but it spreads across social texts, cultural representations, and institutional practices as well, all of which quietly and continuously contribute to the process of affective accumulation that keeps certain bodies permanently marked as Other. This is what gives the affective economy of disgust its truly systemic character. It is not simply about one person disliking another, or one institution treating someone unfairly, it is about an entire social world working together, across multiple levels and spaces, to keep certain bodies in their designated position of inferiority. Even if a single character in the novel were to individually decide to treat Nazo with dignity and recognition, the accumulated stickiness of cultural norms, institutional authority, and social convention would continue to mark her body as lesser, because the affective economy that produces her otherness does not live in any single person's heart, it lives in the structure of the society itself, reproduced by every institution, every cultural text, and every everyday social practice that participates in directing negative affect toward bodies like hers. This is perhaps the most politically important insight Ahmed's framework offers for reading *Nobody Killed Her* which is the recognition that Nazo's destruction cannot be blamed on any single villain or any single act of cruelty, because it is the product of an entire social world organized around the production of certain bodies as

disgusting and disposable. Nobody killed her and the distributed, systemic, invisible operation of the affective economy of disgust is precisely why.

Ahmed also draws attention to the spatial dimension of disgust, showing how it produces what she calls social geographies of disgust, arrangements of bodies in space that quietly but powerfully enact and reproduce the hierarchy between the clean and the dirty, the legitimate and the abject, the body that belongs and the body that is always somehow out of place (Ahmed, 2004). These spatial arrangements are not simply practical divisions of physical space. They are living performances of the social order, material expressions of who matters and who does not, whose body is welcome in certain spaces and whose presence is felt as a kind of contamination. Every time Nazo settles on the floor rather than a chair, every time she is confined to the servants' quarters, every time she stands at the margins of political meetings she has effectively organized herself, the spatial arrangement is performing the disgust that her social world has organized around her body, quietly and repeatedly insisting that she belongs below, that her presence anywhere else is a transgression against the natural order of things.

What makes disgust even more powerful and more difficult to resist is that it does not stay between individual people but it finds its way into institutions, into law, into medicine, into political discourse, and into cultural representation, where it is given the weight and authority of official, objective truth (Ahmed, 2004). When the legal system treats certain bodies as inherently suspicious, when psychiatry diagnoses a woman's resistance and emotional intensity as symptoms of mental illness rather than responses to genuine injustice, when political discourse frames a lower-class woman's ambition as dangerous overreaching rather than legitimate aspiration, disgust has been institutionalized. It has been laundered through the language of neutrality and expertise until it no longer looks like disgust at all. It looks like fact. It looks like judgment. It looks like the natural, inevitable assessment of a body that was always already problematic. This institutional dimension of Ahmed's framework is absolutely central to the courtroom scenes in *Nobody Killed Her*, where the full apparatus of the Pakistani legal and medical establishment is deployed to perform institutional disgust toward Nazo's body, producing her guilt and her inferiority through the accumulation of labels, diagnoses, and accusations that carry the authority of the state behind them, and making it structurally impossible for her to contest what the affective economy of disgust has already decided about who she is and what she deserves.

Even though Sara Ahmed's framework is the main theoretical tool in this article, a secondary analysis of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) is added to the analysis. The key to understanding the form in which othering takes place in *Nobody Killed Her* lies in De Beauvoir's existential and philosophical foundation that woman is othered not as a subject in itself but as the Other of man, defined in relation to the male norm which claims to be universal and absolute. De Beauvoir maintains that the construction of woman as Other is not just a social phenomenon, but an existential one, where woman lacks the status of a subject and is limited to being an object defined in relation to man, and not by her own projects, desires and freedoms (de Beauvoir, 1949). This 'denial of subjectivity' is not just imposed from outside, it is internalised by women themselves, who are socialised since childhood to deny their subjectivity, even to see themselves as secondary to others, as derivative of others, existing for others rather than for themselves. De Beauvoir's premise especially resonates with an understanding of Nazo's relationship with Rani, where Nazo's sense of self is entirely based on devotion to another woman, a devotion so total that it even helps her lose her self, her life apart from Rani's project. The novel portrays de Beauvoir's notion of the internalization of otherness, when "other" has been denied subjectivity, women may sometimes build their whole identities as "other. The novel illustrates the

