Panacea Journal of Linguistics & Literature (PJLL)

Volume 3, Number 1, 2024, Pages 292 – 305

Journal Home Page

https://journals.airsd.org/index.php/pjll

Intertextual Modes and Postcolonial Critique: A Study of Integration and Interfigurality in the Centre (2023)

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received:	March	28,2024
Revised:	April	30,2024
Accepted:	May	25,2024
Available Online:	June	30,2024

Keywords:

Postcolonial literature, Intertextuality, Postcolonial Intertextual Integration, Postcolonial Intertextual Interfigurality, integration by allusion, by absorption and by suggestion

ABSTRACT

The intertextual theory, which has a European origin and was developed by poststructuralist and postmodern theorists, assumes a renewed relevance and currency in the postcolonial context. Postcolonial writers appropriate and adapt Kristeva's influential notion of intertextuality to de-canonise, revisit, and reverse canonical literature and the construction of knowledge. Ayesha Manazir Siddiqi's debut novel The Centre (2023) employs various modes of intertextuality to engage, reference and reimagine Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1899). The present study seeks to probe Siddiqi's deft use of intertextuality and its various modes in The Centre (2023) by applying the latest developments on intertextuality and its intersections with postcolonial theory and literature. Siddiqi uses the intertextual modes of integration and interfigurality in The Centre (2023) to increase the artistic richness and to create counterpoint and irony about canonical texts. Using intertextuality as a postcolonial tool, she lays bare the lingering effects of colonialism and the emerging forms of West's linguistic neo-imperialism. Moreover, Siddiqi does not use intertextuality as merely a mechanical technique to embellish her intertext; instead, her use of intertextuality is consciously directed to the specific purpose of writing back to the centre to subvert or appropriate colonial ideological force by involving in a dialogic process.

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INTRODUCTION

Eco (2000) famously said that books speak of other books (p. 513). Kristeva (1986) calls this relationship between the texts and their mutual shaping of meanings intertextuality. Using Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, Kristeva (1986) proposes the influential notion of text as a "mosaic of quotations" (p. 5), which means that a text never stands by itself and is always in communication with other texts. According to her, a text is always a reproduction of earlier texts. Postcolonial writers appropriate intertextuality to de-canonise, revise, revisit, and reverse

colonial canon, language, and knowledge's "prescribed hegemony" (Bressler, 1994, p. 264). They turn to intertextuality as a method of rewriting and resistance to confront the imperial authority and to underline the discrepancies between colonised people's realities and the narrative imposed by the colonial centre. They use intertextuality, adapted from poststructuralist and postmodernist literature, as an effective appropriation strategy to question, challenge, and subvert dominant white cultural discourses to reclaim the literary and cultural spaces. They employ intertextuality to reconstruct the "identity for and by the colonised" (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 33) by engaging in a critical, ironical, and satirical dialogue with canonical narratives. Intertextuality serves as a tool in their hands to develop counter-discourses and write back to the centre. Therefore, they employ intertextuality's subversive and transformative effects to unsettle the established epistemologies and received views. Postcolonial intertexts usually hinge on the double helix of postcolonial and post-modernism by combing the "ever-deferred semantic and semiotic contingencies of the postmodern" with "the urgent oppositional political impulse that initially underlay the postcolonial" (Trivedi, 2007, p. 130). These intersections transform into powerful tools to reference, reimagine, and rewrite the canonical texts from a fresh perspective, allowing them to deconstruct the colonial discourse embedded in the Western canon.

