3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature® The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies
Vol 31(1), March 2025 http://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2025-3101-11

From Phallogocentric Dominance to Feminist Epistemology: Feminine Authority in Rahadoost's '*I Still Can See'*

ESMAEIL ZEINY
Department of English Language and Literature
Xiamen University, Malaysia
esmaeil.zeiny@xmu.edu.my

ABSTRACT

For centuries, Iranian women were literally absent or mentioned in passing in Persian literature. With the advent of modern thoughts and ways of living, women gained a presence in the male-dominated literature. The Iranian women questioned the traditional regulations, ventured into the public and expressed their thoughts and concerns through literature. However, the phallogocentrism dominating large parts of scholarship on literature has sidelined Iranian women and their literary contributions again. This phallogocentric order lost its momentum with the development of a different style, tone, and storytelling in women's stories that challenge, transform, reconstruct and negotiate histories demonstrating women's own identities, rights, and experiences. Drawing on the latest developments in feminist epistemology, particularly feminist standpoint theory on the significance of women's everyday experiences and resistance, this paper examines Bahar Rahadoost's text 'I Still Can See' (Rahadoost, 2023), shedding light on how Iranian women exercise feminine authority and construct "feminist knowledge." I argue that Rahadoost's text is an innovative genre and an epistemic repertoire that contests the official phallogocentric narratives that emphasise the importance of everyday experiences and forms of resistance in constructing feminist knowledge. This paper also illustrates how 'I Still Can See' makes an essential contribution to the global discourse on feminist epistemology.

Keywords: phallogocentrism; feminist standpoint; epistemology; Iranian women; authority

INTRODUCTION

> But one strange thing about this country is that, apparently, there are absolutely no women in it. You see little girls, four or five years old, in the alleyways, but never any women. No matter how much I thought about this, I could never figure it out…Another thing that is very strange about Iran is that a substantial part of the people, about half the population of the country, wrap themselves from head to foot in black sacks, not even leaving space to breathe. And that's how they go about the alleyways in that black sack. These people are never allowed to speak and have no right to enter a teahouse or any other place. Their baths are also separate, and at public gatherings like passion plays and mourning feasts, they have their own viewing sections.
>
> (Jamalzadeh, 1985, pp. 96-7)

The excerpt above presents a narrative of an Iranian individual returning to Iran after residing in Europe for a long period of time. Reflected in Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh's short story *What's Sauce for the Goose* (1985), this account draws attention to the absence of women from public life in Iran. This was a true depiction of Iran and Iranian women through which Jamalzadeh critiqued the oppression of women (Jamalzadeh, 1985). For centuries, the traditional practices of veiling and public silence disempowered Iranian women. This absence was echoed in Persian literature as well. Women were literally absent or mentioned in passing in Persian literature. This absence was not confined to any particular genre of literature. Both poetry and prose were male-dominated genres, leaving little room for women's voices and self-revelation. This sentiment changed gradually towards the end of the Qajar dynasty when modern thoughts and ways of living wormed their way into Iran. Women's presence was increasing in society, and they became the

subject of masculine literature, but they were portrayed as passive and submissive women. The attempts to modernise the country eventually broke down the secure male-dominated literature and paved the way for women's participation in literature. The Iranian women questioned the traditional regulations, ventured into the public and expressed their thoughts and concerns through literature. Much to the chagrin of these women, however, they were again marginalised, their literature was ignored and they were accused of utilising traditional masculine styles and tones in their writings. The phallogocentrism dominating large parts of scholarship on literature has historically sidelined Iranian women and their literary contributions.

This phallogocentric dominance lost its momentum with the development of a different style, tone, and storytelling in women's stories that challenge, transform, reconstruct and negotiate histories demonstrating women's own identities, rights, experiences and desired futures. Having broken the dominant narratives that exclude women's voices, concerns, and contributions, Iranian women writers have been producing stories and narratives sharing individual and group experiences that bring women from the periphery to the fore. Such a 'storytelling' wherein women's everyday experiences and resistances are shared, feminist standpoint theorists argue, can be an epistemic repertoire (Shahbazi, 2019). These stories and narratives can be an alternative to the phallogocentrism and phallogocentric forms of knowledge. Storytelling is, therefore, an efficient method that can transform women's everyday experience and resistance into 'feminist knowledge.' Drawing on the latest developments in feminist epistemology, particularly feminist standpoint theory on the significance of women's everyday experience and resistance, this study examines Bahar Rahadoost's text '*I Still Can See'* (2023), shedding light on how Iranian women exercise feminine authority and construct 'feminist knowledge.' I argue that Rahadoost's text is an innovative genre that contests the official phallogocentric narratives of the time, and it emphasises the importance of feminist knowledge narrated through accounts of experience and resistance. To contextualise this work in the patterns of development of Iranian women's literature, a brief historicisation of women's absence to female authority in modern Persian literature is in order.