internalization of otherness, when "other" has been denied subjectivity, women may sometimes construct their entire identity as "other," mistaking devotion for freedom and service for selfhood. It is necessary to acknowledge, however, that, though de Beauvoir's concept of existential otherness is suggestive and important about the way that Nazo's otherness is produced and sustained, Ahmed's framework is primary here because it further illuminates the specifically affective otherness. While De Beauvoir tells us what Nazo is in the social order, the Other, Ahmed tells us how she is made Other; how her otherness is produced and maintained as an apparently natural and inevitable condition.

The second of these theoretical underpinnings for this article comes from the theory of performativity developed by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993). Butler's main claim is that identity is not a natural, stable self but is constructed through repeated citation, performance, whereby the illusion of a stable self is generated. Gender is not performed behind the performance; the performance is gender and what seems natural about a feminine or masculine performance is actually the result of numerous reiterations that reference earlier acts and thus reaffirm the prescriptive norms that legitimate performances and make others seem unintelligible (Butler, 1990). Butler's framework is relevant to *Nobody Killed Her* in terms of its light it sheds on the various ways in which Nazo comes to embody Rani's identity including the clothing, manner, speech, gaining political power, and finally claiming Rani's identity in the courtroom. The performances are citational repetitions in Butler's sense: attempts to inhabit and claim the norms of political subjectivity and feminine authority that are embodied by Rani, in a social context that denies the legitimacy of Nazo's body for such performances. Butler claims that in this respect all identity is performative, in that no one is a woman or a leader or a legitimate political subject simply by virtue of the fact of their birth, but only insofar as they perform it and are recognized by others as such. What *Nobody Killed Her* proves is that not every body is equally recognized, that the rules of what can be performed and what cannot be very much accident of class, race, gender and colonial history and that the same performance has very different social significance for the different bodies that perform it. Butler's notion of bodies that matter, that which is not a body is not a body, is also pertinent to the fate of the novel's very real Nazo, who suffers, is raped, contributes to a politics, and is ultimately killed, but all of these events remain only dimly remembered in that social world of the novel (1993). As with de Beauvoir's existential analysis, though, Butler's performativity theory is not the primary focus of this article; Butler does explain how identity is produced and how it is withheld, through performance; it is Ahmed who explains how the performances are invested with social force, and how certain bodies are made to feel, and to be felt as inherently disgusting, out of place, and unworthy of recognition. It is the intersectionality of these three frameworks: Ahmed's affective economy of disgust as the dominant one, de Beauvoir's existential othering and Butler's performativity as the complementary frames, that allow for the present article to provide a full picture of the construction of Nazo as the permanent female Other of Javeri's postcolonial Pakistani world.

#### **Methodology & Analysis:**

The methodology used in this study is qualitative with a major emphasis on close text analysis, with Sara Ahmed's account of the performativity of disgust (2004, chapter four) being a guiding framework, predominantly and overwhelmingly. In every reading of Javeri's novel, Ahmed's basic premise, that disgust is not a spontaneous emotional reaction to objects or bodies that 'naturally' disgust, but is instead a performative social act that creates the very qualities it seems to point to, is followed. The narrative disgusts the spectator over the course of the text, layering negative affect on her "otherness" as a body, until it becomes almost as real as a natural fact of her being,

rather than a social construction. The theory of performativity, which is invoked by Judith Butler, is used as a secondary analytical lens, only briefly. The idea of woman as Other comes from the work of Simone de Beauvoir, which in *The Second Sex* (1949) addresses the existential nature of being a woman, of being always other than oneself. It does not analyze class and embodied abjection as separate entities, or the gendered body as a space of disgust, or institutional disgust as a space of erasure, but rather as layers of a single affective economy, a system that constructs and reinforces Nazo's permanent state of otherness from the very beginning of the novel to its very end.