Ayesha Manazir Siddiqi, in her semi-autobiographical debut novel, *The Centre* (2023), uses intertextuality to weave a counter-discourse on Joseph Conrad's canonical novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Her novel, set against the backdrop of Karachi, London, and New Delhi, tells the tale of a British Pakistani protagonist, Anisa, and her quest to master European languages, to which she attaches her career success and recognition as a great translator. Her ambition drives her to enrol in an elite language teaching school, the Centre in London, which was introduced and recommended by her English boyfriend, Adam. Intrigued by the desire to know the mystery behind the working of the Centre, which claims a native-like proficiency in any language within ten days, she joins the institute, which eventually takes her to India. Through the journey of her protagonist, Siddiqi witnesses the neocolonial mentality of Indian managers of the Centre who operate as neo-imperialists by using their former colonisers' colonial linguistic strategies. This satirical mystery novel highlights the role of formerly colonised nations in perpetuating the dominance of colonial languages even long after decolonisation, resulting in the emergence of linguistic neo-imperialism. Siddiqi has not simply pasted *Heart of Darkness* (1899) in *The Centre* (2023); she has used the source text as a point of inspiration and departure not only to resist or challenge the colonialist misrepresentation of the colonised peoples and cultures but also to map out the emergence of neo-imperialist power from once colonised countries. However, the structure of *The Centre* (2023) is not entirely determined by *Heart of Darkness* (1899), as Siddiqi makes her novel a fresh creation that carries her signature as the creator of the work. She shapes the meaning of her text, *The Centre* (2023), with another text, *Heart of Darkness* (1899). The modes of intertextuality she employs make her intertext a marker of creative productivity for her work and not just a mere reproduction of the prior text.

While the intersections of postcolonial literary practice and the postmodern notion of intertextuality have been extensively explored with exclusive focus on Nigeria and Achebe (Nwagbara, 2011), contemporary African literature (Kehinde, 2003), Shashi Deshpande and Arundhati Roy (Nayak, 2004), Central African fiction writer's engagement with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Reddick, 2019) and *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s use of postcolonial intertextuality (Choudhury, 1996), the employment of intertextuality by Pakistani Anglophone writers like Siddiqui has not been adequately investigated. *The Centre* (2023), which appeared on the literary

scene in 2023, has received scanty critical acclaim as no full-fledged critical assessment of the novel has emerged so far. However, it has garnered some favourable reviews from the leading reviewer and acclaimed literary supplements in global newspapers. *Feminist Book Club'*s Auteri (2023) has lauded Siddiqi's adept handling of complex themes like assimilation, appropriation, the politics of language, and many other unsettling questions on culture. Kapur (2024) calls it a "black mirror'-esque dystopian tragicomedy" (para. 1) in her brief review available at the *Geeks*. *The Guardian'*s Mamata (2023) views the novel as a "Black Mirror take on the world of language labs and translation workshops [which] opens up questions of cultural appropriation, the power of language, memory" (para. 1). Ramarathnam (2023) probes the intriguing premise of the book, which centres around an ambitious young girl's immersion into a secretive and semi-miraculous language learning program that offers fluency in a mere ten days. The book's review by *The New York Times'*s Grossman (2023) highlights the novel's synthesis of features from psychological thrillers and speculative fiction and its concerns about the pitfalls of cultural appropriation and assimilation. The present study seeks to probe Siddiqi's deft use of intertextuality and its various modes in *The Centre* (2023), which has somehow been overlooked by critics and reviewers. Using the latest scholarship on the intersections of intertextuality and postcolonial theory, this research seeks to investigate *The Centre*'s (2023) intertextual engagement with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), with a particular focus on postcolonial intertextual interfigurality and integration.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Intertextuality and its Postcolonial-Postmodern Intersections:

The development of postcolonial studies as a field of theoretical inquiry has "synchronized with the emergence of postmodernism in Western society" (Mechgoug, 2022, p. 45). They have their mutual discords and concords. Quayson (2000) states that both postmodernism and postcolonialism use critical practices that are challenging to define (p. 1). According to Ashcroft (1987), the confusion is the result of postmodernism's aim to decolonise "the centralized…master narratives of European culture," a goal that overlaps with postcolonialism's efforts to dismantle "the centre/margin binarism of imperial discourse" (p. 117). The decentring of discourse stresses the importance of language since this is one of the main tools and mediums of colonial oppression, perpetuating the hierarchical power structures globally. In order to construct colonised people's experiences, writers from the margin have seized the language of the centre and used certain strategies, such as intertextuality, to reject and subvert the canonical discourses. These strategies are also employed by postmodernists, resulting in the merging of the two approaches. In other words, "the postcolonial theory intervenes in postmodernism" as the postcolonial writers are concerned with writing back "to colonial/imperial discourse" and the postmodernist writers "playfully writing back to modernist assumptions about order or centrality" (Kundu, 2008, p. 21). Different modes and manifestations of intertextuality are used as strategies in both cases.