THE ABSENCE AND PRESENCE OF WOMEN

Persian literature, from its classical emergence up until recently, has been dominated by men. Notwithstanding that, there were a few female authors, such as Mehri Heravi (9th century), Rabia Balkhi (10th century), Mahasti Ganjavi (12th century), and Jahān Malik Khatun (14th century), who were contemporaneous with the well-known poets Hafez Shirazi and Ubayd Zakani, the Persian classical literature was written by men and with male readers in mind. In a culture where the man is the "self-controlled centre of the universe," and "the rest of the world", which he defines as the Other, has meaning only in relation to him since he is the "possessor of the phallus" (Jones, 1981, p. 248), it is no wonder that women, in Persian literature, has been systematically downplayed, misrepresented or dismissed. Such a phallogocentric culture results in gender and spatial segregation. Farzaneh Milani, in her *Veils and Words* (1992), attributes the misrepresentation or dismissal of women to the centuries-tradition of veiling, claiming that the veil covered Iranian women's bodies and their literary voices. The conventions stipulated that women's physique should be concealed, she surmised, applied mutatis mutandis to their voices and concerns (1992). Having seen the practice of veiling as a sign of resistance and desegregation in post-revolutionary Iran, and given the proliferation of literary output by Iranian veiled women, she recanted her earlier contention about the veiling and stated that it was not the veil but the 'physical confinement' that

was "the foundation of women's subordination in Iranian society and the source of their literary quasi-invisibility" (2011, p. xx). It is quite hard, however, to divorce the veiling of the body and women's silence in traditional society. Milani's former contention was partly true, as the practice of veiling did lead to women's silence as a result of Iranian men's *gheyrat* (machismo) and women's *sharm* (shame). *Gheyrat* was a patriarchal conceptualisation attributed to men, allowing them to control and protect the female members of their families. The traditional Iranian men's *gheyrat* would not allow female members of the family to appear unveiled. Although it is typically taken as a positive trait and as an expression of love, *gheyrat* also contains an ownership dynamic, motivating men to defend women's sexuality (Tizro, 2012). Put differently, this discourse has an intrinsic master/slave dialectic of power, which can degrade women by viewing them as men's property. On the other hand, *sharm* was a cultural construct developed for women to maintain distance, claim as little space as possible, and cast down their eyes modestly. An example that illustrates *Gheyrat* and *sharm* in literature is Amir's description of his ideal girl to marry in Shahrnush Parsipur's *Women Without Men* (1998) when he says, "She's eighteen years old, very beautiful, soft and quiet, modest, shy, kind, diligent, hard-working, dignified, chaste, elegant, and neat. She wears a *chador*, always looks down when she's in the streets, and blushes constantly" (41). These cultural constructs ensured the invisibility of women and their disappearance from public arenas. Therefore, both veiling and physical confinement repressed women's bodies and voices.

The downplaying, dismissal or misrepresentation of women in literature can also be a result of 'anecdotal gendering', which can be traced back to the inception of Persian literature, especially Persian poetry (Shams, 2022). For centuries, male poets were appointed to the Persian royal courts. This presence of males journeyed beyond the court into the everyday lives wherein women were rendered invisible under traditional and patriarchal socio-politic structures and roles. Consequently, men's poetry was anthologised on biographical accounts and remained the foundation for scholarship on Persian literary tradition for centuries. This systematic dismissal of women from the Persian literary landscape was in no way an indication of the lack of women poets. As has been noted earlier, female poets such as Rabia Balkhi, Mahasti Ganjavi, Mehri Heravi and Jahān Malik Khatun contributed to poetry, but they did not gain fame because of their poetry. For instance, Rabia Balkhi's, also known as Rabia Bint Ka'ab, attracted attention since she fell in love with Bektash, her brother's slave and was killed by her brother, King Hares. Another prominent example of such gendered recognition is Mahasti Ganjavi, the 12th-century poet who was described as a poet, a beautiful prostitute and the beloved of Sultan Sanjar in biographical anthologies such as Riāz al-Shuʿarā by Vāleh. (Shams, 2022). Women's personal and physical traits and moral qualities were far more important than their literary expressions. Indeed, the literary significance of these female poets was devalued through erasure and destruction of their poems. Of Rabia Balkhi's poems, for instance, only seven ghazals remain, four couplets, and two single verses, and the rest of her poems were destroyed by her brother. In his study of Qajar princess poets, Brookshaw (2013) corroborates this sentiment and argues that there were female poets who were reciting poems and circulating their poetry, but their texts were destroyed. He states:

> The loss of divans [poetry collections] of women poets was most likely more common than the loss of those of male poets. This gender discrepancy must be attributed (in part at least) to residual anxieties about women's writing in general and, more specifically, about the preservation of their compositions in a written form (and the increased potential for public dissemination of a woman's poems that this written form of the text facilitated).
>
> (pp.18-19)