In the opening of her chapter on the performativity of disgust, Ahmed is interested in observing, as she sees it in Darwin's colonial encounter, that "disgust reads the objects that are felt to be disgusting: it is not only about bad objects that we are afraid to incorporate, but the very designation of 'badness' as a quality we assume is inherent in those objects" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 82). This statement which means that disgust evokes the badness it seems to be revealing is the basic analytical code which will help to explain how Nazo's body is created and maintained as Other in Javeri's novel. For Ahmed, the attribution to disgust to a body does not depend on any body having an inbuilt repulsive quality: "The other is already seen as dirt, as the carrier of dirt, which dirtified" (Ahmed, 2004, p.82). The other may not be dirty; it is enough if the social order has already set up the flow of the disgusts to be directed toward the other: the dirtiness of the other is thus already felt as an inevitability. This is in novel right from the opening scene of Nazo's interaction with Rani. On the first visit to Rani's New York apartment, Nazo doesn't wait to be told where she should sit, she sits on the floor. Nazo tells us, "With downcast eyes. I settled on the floor" (Javeri, 2017, p. 7). It isn't an individual preference or a gesture of individual disrespect; it's a social script of class disgust that's deeply internalized that's so ingrained in the body that it becomes reflexive. The imagined notions of above and below and their associated powers, according to Ahmed (2004, p. 89), are maintained through disgust at 'that which is below'. The floor is not just the figure of the body that is below, lowered, abject, but also the spatial mediation of Nazo's allotted body, or her place in the affective economy. When Rani acquiesces to this form of transaction, her silence is the cementing of this spatial performance of class disgust as the basis of their relationship as a whole, which will be repeated, in different forms, in every encounter the novel charts.

At the heart of the idea of "stickiness" is Ahmed's notion of the "otherness" of his performance of class disgust, and how this otherness builds up over the course of the novel to a permanent "otherness" that results in Nazo's devastation. Ahmed says that stickiness is an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs: sticky bodies are not sticky because of any characteristic they have or any particular reason for being, but because of the repeated impress of negative affects that are created in social encounters and carried through the language, the gesture, the spatial arrangement, and the institutional judgment. "Things become sticky as an effect of encountering other sticky things," (Ahmed ,2004, p.91) and crucially, the more a surface becomes sticky, the more easily other negative affects can be attached to it, the harder it will be to get them off, the more fully they will feel as if they are natural properties of the body rather than as social judgments. In *Nobody Killed Her*, Nazo's body acquires a stickiness in just this way. Every time she is called servant, maid, nobody, or barely literate asylum seeker, there is another layer of disgust that she is carrying on her body until the time of her trial, where she is found guilty before any evidence is evaluated, by the court, the political establishment and her society at large. The most clear-cut example of this accumulation is seen in the moment in which Nazo corrects Balgodi's use of a word, which draws out an immediate and strong class disgust performance from him. Balgodi says, "the poor do not speak among the

rich," and tells her to get out of there because she has "sprouted wings" (Javeri, 2017, p. 89). Nazo is one of "these poor people" who "don't know about manners and etiquettes" (Javeri, 2017, p. 89). According to Ahmed (2004, p. 102) "to name something as disgusting is to make it sticky with the stickiness of 'disgust', and this disgust is now generated as the thing that is named. It does not describe a quality that already exists, but it brings into existence a quality through the social act of naming, one that is a natural quality of her and a social deficiency. Then, when Nazo is perceived as one who does not know manners, any additional perception of her is understood as one more act of inappropriateness, and she can be read only as such, within the social world of the novel. The affective economy of disgust is also demonstrated in Rani's reaction to the Balgodi scene, where she looks around at the floor, then turning to Nazo, she says, "we can't have the servants of this house looking like trash" (Javeri, 2017, p. 90). Ahmed says that the subject may seek to maintain the border against what threatens, which means that Rani's act of giving the cast-off clothes is a border-maintenance act: a material performance of borders that acknowledges Nazo's presence and again marks the distance between the body that wears the clothes and the one that receives them, the difference between the body wearing the clothes and the body receiving the clothes. Ahmed's sticky objects are the clothes; Nazo's sticky objects are the things that have the affective weight of class hierarchy and carry it onto her body physically. It is more important that Rani's direction of disgust is downward towards Nazo, rather than sideways towards Balgodi's boorish behavior, which shows that Ahmed's observation about the way those who are lower are kept down by the disgusted subject's disgust, that disgust keeps the native below, as it makes the native below (2004, p. 89), works regardless of the source of the social transgression. This is an effect of the accumulated disgust that Ahmed cites as one of the most destructive effects of the affective economy: "I was worth nothing" (Javeri, 2017, p. 251) is an internalization of that disgust that is felt by others, and then absorbed by the subject as a truth about herself.