Intertextuality is one of the significant practices that postmodernists use in critically analysing literature. Though it has a European origin and was developed by poststructuralist and postmodern theorists, the intertextual theory is still familiar and relevant to the postcolonial context. It is used as an effective appropriation strategy by postcolonial writers. Thus, employed to subvert the European narratives of superiority, the claim of universalism, and to examine cultural diversity between coloniser and colonised cultures, intertextuality, according to

Breitinger (1996), is one of the significant concerns of postcolonial critical discourse and an effective weapon for postcolonial re-writers (p. xxii).

The intertextuality theory explores how different texts relate to, interact with, and are in a state of continuous dialogue with each other. In this dialogical process, both postcolonial and postmodern literary texts question, challenge, and even modify the dominant narratives. The term intertextuality was first coined, defined, and introduced by Kristeva in literary theory and studies in 1966 in her groundbreaking essays published in Tel Quel and Critique Journal and later on in her book *Sémiotiké, Recherche pour une sémanalyse*, mainly focussing on Bakhtin's dialogical theory (Achour & Bekkat, 2002, p. 102). Kristeva's formulation of intertextuality resulted from blending Saussure's semiotic studies with Bakhtin's language theories (Juvan, 2008, pp. 13–14). Kristeva (1986) incorporated Bakhtin's concept of dialogism in her article *Word, Dialogue and Novel*, in which she refers to Bakhtin and states that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (p. 5). This concept of mosaic is the central idea of intertextuality, as it refers to the fact that neither text stands alone nor is produced in isolation. A literary text responds to and connects to earlier ones in so many ways.

Intertextuality was originally introduced within the framework of poststructuralism; its usage extended beyond this literary context as it has been adopted by postmodernists and subsequently by postcolonial authors. The works of postcolonial writers are involved in a "hostile dialogue" (Shafique & Yaqoob, 2012, p. 479) with the European canonical discourses. Boehmer (2005) argues, in this regard, that by using intertextual modes, postcolonial writers "also mixed up and upturned dominant meanings" (p. 163) in the European discourses. However, intertextuality is regarded as "a subtle interplay of writing and re-writing" (Mouro, 2013, p. 32) in postcolonial narratives, involving "not only a disruption of discourses but also a disjuncture of the time-space continuum of the parent text" (Kundu, 2008, p. 22). The critics have identified certain ways in which a source text can be incorporated into a new text through intertextuality.

Modes of Intertextuality

In addition to appropriation and parody, the two other important modes of intertextuality used by postcolonial writers are interfigurality and integration. Integration by suggestion appears by a just simple reference to the name or title of the book. This mode of intertextuality "is not, or not necessarily, a merely decorative addition to a text" (Lodge, 1993, p. 102); rather, it provokes readers' memory to go back to the prior text to decode and decipher the post-text. It can also be a reference to real figures or famous fictional characters. It means that literary characters are not independent since there are intertextual relationships between the characters of various authors. Integration by allusion serves as an intertextual mode that makes "implicit, indirect, or hidden reference" (Guerra, 2013, p. 60) to a source text. Unlike a quotation, it is not obvious and requires readers' prior knowledge to recognise it in a text. Hebel (1991) defines allusion as an "evocative manifestation of intertextual relationships" (p. 138) or as a device for linking different literary texts. It functions as an intertextual marker that belongs to the source text in pretext. Within a new text, allusion appears only through signs, which can be the use of a title of the text, a character's name, or a particular scene borrowed from another literary work, all making the readers go back to another text.

According to Hebel (1991), allusion requires an "active participation" on the part of the reader to identify and interpret its meanings (p. 140). He describes the steps involved in identifying

allusions, which lead to the creation of intertextual relations between a source text and an intertext, involving the recognition of an intertextual marker, leading to the identification and activation of the source text using that marker to create a maximum number of intertextual connections. However, allusion serves as one of the most successful techniques in intertextuality, employed by postcolonial writers to rewrite canonical texts by forming allusive links between a text and a source text to subvert the hegemony of the dominant discourses. Integration by absorption is not mere echoes of the source text in the form of quotation or allusion; it appears when an original text is absorbed into a new text, leaving no proof of it. In other words, a writer implicitly absorbs the source text rather than just pasting it into his/her intertext, which can be a case of plagiarism. Once a text is absorbed into a text, it is up to the readers to identify it based on their literary background.