Thus, the fear of feminine visibility left women out of Persian literary history. The women poets were not taken seriously, and the male authors never bothered to even include them in their biography anthologies, except in the 16th century *Tazkirat al-nisā* (The Biographies of Women) compiled by Fakhri Haravi. The reluctance to preserve women's writings is closely linked to gender "as both a social and literary construct" (Shams, 2022, p. 1). The patriarchal readership reduced women to archetypal personae. This imposed invisibility and enforced reticence have continued into the contemporary era and affected contemporary Persian literature as well. This systematic and imposed absence was gradually changed with the advent of modernisation. Iranian women's series of protests against their status quo after the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) tremendously contributed to the presence of women in various fields, including literature. At this juncture of Iranian history, literature produced by women became a significant vehicle for women's struggle for liberation (Shafi'i Kadkani, 2013). Emerging in the 1930s, women poets such as Parvin E'tessami (1907-1941) kept venturing into the public through their poetry and questioned the imposed absence of women and the patriarchal negligence of women. In a poem entitled "The Reproach of Uncouth," through lamenting of a hen who is a captive in a man's trap, E'tessami asks: "Why tell our story? Nobody will listen/ Why recount our life? Nobody will read it anyhow" (1935, p. 58). E'tessami's poetry was also sidelined, and she has been "repeatedly stereotyped as a traditional recluse in the shadow of an overprotective, equally traditional father" who has "merely and passively reflected the ideas and ideals of her father" (Milani, 1992, p. 112). Confining women's writing into a phallogocentric logic, women authors were again pushed to the margins, and their literature was greeted with the male authors' nonchalance. The male authors of the time had access to literary circles and publications, held a firm grip on the styles, themes, tones, and contents of Iranian literature, and defined what Iranian literature should look like. This position reaffirmed women's passivity and domesticity in public and furthered women's absence in literature. Women were still encouraged to stay home and not trespass on the male domains. As Afsaneh Najmabadi notes, the desegregation of women as a result of modernisation dovetailed with a compulsory heterosexist framework assigning women the dual responsibilities of nurturing and educating the new Iranian citizens while becoming the custodians of the nation's spiritual core (2005).

In the late 1960s, a significant shift took over the Persian literary landscape in Iran. From the phallogocentric imposed absence, described and imagined entities emerged feminine describers and imaginers. Female authors initiated a new system of writing and developed a storytelling technique to share their everyday experiences. This technique and the concomitant style and content of writing from women's perspective marked a departure from the masculine literary conventions and styles (Zeiny, 2019). They institutionalised a point of *difference* through which phallogocentric notions and controls were dismantled (Zeiny, 2019). This allowed them to share their own experiences and viewpoints in literature, making it an epistemic repertoire. Authors such as Simin Daneshvar (1921-2012), Simin Behbahani (1927-2014), Forough Farrokhzad (1935-1967), and Shahrnush Parsipur (b.1946) pioneered feminine literature through which women's experiences, expressions and styles gained cultural currency. Shunning away from the masculine styles, motifs, symbols, themes and tones, they established a system of writing which depicts women's experiences in everyday life. Not surprisingly, one of the striking facets of the women's literature of this era was questioning women's "domesticity and how women occupy and/or are socially and culturally conditioned to configure themselves in the space of the home and the nation" (Rahimieh, 2010, p. 1). Despite their diversity in genres and artistic value, these women's literature consistently manifests a profound sensitivity to women's issues, gender relations, and

gender hierarchy transcending the extant male-dominated literary discourse. For instance, Forough Farrokhzad's celebrated poem "Let Us Believe in the Dawn of the Cold Season" depicts a woman with unlimited and universal thoughts trapped in a restricted world replete with clichés and traditional rituals. She writes from a "female point of view" through which she takes "the exclusive meaning of good poet out of the hands of middle-aged men," bound "the feminine language, mind, body, and soul with Persian literature, and change[d] its face forever and ever" (Milani, 2016, p. 2). "Why do you always keep me in the deep of the sea?" Farrokhzad laments in this beautiful poem, demanding inclusion and visibility. Similarly, Sharnush Parsipur's *Women Without Men* (1998) critiques women's domesticity and the absence of it in public arenas. Amir, the male protagonist in the novel, does not allow Faizeh to go out alone, stating that "It doesn't make sense for a woman to go out in the first place. Home is for women, and the outside world for men" (28). The female characters in the novel have been taught to stay quiet, shrink their desires, and make themselves invisible. However, they realised that invisibility did not mean protection; rather, it represented a form of erasure. It is this ferocity of erasure that women writers have been tackling with the development of feminine writings, zeroing in on bringing women from the margin to the centre. This feminine writing is what Helen Cixous (1976) terms *Ecriture Feminine*—an alternative writing developed by and for women to move past the confining frameworks of phallogocentric discourse and disturb the conventional practices of reading, writing and representation produced and supported by patriarchal values. Anchored within such discourse, the phallogocentric imposed absence and enforced disappearance can no longer continue to manoeuvre in Persian literature. These women writers serve as chroniclers of a feminine presence asserted, a body inserted, and a voice regained. They democratise Persian literature by including female voices and visions into a predominantly masculine literary tradition.