In theorising the performativity of disgust, Ahmed picks up on Butler's (1993) arguments, stating that "performativity relates to the way in which a signifier, rather than simply naming something that already exists, works to generate that which it apparently names" (2004, p. 100, citing Butler 1993, p.20); "performativity is hence about the 'power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration'" (2004, p. 92, citing Butler 1993, p.20). This aspect of Ahmed's work brings a spotlight to the specific way in which Nazo's legitimacy is constantly recreated throughout the novel, not once, but through repeated stages of disgust performances that refer to earlier disgust and add their power to each iteration. Butler's notion of the regulatory norm, the social norm that determines the ones who are "legitimate" to claim the identity of a secretary, political operator, or genuine public figure, and the ones who aren't, helps explain why Nazo's various efforts to claim this identity are never recognized, even though they are accurate descriptions of the work she performs. The same performance that indicates authority and competence on the part of Rani's elite, educated, dynastic body indicates transgression and dangerous overreaching on the part of Nazo's poor, scarred, refugee body, because the norms that regulate the intelligibility of such performances are inseparable from the class and social histories that have produced certain bodies as inherently inadequate for certain roles. Ahmed expresses this idea through her discussion of the speech act of disgust, which "creates a community of witnesses whose 'shared distance from an event or object that has been named as disgusting' is generated by the repetition of disgust" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 95). Every time Nazo is called maid, not secretary, and nobody, not political figure, but asylum seeker, a community of witnesses is created, from the walls of the house to the floor of the political floor, from the court to the floor of the social hierarchy that holds her to stay in her place. It is in this, at the juncture of Ahmed's performativity