Interfigurality is a mode of intertextuality that, according to Muller (1991), is "the interrelationships between literary characters" (p. 102). This interrelationship appears through "a fictional character's... identification with a character from another literary work" (p. 102). Writers transfer a character from a source text to an intertext by transcending the confines of different literary texts and genres. Among the interfigural devices, the most obvious ones that can be identified in the counter-narratives are the use of the names and figures borrowing from pretext to intertext. The interrelationship between characters is recognised through a writer's re-using of figures and characters' names in some other text. The names and figures can be identical to those in the source text or transformed in the intertext.

In interfigurality, a quoted name has the same quality as a quotation that "repeat(s) [...] a segment derived from a pretext within a subsequent text" (Muller, 1991, pp. 102-103). Like quotations, which are liable to modification and transformation when placed in the pretext, names can also undergo the same change when they are used in the intertext. Plett (1986) states that "there appears a conflict between it (the source text) and between the context in the posttext" (p. 300), inevitably transforming the figure when it is transferred from one literary text to another. However, postcolonial writers follow interfigural deviations by reusing figures and names, having liberated them from the source text's context and incorporating them into the intertext by transforming and modifying them. In a literary work, a figure is modified according to the context of the intertext and is given a different group of qualities than a source text's figure. The name this new figure receives becomes "its identifying onomastic label" (Muller, 1991, pp. 102-103). According to Varis (2016), writers use this technique to compare not only the different characters but also different stories. This interrelation depends on the memory and observation of the readers as they connect the dots to respond and generate the meanings of the interfigural cues (pp. 6-7).

As an act of rewriting, intertextuality "brings out an important, albeit age-old, truth" (Kundu, 2008, p. 24). It is a continuous process of creativity that is used as a tool by postcolonial writers to interrogate, dismantle and subvert the colonial assumptions of superiority within the white man discourse, by which it upheld its cultural and linguistic hegemony over the non-European world. Intertextuality is one of the most "popular and effective devices" through which" 'empire' would have written back" by "breaking open" and "re-inscribing" with new meaning in a canonical text from the perspective of marginalised societies. However, the use of intertextuality in rewriting provides "a site for the dialogue between discourses and counter-discourses" (Kundu, 2008, p. 20). The subversion of European discourses through intertext has emerged as a central and indispensable task at the core of postcolonial literature. In this regard, Ashcroft et al.

(1988) have commented that "these subversive manoeuvres, rather than the construction of essentially national or regional alternatives, are the characteristic features of the postcolonial text" (p. 196). Casteel (1999) has gone as far as to stress that "most (such) rewritings are predicated on a hostile relationship to the canonical work and are motivated by a desire to dislodge the canon" (as cited in Kundu, 2008, p. 38). While dislodging, subverting, or appropriating the postcolonial counter-discourse through intertextuality, the writers inevitably need to revisit and work on the space of the prior text. Shastri (2001) has commented on this aspect of intertextual rewriting: "... In the ongoing evolution of literary tradition, each writer believes that a predecessor text contains a space that requires to be filled. He also believes that he is equipped to fill it" (p. 138). Thus, by working in this space of colonial discourses, postcolonial writers have access to appropriate and decolonise their literature by employing the techniques of intertextuality.

The result of intertextual rewriting is a fresh work, as every new intertext has its own uniqueness and emerges as a fresh text that traces back to the original work and acts as a source text for future intertextual appropriation simultaneously. An intertext is altogether a new text and a product of creativity on the part of the writer; as Nwadike (2018) remarks, "other texts reside or echo their presence" (p. 77) in an intertext in a creative way. It is not just the result of transportation or reproduction of the earlier text; it serves as a marker of creative output on the part of the writer. According to Kundu (2008), the technique of intertextuality for producing an intertext should not be confused with "mechanical influence study or source hunting" (p. 402). Olofinsao (2017) has also argued in this regard that the originality of a new text is not associated with isolation; rather, it is based on the association and influence of one writer on another since borrowing another writer's work does not devoid the new text of a sense of originality. For Olofinsao (2017), borrowing is a kind of conquest that produces a new text through intertextuality (p. 20). Analysing the canonical texts' appropriation by postcolonial writers through intertextuality, Boehmer (2005) has also argued that "imitation became not an act of simple copying but an act of original creation, resulting in something subtly but distinctly new" (as cited in Reddick, 2021, p. 4).