FEMINIST STANDPOINT EPISTEMOLOGY AND STORYTELLING

Feminist standpoint epistemology is a branch of feminist scholarship articulated and developed by sociology and political scholars such as Bell Hooks, Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, and Dorothy Smith. Rooted in the Hegelian and Marxist traditions, feminist standpoint epistemology identifies how the predominant concepts and practices of knowledge attribution, acquisition, and justification systematically marginalise women and their perspectives and attempts to improve them for the interests of women. Feminist standpoint epistemology depends on the two main influential concepts of situated knowledge and epistemic privilege. The situated knowledge asserts that knowledge construction is contingent on the special location, interest, time in history and culture of the knowing subject that produces the knowledge and/or on whose experience that knowledge is based (Harding, 1998). In other words, the premise that knowledge is situated suggests that the knowing subjects are situated in specific locations— historically, geographically, culturally and socially—and that they develop relationships with the world and with the other knowing subjects. It also maintains that the produced knowledge depends on the knowing subject's location and their specific relation with the world and other knowing subjects (Anderson, 1995). In fact, knowledge, knowing, and knowers are notions that are linked to specific time, place, and social categories and are disproportionately imbued with power.

Another central argument of feminist standpoint epistemology concerns women's exclusion from inquiry, denial of epistemic authority, and denigration of their cognitive style. It maintains that women who have been placed at the far extremes of the margin of power and

privilege, or those who are on the 'outside' of predominant socio-political group domains, have epistemic advantage vis-à-vis social structures. Haraway (1998) and Harding (1986) argue that women's on-the-margin and 'outsider' status enables them to observe and perceive social structures and their functions in ways that individuals from the dominant groups cannot perceive. This stems from what Dorothy Smith calls 'bifurcated consciousness' (1987), underscoring that the subordinate and marginalised groups live in two split worlds as it is experienced and as the world where the subordinates view the world from the perspective of the dominant groups. It is this type of duality that affords women epistemic privilege to perspectives of dynamics and structure of the dominant system of power. This bifurcated consciousness, argues Hooks (2004), serves both as a powerful "space of resistance" and a "site of radical possibility" (p.156). On that account, feminist standpoint epistemology suggests that one will develop a better comprehension of specific situations and power dynamics if approached from the perspectives of marginalised and subordinated women. This epistemic privilege asserts that the particular standpoints of the marginalised, oppressed and discriminated women possess epistemic advantage for knowledge construction (Brooks, 2007). Theorised by the political scientist Nancy Hartsock in her book *Money, Sex and Power* (1983, p. 132), the standpoint is:

> Achieved rather than obvious, a meditated rather than immediate understanding. Because the ruling group controls the means of mental and physical production, the production of ideas, and goods, the standpoint of the oppressed represents an achievement both of science and of political struggle on the basis of which science can be constructed.

Feminist standpoint epistemology, therefore, encourages a knowledge construction from the views of silenced and ignored women through uncovering "hidden knowledge contained within women's experiences" (Brooks, 2007, p. 54) and seeing and understanding "the world through the eyes and experiences of women" (Brooks, 2007, p.55). Needless to say, this is especially significant when it comes to knowledge construction pertaining to women and gender issues. Feminist standpoint epistemology suggests that under these circumstances, it is a valuable approach to initiate inquiry by investigating the lived experiences of women. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) corroborates this and argues that it is women's "concrete experience" that is the ultimate "criterion for credibility" in studying issues related to women and gender (p. 276). Despite this, the epistemic credibility of experience is always questioned as critics link this with social identity (Alcoff, 2001). Theorists argue that an individual's experience within a social group is socially, historically and ideologically constructed (Harding, 1998). I agree with Stone-Mediatore (1998), however, suggesting that experience should be read from Chandra Mohanty's concept of experience, "one that does not treat experience as indubitable evidence but nevertheless recognises experience to be a resource for critical reflection" (p.122). Mohanty dismisses the 'epistemological incorrectness' that has been attributed to experience and argues that one should focus on these writings wherein women's experiences are shared as accounts that subvert the dominant narratives (Stone-Mediatore, 1998). Mohanty further argues that underrepresented social subjects gain authority and agency through the process of knowledge production, such as by writing testimonies and storytelling.

A prominent way for women to share their individual and group experiences is 'storytelling.' Women's narratives and stories can act as an alternative to phallogocentric forms of knowledge. A narrative can, Edward Said (1978) argues, introduce "an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision" (p. 240). While the lives of countless men have been recognised and documented across various cultures and centuries, the life stories of