of disgust and de Beauvoir's existential analysis of woman as Other that the novel's treatment of Nazo is most philosophically resonant. De Beauvoir's assertion in *The Second Sex* (1949) is that woman is not a subject in itself but rather the Other of man, an Other that is defined not in itself but in relation to a norm that "is presented as universal and yet is a specifically masculine norm." De Beauvoir (1949) says that women are the "incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential". It marks Nazo's situation throughout the novel; she is always secondary, she is always "this" as opposed to an autonomous "other", a subject who has her own projects and desires, but is instead the instrument by which Rani's subjectivity is sustained and extended. Rani says "Nazo is a nobody. No family background, no vision, no brains, just a stupid tagalong" (Javeri, 2017, p. 311) in the process of existentially erasing Nazo, as described by Beauvoir, making her a pure relational function, defined only by her presence in relation to the one who matters. In Ahmed's framework this existential reading is supported by an explanation of the affective mechanism through which this erasure is produced and sustained: the repeated social performance of disgust produces Nazo's nobody-ness not as an existential judgment, but as an ostensibly objective social fact, which makes it impossible for her to be perceived as having the independent subjectivity which could enable her to challenge her own construction as Other. The most politically and intensely disgusting version of Ahmed's argument that disgust brings the conditions of a body's violability is the rape of Nazo by men from the Jihadist group. The violence directed at Nazo, in response to her political activism and her successful critique and exposure of a Jihadist Elder, is clearly a performance of the social geography of disgust, a violence that is a re-inscription of Nazo's body in the position from which her critique and exposure have threatened to lift her. "They dug my face into the mattress and placed the tip of the knife on the small of my back (Javeri,2017, p.266). The logic of the speech act of disgust, that it is not only possible, but the requisite violence that is necessary to expel Nazo's body back into the position of abjection from which her political activity has transgressed, is precisely enacted by this statement: "You'll have a good case (Javeri,2017, p.266). Then my body was made so repulsive by the affective economy of Pakistani Patriarchalism that there wasn't any social cost to its violation, "my battered body was thrown on the road in front of Shah House in a moving car. I wasn't wearing anything to cover my body. I stood in the darkness, holding on to leaves and dirt. I remember the roaming dogs with yellow eyes. The appearance of pity"(Javeri,2017,p.266), is one of the most haunting figurations in the novel of what Ahmed means by the complete operation of the affective economy of disgust, that is, the positioning of Nazo's body to such an extent that it is outside the legitimate social order, and even animals are more likely to be recognized in the social order than Nazo. The emotional repercussions of the rape are just as important as the actual event. The accumulated disgust that strikes in the middle of suffering and recognition is so sticky that Ahmed could sum it up in his response to Nazo's demand for justice: "Disgust is dependent on contact or proximity, and the object must have got close enough to make us feel disgusted"(Ahmed,2004,p.85) which Rani illustrates in sharp detail with her response to Nazo's demand for justice. Nazo asks Rani to seek legal redress, Rani replies "You brought this upon yourself"(Javeri,2017, p.267). This response is the affective performance of the retroactive logic of disgust, by which the act of disgusting the thing becomes the "truth of the reading of the thing" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 87), in the sense that it seems like the object itself did it, rather than the forces of society targeted at it. The arrows of disgust uttered by Rani play out like a circular effect: the rape is a result of her visibility and transgressiveness, and her transgressiveness and visibility is the cause of the rape. The arrows of disgust Rani spits out are the structural impossibility of acknowledging the injury within the terms of the social order that produced it; the transgressiveness and visibility of the victim is what caused her to be attacked.

This rejection is a systematic one, which goes beyond the immediate crisis: "Every time I raised the Women's Rights Bill, you said 'later'" (Javeri, 2017, p. 231). The deferral is an everyday act of disgust-as-neglect, which is a sustained refusal to bring the suffering of lower-class women into the political arena, to make it an institutional reality, as it were, of the 'pulling away' of disgust from the object designated as contaminating, as Ahmed puts it. The expulsion itself, that is, the repeated expulsion of Nazo's political demands from Rani's legislative agenda, is the "truth" of the reading of the object, the bodies it concerns are below the threshold of political recognition, what is important is the social truth.

The courtroom scenes are the place where the disgusting individual and personal performances described above can be institutionalized, turned into the apparently objective, authoritative and neutral language of the state. Disgust is a speech act that produces 'a community of witnesses' connected by their 'shared condemnation of a disgusting object or event' (Ahmed, 2004, p. 94) and 'such shared witnessing is required for speech acts to be generative, that is, for the attribution of disgust to an object or other to stick to others' (Ahmed, 2004, p. 94). The trial of Nazo is the institutionalization of just such a community: the legal system, the medical profession, the political system, the public and the theatre are all witnesses to Nazo's disgust, bound together in their shared condemnation, producing through their witnessing the conditions where Nazo's guilt is made self evident. Dr. Farooqi's testimony, the most explicit in this institutional disgust show, reveals that "Your Honour, please see Exhibit E, a report from Dr Farooqi about Miss Khan's diagnosis of schizophrenia. It is not a result of a shock, but an underlying illness which surfaces due to a shock. It shows that Miss Khan had always been mentally unstable" (Javeri, 2017, p. 270). According to Ahmed, "signs become sticky through repetition; if a word is used in a certain way, repeated again and again, then that 'use' is made sticky; it is a form of signing" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 91). When the word "schizophrenia" is affixed to Nazo's body in the authoritative institutional setting of the courtroom, it lingers on all previous descriptions of her actions and redefines every act of political courage, emotional intensity, and determined resistance as a symptom of her inherent pathology. The conjunction "had always been mentally unstable" simulates the temporal dynamics between the speech act, which "lags behind" the object from which it recoils, and the object itself, which it produces in the very act of recoiling," as Ahmed describes it (2004, p. 93). Nazo is produced as always already disgusting, always already mentally defective, always already other to the extent that these qualities are always already there; not because they always already were there, but because the production of such qualities by the performance is a performance of that kind with institutional authority that is, the kind that makes its product sound like a fact and beyond contestation within the framework of the very institution that produces it.