ANALYSIS

Siddiqi's *The Centre* (2023) challenges the constructed truth of certain languages' superiority over others. Through the character of Anisa, who serves as the mouthpiece of the writer, Siddiqi invites readers to reflect on linguistic hierarchies and the role languages play in the erasure of indigenous societies' cultures and languages. Anisa represents the frustration of the people of the once colonised or third-world societies who are made to believe that their language is inferior and less intellectual than other certain languages. To critique these constructed linguistic realities, Siddiqi, in her debut novel, shows deep scepticism not only towards the idea of inclusion within an existing imperial system but also highlights the emergence of linguistic neo-imperialist powers from once colonised societies like India. Siddiqi's *The Centre* (2023) is a rich text that employs intertextuality to develop a counter-discourse to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Siddiqi has primarily used two intertextuality modes in *The Centre* (2023): intertextual integration and intertextual interfigurality. These intertextual techniques enhance the artistic richness of *The Centre* (2023) while subverting the prevailing colonial discourse in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and bringing to light the underlying ideologies of linguistic neo-imperialism. The analysis will first deal with the intertextual mode of integration and its three forms: integration by suggestion, allusion and absorption. The next part will explore the intertextual

interfigurality, illustrating how Siddiqi has borrowed characters from *Heart of Darkness* (1899) to highlight the seamless integration and adoption of colonial imperial strategies by once-colonised societies in order to emerge as neo-imperialist powers in the modern world.

Intertextual Integration in *The Centre* (2023)

Achour and Bekkat (2002) have suggested three modes, namely "integration by allusion, by absorption and by suggestion," to pinpoint the the incorporation of intertextuality in an intertext (as quoted in Mechgoug, 2022, p. 100). The integration by suggestion makes the mere mention of a name or title. It is the simplest sort of integration since the reader can easily identify through the reference of the author, character, or title of the book to which the intertext refers. Siddiqi in *The Centre* (2023) makes a deft use of the intertextual mode of suggestion. This intertextual technique is skilfully incorporated in the novel when Doctor Susan, following the medical check-up, asks Anisa, "Do you mind if we measure your skull?" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 71). In a parodic manner, Anisa links this request with *Heart of Darkness* (1899): "'Funny.' I laughed… 'Heart of Darkness, right?'" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 71). This reference not only recalls the doctor's measurement of Marlow's skull in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) before he voyages to Africa but also facilitates readers' identification of the source text by mentioning the book's title. While measuring Anisa's skull, Doctor Tim mentions a strange fact: "Conrad, you know, didn't speak any English until well into his twenties" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 71). Through this reference, Siddiqi not only draws a parallel between Anisa and Conrad but also raises a question about Conrad's remarkable English fluency development, all while mentioning the name of the author. The mention of the writer's name not only facilitates readers in recognising the source text but also allows readers unfamiliar with this novel to locate it within the intertext.

Furthermore, *The Centre* (2023) employs both the writer's name and the title of the source text, *Heart of Darkness* (1899). These references help readers who lack background knowledge and understanding of the source text to identify it within the intertext readily. Moreover, for those familiar with the source text, these references facilitate identification and activation of readers' ability to decode text and develop further intertextual links between the two texts.

According to Achour and Bekkat (2002), integration by allusion appears within an intertext "using only signs" (as cited in Mouro, 2013, p. 32), taking different forms depending on how a source text is integrated within an intertext. As allusive integrations are implicit and hidden references, Hebel (1991) argues that allusions "presuppose certain foreknowledge" on the part of the reader (p. 140). He summarises the steps involved in creating intertextual relations through allusion between two texts: first, the recognition of the intertextual marker based on readers' prior knowledge, leading to the identification of the source text using these markers, and, ultimately, the activation of the source text in order to develop a "maximum of Intertextual patterns" (p. 138). In Siddiqi's *The Centre* (2023), this mode of intertextuality is evident through the allusion to a pivotal and most important scene of Conrad's novel, protagonist Marlow's journey to the Congo River. This scene of the journey is alluded to in *The Centre* (2023) when Anisa, the narrator, embarks on her journey towards the Centre. However, this voyage scene acts as an intertextual marker for readers, prompting them to identify the source text, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), based on their prior knowledge. Once identified, this recognition triggers the activation of the source text, leading readers to establish multiple intertextual connections through careful analysis.