women have been less frequently documented, leading to overlooking and/or forgetting their experiences (Brooks, 2007). Women's narratives and stories derived from their lived experiences can interrogate the sterility and permanence that has been assigned to histories by 'vision.' According to Razack (1998, p.36), storytelling is used by women to engage "the experience of the world that is not admitted into dominant knowledge paradigm." Women's concrete experience in stories and narratives has adequate epistemic repertoire to mutate their daily life experiences into "feminist knowledge" (Stone-Mediatore, 1998, p. 936). Feminist standpoint theorists have all accentuated the importance of feminist knowledge derived from women's "marginalised experience" (Stone-Mediatore, 1998, p. 936.). Such storytelling empowers both the writers and the readers who share the same experience. Hooks (2004) contends that "storytelling becomes a process of historicisation. It does not remove women from history but enables us to see ourselves as part of history" (p.189). These stories can be a 'legitimate source of knowledge' since they originate from women's strong objectivity, which proposes that "women suffer a special form of exploitation and oppressions…that provides them with a distinctive epistemological standpoint. From this standpoint, it is possible to gain a less biased and more comprehensive view of reality" (Jaggar, 2004, p. 57). Stories of women's lives, *as they themselves experience them*, can create liberatory narratives that bring women from the margin to the centre. Mohanty regards "the experience narratives as important means for marginalised people, especially Third World women to express their political and epistemic agency (Shahbazi, 2019, p. 76). She argues that daily lived experiences shared in narratives contain multiple forms of resistance to hegemonic discourses. Consequently, the lived experience narratives can be considered as narratives which revisit, rewrite, and reinterpret the history formed by the patriarchal hegemonic discourses.

'*I STILL CAN SEE'* AND FEMININE AUTHORITY

While narratives by Iranian women in the diaspora have gained momentum and grown exponentially in recent years, and while well-known scholars such as Farzaneh Milani (1999, 2011, 2016), Nima Naghibi (2007, 2016), Gillian Whitlock (2007), and Amy Motlagh (2011) spilt ink on the surge, reception and circulation of women's narratives in the diaspora, literary narratives by and about Iranian women within Iran have received very little scholarly attention to date. Given that both types of these narratives seek to promote women's cause and feminine authority, I propose it is high time that we drew attention to narratives by and about Iranian women from inside the country. Bahar Rahadoost's *I Still Can See* (Rahadoost, 2023) is one such narrative revolving around her personal, social and professional experiences in three areas of research, literature and librarianship. The first seven sections, which consist of twenty sections, illustrate Rahadoost's thoughts on and experience of librarianship. These pieces detail her concerns that the professional codes of ethics in social sciences and humanities have lost their momentum. They illustrate her reflections on her own career as a teacher of Research Methodology and her attempts to figure out whether she has overlooked any important points in teaching Research Methodology. Her own thoughts and philosophy of 'Socrates Dialogue' and its similarities with Research Methodology' are also pointed out within the first seven pieces. One piece of this book portrays Noushafarin Ansari, the famous woman librarian and educator, and her personality; it also details what Rahadoost has learned from her classes. The next 11 pieces stem from her own lived experiences and what she has been through in her life. These pieces are fraught with rhetorical questions about

women's beings, their thoughts and places in social and professional life. The book concludes with a piece on Rahardoost's thoughts on the Children's Book Council and the way towards eternity.
'*I Still Can See'* has a unique feminine style and can showcase feminine authority and feminist knowledge to the best. To begin with, the title of the text '*I Still Can See*' is accompanied by the subtitle '*Essays from Lived Experiences*.' These essays are narrative essays that tell a story and have character, problem, struggle, epiphany and resolution. 'Essay' is a literary genre that floats somewhere between all the literary forms and blurs the boundaries set by these forms (Lara, 2009). It is a form of literary composition whose author is free to express their thoughts on a particular topic or question. To write an essay in a literary genre, authors have analytical skills and critical thinking skills, along with a good grasp of the issues. Rahadoost's choice to write in this genre was nothing short of a very conscious move to interrogate the phallogocentric rules and regulations, question the epistemic injustice and centre women's thoughts and feminine authority in research, literature and librarianship. Rahadoost realises that 'essay' as a literary genre "does not capitulate before the burden of what exists, [and it] does not submit to what merely is (Adorno, 2019, p.46). This literary genre provides the authors with absolute freedom in terms of structure and content. This is her way of suggesting that women will not remain passive and submissive in a phallogocentric literary and research world. The title '*I Still Can See: Essays from Lived Experiences,*" in and of itself, bears significance in that it suggests that women's vision and experience matter, reflecting the core argument of feminist epistemology. The "I" of this title can pack a punch in society and make women readers aware of their agency and authority. Rahadoost has, indeed, embarked on a path where very few Iranian male authors, such as Dariush Shayegan (1935-2018) and Shahrokh Meskoob (1924-2005), have trodden. This genre allows Rahadoost to institutionalise a feminine way of knowing and feminist epistemology through narratives that share her thoughts, emotions, and arguments in everyday experiences.

A part and parcel of texts that highlight feminist knowledge is pointing out the phallogocentric constraints imposed on women and the domineering behaviour of men, and *I Still Can See* (2023) is no exception. For instance, in an essay entitled 'We Don't See, or We Don't Say?' she shares her experience of confrontation with the new Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the university where she was working. When the Deputy Vice-Chancellor goes into the library and shouts, "Who is in charge of data search in the library?" and continues with the same hoarse and raucous voice ", I need a comprehensive search on Crohn's disease. I cannot wait much" (p.37). She was taken aback by his unacceptable behaviour and gave him a form to fill out and said, "Please narrow down the topic according to the aspects in this form" She was surprised to hear "Can't you fill it out yourself based on my explanation? I've got a meeting to attend" (p.37). She said "no" in a low voice and had to put up with his presence in the library for the next two or three minutes. While he was leaving, he arrogantly said, "I'll send someone in two or three hours to collect the search report" (p.37). This account undoubtedly illustrates the degrading and domineering behaviour of a man toward a woman in a professional role. The disregard for professional ethics when encountering a woman poignantly speaks of discrimination and dominance that women encounter in professional and academic settings. Facing this demeaning and domineering behaviour, Rahadoost was so furious that she could not say a thing; instead, a barrage of questions and comments came to mind:

> He treated me like a slave. I liked my job, and I thought I was serving culture and scholarship. They constantly talk about human dignity day and night, but which dignity? For which people of this country? Where did these illiterate people come from? Who allows them to treat their fellows like a salve? Shall I not defend my right? When he started to speak with me contemptuously, I should have warned him to act like a human being. I should have given him a piece of my mind so he would learn his duty. What should I have done? I

> did the things that I was taught. I didn't disrupt the library's peace and quiet. Despite the insulting behaviour, I did my job. But I shouldn't have kept quiet. How can a librarian who is not respected and whose self-esteem is wounded act professionally?
>
> (p.38)

The above excerpt illustrates women's limitations and frustration in phallogocentric academia. Rahadoost questions this masculinity privilege and depicts her discontentment with the male-dominated and phallogocentric academia that places women in subordinate roles and marginalises their contributions. Recounting from the perspective of a woman in a subordinate position, this narrative represents the nuanced experiences of 'exploitation and oppression.' This form of 'exploitation and oppression,' according to Jaggar (2004), can provide women with a distinctive epistemological standpoint. By sharing her experience with others, she validates her own experiences and creates a sense of solidarity amongst women facing similar challenges. Besides such experiences, women's everyday resistance can contribute to the production of feminist knowledge that used to be overlooked in traditional epistemologies. As has been noted earlier, feminist standpoint epistemology places emphasis on the significance of women's everyday resistance. This resistance is not a concrete and confrontational form of resistance and should not be characterised by grand gestures, revolutionary acts or splashy acts of glory, but rather, they comprise subtle and often neglected ways in which women challenge and navigate the patriarchal and phallogocentric norms and expectations. These everyday forms of resistance encompass seemingly insignificant acts that women engage in to resist oppression and assert their agency and identity (Hartsock, 1983). A simple refusal, subverting gender roles, developing supportive networks, or speaking out against injustices are some forms of everyday resistance. These minor acts collectively pose a threat to patriarchal and phallogocentric rules and contribute to broader change in favour of women. Rahadoost's refusal in a low voice to fill out the form for the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (p.37) and a series of questions she raised and addressed in her mind (p. 38) are forms of everyday resistance. Acknowledging the pain, sharing it with others, and the very act of writing about it can act as a form of everyday resistance, too. Rahadoost's title in this essay, 'We Don't See, or We Don't Say?' is a clarion call for women to resist the patriarchal and phallogocentric gender bias. Such women's everyday resistance can contribute to the epistemological framework of power relations. Lila Abu-Loghud's suggestion of inverting Michel Foucault's well-known sentence "where there is power, there is resistance" (1978, p. 96) to "where there is resistance, there is power" assists us "to move away from abstract theories of power toward methodological strategies for the study of power in a particular situation (1990, p.42). Each act of women's everyday resistance enriches our understanding of women's experiences, contributes to knowledge about women's struggles, and helps us better understand how different forms of power work.

Another form of everyday resistance in *I Still Can See* (2023) pertains to the experience of invisibility. In an essay entitled 'The Death and Rebirth of a Message,' Rahadoost recounts her experience of being overlooked and unrecognised throughout her career (p.12). While she cannot mask her elation at the kindness and appreciation articulated by her former students in a lengthy correspondence sent to her years after her retirement commending her teaching and research abilities, she is concerned about why she "was not seen properly" during her career (p.12). Consoling herself, she states: "Anyone who chooses a path out of love and passions receives their true reward from that very love and choice" (p.12). However, she is evidently concerned regarding this experience of invisibility and unrecognition. Her complaints of "I'm feeling I was not seen properly" (p.12) and "I get the sense that I'm not seen" (p. 55) are indicative of her clamouring for

visibility. It is this experience of invisibility that enables her to reflect upon the concepts of seeing, perceiving, and visibility and seek ways to make women visible. "Seeing and being seen," Rahadoost states, "has been sitting on my mind for quite some time" (p. 55). She cautions the readers to practice seeing accurately and clearly, or else they will miss beautiful images and voices (p.55). To corroborate the importance of seeing, Rahadoost alludes to poetry in classical literature and argues that "seeing is perceiving" (p.56). This way, she questions the patriarchal and phallogocentric nonchalance that has historically marginalised women in Iranian society. Her concern about "being seen" highlights the crucial role of visibility for women. While visibility can act as a form of social control (Foucault, 1979), it can also act as a tool to achieve recognition and empowerment (Brighenti, 2007). Without visibility—*the sense of being heard and seen*—confrontations with patriarchy and phallogocentrism have no meaning. As resistance's condition of possibility, visibility can be used to assert feminine authority, which is the backbone of feminist standpoint epistemology. It is of utmost importance in Iranian women's resistance. Women make their presence known and seek recognition in the order of a society that has been constructed to silence their voices and render them invisible. It enables them to reclaim their narratives and reorganise their identities.