The attachment of disgust to some bodies, a sticking which cannot ever be completed, as it is always possible that other bodies might be 'terrorists', "produces other effects" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 97) and this incompleteness of the expulsion of disgusting body is the end of the novel. The affective economy of disgust has had its most complete and most politically significant impact in the erasure of Nazo in the novel's last pages. This grave, "has become a shrine," and to look at it in daylight, "it looks like blood on stone," (Javeri, 2017, p. 335) is a memorial to Rani, the body that matters, the body that was recognized, the body that was mourned by the social order. Absorbed, Nazo is buried here as Rani, and Rani is mourned as Nazo, that is, her identity is swallowed by another at the very moment of being completely erased as "nobody. The word 'disgust', Ahmed writes, 'is itself a sticky sign, insofar as other signs stick to it' (Ahmed, 2004, p. 93), and the word 'nobody', the label most insistently applied to Nazo throughout the novel has the same sticky effect, adding with each repetition the whole history of class, gender, and social

disgust performed upon her body, until by the novel's end it has become the full and seemingly natural description of Nazo's social life. The novel's most ironic crystallization of this affective economy is the two-word performance that Omar gives to himself in an empty courtroom, a measure of condescension, of memory, of confirmation, of a social community of witnesses who, as the social function of disgust is to expel the threatening body from the community of legitimate social belonging and no further acknowledgment, no further performance, no further word is needed. No one was directly responsible for her death: the affective economy of disgust was able to complete the task because the work of her destruction had already been so distributed across bodies, signs, spaces, and institutions of Pakistani postcolonial society that no one could be held accountable for what the social order, which endlessly repeats its performances of who matters and who does not, already did.

### **Conclusion:**

In this article, I have explored the affective construction of female otherness in *Nobody Killed Her* (2017) by Sabyn Javeri by using Sara Ahmed's notion of the performativity of disgust as articulated in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004). The article has shown how Nazo's otherness is not a social fact, but rather a product of a social production of disgust, which is affected and maintained over class, gender and institutional relations. Together, Ahmed's ideas of the affective economy, of stickiness, of the contact zone, and of the performative speech act of disgust enable one to read the novel's central tragedy as a story not of cruel individuals or betrayal from individuals but as a story of the destruction of a person by an entire social order organized around the circulation of negative affect, with no single agent required to take responsibility for this destruction. The analysis has revealed that Nazo's body brings several different kinds of disgust with him throughout the novel, each instance building upon the others and making the surface he encounters increasingly "icky" to see. When the woman's refusal of justice becomes a refusal of her own rape, the courtroom's medicalization of Nazo's resistance as schizophrenia is a medicalization of the woman's resistance, and when the woman is finally erased in death, it's a performance of a single affective economy one in which the female lower-class body is produced as so disgusting that its violation, silencing, and ultimate disappearance are regarded as natural rather than political outcomes. This reading has thus far been supplemented briefly by Butler's performativity and de Beauvoir's *Otherness of woman*, in their elucidation of the regulatory norms that obstruct the recognition of Nazo's performances of identity and the existential dimension of a subjectivity entirely mediated by another's desire. In the end, *Nobody Killed Her* is a very strong poetic assertion of Ahmed's most provocative theoretical position: disgust is not triggered by "otherness" but generates it. Javeri's title is both a fact and an indictment, since all of them did and the endless repetitions, confirmations, affectations of disgust made her already a nobody before her death. The novel makes its readers aware of this erasure as a political scenario, rather than a personal one, because it is an inevitable result of an affective economy that has been established in society through the production of the female Other.

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