Similar to Marlow's journey facilitated by his aunt's recommendation, in *The Centre* (2023), Adam recommends Anisa for the Centre. By using this intertextual marker, Siddiqi emphasises a stark contrast in the direction of the protagonists' journeys in both the source text and the intertext. In *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Marlow travels from the centre to the periphery to unveil the white man's perceived perception of Africa's lack of civilisation and enlightenment. In *The Centre* (2023), Anisa, who belongs to the periphery (Pakistan) and now lives in London, travels in the opposite direction from Marlow—from the periphery to the heart of European civilisation (London). This divergence reveals the bleak reality behind the facade of civilisation in the centre of imperialism. It lays bare that the flourishing "vibrant flowers adorning the landscape" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 78) in the Centre thrive on the oppression and erasure of peripheral culture and civilisation. Anisa's admiration of the "thriving plants" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 123) behind Shiba during their Skype conversation is juxtaposed with Shiba's revelation that every month she "pour(s) her menstrual cups into a jug of water, and then at the end of the week, she would water her plants with that mixture" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 123). She adds, "'It's the stem cells. That's why these babies are so lush, you see" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 123). The pouring of menstrual cups serves as a metaphor, exposing the disturbing reality that the demise of peripheral cultures and civilisations sustains the prosperity and progress of the central civilisation.

Besides ironically inverting the direction of Anisa's journey, Siddiqi also appropriates the underlying aim behind Marlow's journey in *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Marlow's journey is motivated by his childhood obsession with enigmatic blank spaces, particularly the Congo River, which resembles a snake on the map. Marlow expresses his fascination in these words: "And as I looked at the map of it in a shop- window, it fascinated me as a snake would a bird- a silly little bird" (Conrad, 1990, p. 6). Likewise, Siddiqi creates a counter-discourse in *The Centre* (2023) by appropriating the aim behind Marlow's journey to dismantle the dominance and hierarchization of European languages in the postcolonial world. Through Anisa's desire to join the Centre and master the German language, Siddiqi exposes how linguistic imperialism is alive and thriving in the global world. In the novel, Anisa connects intellectuality with European languages, believing that acquiring the German language will make her 'smarter" and assist her in securing a more esteemed translation role than her current job of "writing subtitles for Bollywood films, which she considers "not real translation" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 11). Anisa contemplates: "The Centre, I thought. The Centre could be the steppingstone I needed. To reach the life I really wanted. To find a sense of fulfilment and meaning. To become a real translator" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 50). However, Anisa exemplifies the notion that linguistic imperialism is still controlling and shaping the psyche of the people of postcolonial societies.

Apart from integrating the voyage scene from the source text *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Siddiqi has deliberately employed several different intertextual markers to assist readers in identifying and activating the source text. Some of these references include the receptionist "knitting with bright turquoise wool" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 64) rather than black wool in the Centre's office and a medical examination where Doctor Tim and Susan measure Anisa's skull. Siddiqi's text does not merely appropriate these details; she reinscribes these intertextual markers with new meanings from postcolonial perspectives. Readers who have already read the source text can readily identify, decode, and form multiple intertextual relations based on their prior knowledge.