In '*I Still Can See*,' Rahdoost introduces two approaches through which women become visible in a place that renders them invisible. Firstly, she brings women into her text. Her inclusion of pioneer female teachers, researchers, and authors such as Noushafarin Ansari, Pouri Soltani (p.16), and Forough Farrokhzad (p. 59, 60), along with her translation of Daryl Koehn's *The Nature of Evil* (2005) (p. 67-69), and her essay on the value of mothers (p.85-91) reflects Rahdoost's effort in extending prominence to women who have almost always been misrepresented or underrepresented in phallogocentric discourses. Rahdoost's essay 'You are a Critic, I am a Mother' centres on Noushafarin Ansari, her classes in the university, her pioneering role in teaching and research, what Rahdoost learned from her classes and Ansari's unique personality summed up in "I think she is the embodiment of one of the principles of human rights that the world is talking about, but there is little evidence of its realisation in real life. This principle is self-respect and respect for others" (p. 52). Through emphasising the self-respect principle, Rahadoost makes an urgent appeal to women to honour and uphold this intrinsic value as it cultivates a sense of dignity that reflects women's worth in both individual and professional spheres. Citing Forough Farrokhzad and her poetry bears significance if one reads between the lines: it draws attention to her feminism, her deep exploration of women's experience, and her poetry that reveals a profound and personal connection to existence. By citing Farrokhzad, Rahadoost conjures up subjects such as love, women's emotions, female sexuality, and women's oppression. The fact that Rahadoost chooses women as role models and a text written by a woman for translation concords well with feminist epistemology in bringing women into texts and sharing their experiences.

Rahadoost's other approach to making women more visible is prioritising women's perspectives. By prioritising women's perspectives, feminist standpoint epistemology seeks to dismantle the patriarchal structures that have historically dominated knowledge production (Harding, 1991). For instance, discussions on Noushafarin Ansari's perspectives and professional conduct (pp.49-54), Farrokhzad's poetry (pp.59-62), and Daryl Koehn's philosophy (p.65) are examples of Rahadoost's efforts in legitimising and prioritising women's perspectives. These women think and write from a female point of view using feminine language, mind, body, and soul, changing the course of literature, philosophy, and education forever and ever. However, much of the epistemic values of '*I Still Can See'* come from Rahadoost's vantage point as a

woman. It is her gender that provides her with experience and perspective not readily available to men. For instance, she questions men's condescending behaviour towards women and asks, "1) why, despite all the Iranian history, literature, art and culture, does our social behaviour look like backward societies? 2) what should we do to prevent such disrespectful behaviour towards this woman…?" (p.38). Illustrating her perspectives, she enumerates dozens of historical, geographical, political, social, and cultural factors in an attempt to answer the questions (pp.38-39). She further argues that "cutting ties with our past, history and culture, and that we don't know who we are and who we were, and who we can be" is one of the factors causing such disrespectful behaviour towards women (p.39). Rahadoost thinks that Iran has "hundreds of historical artefacts, and brilliant cultural and artistic works…and outstanding literature that have not been explored" (p. 39). If explored and critiqued, they could be "our contemporary treasure" in imparting self-respect and respect for others (p.39). Rahadoost's ability to observe, question and respond is informed by her experience and is unique to women. In addition to these questions and points of view, Rahadoost puts forward other inquiries, proposals, and responses to unresolved issues and questions in her text to highlight her perspectives. For instance, in an essay entitled 'I ask, therefore I am,' Rahdoost shares her experience of learning in childhood and adulthood and how she developed an inquisitive personality (pp.63-66). It is in this essay that she raised several significant epistemological standpoints and philosophical inquiries, such as "To what extent human science and knowledge can help people predict the future accurately…? Can humanity overcome the uncertain future, or is it doomed to deal with the unpredictable fate?" (pp.64-65). She draws on Daryl Koehn to respond to these questions and encourages women to be inquisitive through "profound deliberations and precise comprehension and a careful articulation of the problem" (p. 64). Rahadoost's perspectives on Research Methodology (p. 15-24), Socrates dialogue and its characteristics (pp.31-35), self-alienation (p.57), women's literature (p.61) and knowing the self (p. 94) contribute to establishing the feminine authority in research, literature, and librarianship.