In integration by absorption, according to Achour and Bekkat (2002), an original text is implicitly absorbed into a new text. Unlike integration by suggestion or allusion, in this integration technique, readers do not find a direct reference or assimilation of the prior text into

the intertext. The source text is melted into the new text in such a way that readers who have background knowledge of the preceding text can only identify it. Siddiqi's *The Centre* (2023) employs integration by absorption as a mode of intertextuality to interrogate the colonial assumption of European discourses. She melts the colonial ideology of imperialism, mirrored through the painting in *Heart of Darkness* (1899), into her novel through the inclusion of a poster. The poster that recalls the original advertising for the Centre symbolises a hidden agenda to promote linguistic imperialism in the postcolonial world. Shiba describes the poster as" – a skinny man in a dhoti and turban with a snake made out of letters of the Hindi alphabet coming out of his basket" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 207). As the white man's poor excuse of bringing civilisation proved effective in colonised societies, the discomforting imagery, according to Arjun, "worked though" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 207) in *The Centre* (2023). Europeans are regarded as demigods by natives in *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Similarly, in the Centre, Arjun, during the conversation about the original advertising for the Centre, tells Shiba and Anisa: "The Learners said we were magicians, even saints" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 207). However, the inclusion of the poster not only exposes linguistic neo-imperialism as a new technique to control the minds of the people in postcolonial societies, but it also represents how once-colonised societies are now using their coloniser's methods for extending their domination. The poster capturing the essence of linguistic imperialism highlights how India is using language as a tool to exert power globally and subtly control the psyche of people to emerge as a neo-imperialist.

In *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Marlow sees a painting in the central station made by Kurtz, "a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre—almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister" (pp. 21-22). The painting exposes Europe's misguided attempt to bring enlightenment to Africa, which is perceived as enshrouded in darkness, symbolised by the black background. It symbolises the entrenched ideology that darkness in Africa is so profound that light from the white man's torch proves insufficient. In other words, the failure to bring civilisation to Africa is neither because of the change in the psyche of the white man nor a failure on the part of Europeans; instead, it is the opposite of civilization that they encountered in Africa. What stands out as ironic is carrying a torch while blindfolded, serving as a metaphor for the dangerous and ill-advised nature of this mission. However, the imagery of the blindfolded woman in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and the snake in the Centre's poster in *The Centre* (2023) both symbolise the potential danger and deceit, cloaked in the mission of imposing civilisation and language teaching, respectively. Siddiqi implicitly absorbs the painting scene into her narrative to expose the imperialist ideologies framed around the guise of civilisation in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and linguistic imperialism in *The Centre* (2023). The attentive readers who have a literary background and have read the source text can only identify this level of absorption of *The Centre* (2023).

The three modes of integration—integration by suggestion, allusion, and absorption—discussed in this research paper are like pieces of a jigsaw fitting together. Integration by suggestion makes integration by allusion easier to achieve, leading to integration by absorption to demonstrate the comprehensive existence of *Heart of Darkness* (1899) in the intertext *The Centre* (2023). When readers recognise the source text through the author's name and the title of the book, as mentioned by Siddiqi in the novel, they are led to identify the voyage reference as an intertextual marker. It enables the readers to activate the original text to make maximum intertextual connections and identify more references that are absorbed within the intertext through decoding.

Postcolonial Intertextual Interfigurality in *The Centre* (2023)

Muller (1991) defines Interfigurality as "the interrelationships between literary characters," appearing through "a fictional character's... identification with, a character from another literary work" (p. 102). The interfigural devices that can be identified during intertextual analysis of a literary work are borrowing names and reusing figures from pretext to posttext. The borrowed names and figures can both be taken from the pretext in its original form or modified according to the need of the intertext's author. Only attentive readers can identify the interrelationship between characters of old and new text and generate meanings of the interfigural devices based on their previous knowledge of the source text.

In Siddiqi's *The Centre* (2023), Anisa is a prime example of interfigurality. The readers who have identified Anisa with Marlow through the voyage scene also notice the interfigural deviation used by Siddiqi in reusing Marlow's figure. Siddiqi not only liberates Anisa from the source text by changing her name to "Anisa" before integrating it into her postcolonial discourse, but she also imparts attributes highlighting interfigural deviation to Anisa. The relationship between Marlow and Anisa is founded on an interfigural divergence, as Marlow remains prejudiced against the white man's mission of bringing enlightenment and European civilisation to Africa despite witnessing the corrupt nature of the white man and the imperial nature of the mission. On the other hand, Anisa becomes disillusioned after realising it is not her work for which she is getting success and admiration. She contemplates, "It was as if, overnight, my words mattered, even when they were, frankly, somewhat mundane or being uttered by a million others who were patronised or outright ignored. The same people who I'd previously been invisible to were now looking at me with something like awe" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 115). Anisa's disillusionment deepens when she realises that it is the German language for which she is receiving recognition and admiration upon uncovering that the Centre's objective behind teaching European languages is to foster linguistic imperialism by promoting language hierarchies. Anisa expresses her disillusionment: "But basically, I was of two minds, both pleased with my new-found success and utterly disillusioned" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 116). Unlike Marlow, who remains prejudiced of white man's superiority, Anisa questions the superiority of some languages and their writers over others: "Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, Gogol and Chekhov. The ones they call 'the Greats'. My god. What was it that made them so great? Could it be something in the language itself?" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 133).