CONCLUSION

Rahadoost's '*I Still Can See*' demurs against the phallogocentrism in research, literature and librarianship, questions the phallogocentric order, and makes provisions for a feminist epistemology that redefines knowledge and experience of women. The experiences of everyday lives, their resistances and perspectives shared in the text can serve as a counter-narrative that reclaims women's agency and authority, which have historically been denied to them. Sharing women's experiences and prioritising women's perspectives and knowledge, Rahadoost establishes a feminist epistemology that contests the official phallogocentric narratives and emphasises the importance of feminist knowledge. Rahadoost places herself and other women in a position of authority through her text by providing her perspectives and comments on questions and issues previously thought to be masculine-dominated. Portraying herself as an established librarian and researcher, she claims authority and legitimacy. Her text in this context can turn into weapons of resistance against phallogocentrism. It illustrates that the lived experiences of women possess significance and can be used to construct 'feminist knowledge. Additionally, Rahadoost's innovative genre and her unique feminine writing style harbinger that women can develop a literary genre independent of the phallogocentric rules and regulations. Her text makes an essential contribution to the global discourse on feminist epistemology.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research is supported by Xiamen University Malaysia Research Fund (Grant No: XMUMRF/2023-C11/IELL/0002)

REFERENCES

Abu-Lughod, L. (1990). The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women. *American Ethnologist*, *17*(1), 41-55.

Adorno, T. H. (2019). *Notes to Literature*. Trans. Shirry Weber Nicholsen. Columbia University Press.

Alcoff, L. M. (2001). On Judging Epistemic Credibility: Is Social Identity Relevant? In Nancy Tuana and Sandra Morgen (Eds.), *Engendering Rationalities*, (53-80). New York: SUNY Press.

Anderson, E. (1995). Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and Defense. *Hypatia*, *10*, 50-84.

Brighenti, A. M. (2007). Visibility: A Category for the Social Sciences. *Current Sociology*, *55*(3), 323-342.

Brooks, A. (2007). Feminist Standpoint Epistemology: Building Knowledge and Empowerment through Women's Lived Experience. In Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Lina Leavy (Eds.), *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*. Sage Publications.

Brookshaw, D. (2013). Women in Praise of Women: Female Poets and Female Patrons in Qajar Iran. *Iranian Studies*, *46*(1), 17–48.

Cixous, H. (1976). The Laugh of Medusa. Signs, *1*(4), 875-893. https://doi.org/10.1086/493306

Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

E'tessami, P. (1974). *Divan* [Collected Poems]. Reprint. Tehran: Fardin. (Original work published 1935)

Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. Random House.

Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage.

Haraway, D. (1998). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, *14*(3), 575-599.

Harding, S. (1986). *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Harding, S. (1991). *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Harding, S. (1998). *Is Science Multicultural? Postcolonialisms, Feminisms, and Epistemologies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hartsock, N. C. M. (1983). *Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*. Longman.

Hooks, B. (2004). Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness. In Sandra Harding (Ed.), *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Political and Intellectual Controversies* (153-159). New York: Routledge.

Jaggar, A. M. (2004). Feminist Politics and Epistemology: The Standpoint of Women. In Sandra Harding (Ed.), *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. New York: Routledge.

Jamalzadeh, M. A. (1985). "What's Sauce for the Goose," in *Once Upon a Time*, Trans. Heshmat Moayyad and Paul Sprachman. New York: Bibliotheca Persica.

Jones, A. R. (1981). Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of "L'Ecriture Féminine. *Feminist Studies, 7*(2), 247-263. https://doi.org/10.2307/3177523

Lara, A. (2009). *Naked, Drunk and Writing: Writing Essays and Memoirs For Love and Money*. Scottwall Associates.

Milani, F. (1992). *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*. Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press.

Milani, F. (2011). Words, Not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Milani, F. (2016). *Forough Farrokhzad: A Literary Biography with Unpublished Letters*. Toronto: Persian Circle Publications.

Motlagh, A. (2011). Autobiography and Authority in the Writings of the Iranian Diaspora. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, *31*(2), 411-424.

Naghibi, N. (2007). *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran*. London: University of Minnesota Press.

Naghibi, N. (2016). *Women Write Iran: Nostalgia and Human Rights from the Diaspora*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Najmabadi, A. (2005). *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Parsipur, S. (1998). *Women Without Men*. Trans. Kamran Talatatof and Jocelyn Sharlet. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Rahadoost, B. (2023). *I Still Can See: Essays from Lived Experiences*. Tehran: Nashr-e Hanooz.

Rahimieh, N. (2010). Woman and Domesticity in Modern Persian Literature. University of California, Irvine.

Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Shafi'i Kadkani, M. R. (2013). *With Light and Mirror*. Tehran: Sokhan.

Shahbazi, S. (2019). Decolonial Feminist Epistemologies of Border Crossing: A Comparative Study of Transnational Iranian and Iraqi Women's Life Writing. Dissertation, University of Sydney.

Shams, F. (2022). Opening the Drawn Curtain: Decoding the Gendered Personhood of the 'Woman Poet' in Persian Poetry. In *Women Poets Iranica*. Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation.

Smith, D. E. (1987). *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Stone-Mediatore, S. (1998). Chandra Mohanty and the Revaluing of "Experience". *Hypatia 13*(2), 116-133.

Tizro, Z. (2012). *Domestic Violence in Iran: Women, Marriage and Islam*. New York: Routledge.

Whitlock, G. (2007). *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Zeiny, E. (2019). Ecriture Feminine: Feminism and Nationalism in Seyyedeh Zahra Hosseini's 'One Woman's War: Da.' *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, *25*(3), 115-125. http://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2019-2503-09