Anisa comes to understand the real motives of Arjun, representing a neo-imperialist force behind the establishment of the language institute, first in India and later in London, to take revenge for Indians' past subjugation. It represents his aspiration for India to emerge as a new imperialist power by adopting the tactics of linguistic imperialism of their former colonisers and stepping into the role of their European colonists, mirrored by Arjun's sentiments of "Never again will I be humiliated this way" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 244). Anisa realises that the Centre is the result of the ongoing cycle of imperialism rather than its dissolution. Unlike Shiba, who rationalises her participation under the lame excuse that their generation has no choice but to continue what their predecessors started and suggests reformation is the only way they have, Anisa becomes sceptical about the prospects: "To smuggle dynamite into the epicentre of power. To remake the world in our own image" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 281). She observes, "It's covered with blood, that seat," hinting that the seat's sustenance and vibrancy depend on the continuous sacrifice of marginalised cultures and civilisations. However, unlike Marlow, who hides the packet of papers that Kurtz entrusted to him, the reality of Kurtz from his fiancé, and the true agenda behind

civilisation from her Aunt, Anisa determines that exposing the truth is the only way to halt the exploitation. She prefers to "let the dirt be known" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 281) to the world rather than hide it. Anisa, representing the writer Siddiqi, attempts to disrupt the ongoing cycle by exposing the fall practices and unethical acts the Centre is involved in to promote linguistic neo-imperialism, emerging from the once-colonised societies in reaction to those societies' subjugation through the publication of her story. Thus, Siddiqi employs interfigural deviation by attributing Anisa to different qualities and liberating her from the colonial narrative *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by placing her in the postcolonial context to expose, challenge, question and subvert the imperial discourses of linguistic imperialism.

Another example of interfigurality found in the intertext *The Centre* (2023) is the character of Shiba, who shares an identical role to Mr. Kurtz in the postcolonial context. Though Siddiqi has changed her name to Shiba before borrowing Kurtz's figure in the intertext, her role is similar to Kurtz's as she is involved in a different but equally cruel form of brutality. As Kurtz exploits the natives of Africa, Siddiqi inverts the situation in *The Centre* (2023) as Shiba, who belongs to the once colonised society, India, exploits the people from European countries who are old or suffering from some disease, with the surety that they will die soon. She exploits the Europeans as "indentured labourers, people who didn't want to pass on debt to their families" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 206). In return for paying off their debts, these old people agree to "record their stories" and allow the use of "their bodies" after "their passing" without questioning the intended use (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 206). After their demise, their bodies are used by the Centre to "transfer the energy" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 223) by incorporating their flesh and blood into the learners' diet. Being the head of the Centre, Shiba oversees this barbaric practice. Like Kurtz engaged in brutal raids of Africa in search of ivory, a physical and practical application of the imperial mission in *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Shiba in *The Centre* (2023) is involved in an equally violent form of brutality to promote linguistic imperialism in the postcolonial world. Though Siddiqi has modified the name and transformed the figure from the source text, Shiba is a practical example of perpetuating the legacy of imperialism passed down by her ancestors, keeping the cycle of imperialism continuing and evolving rather than stopping it. Like her father, Arjun, she holds the belief: 'What we're doing here, it's revolutionary.' 'It's truly unbelievable" (Siddiqi, 2023, p. 100).

Siddiqi establishes an intertextual link by borrowing names and figures from the original text, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), through the implementation of both interfigural identification and deviation. Anisa and Shiba are not mere imitations of Marlow and Kurtz, respectively; Siddiqi uses the borrowed images to unveil, challenge and subvert the colonial ideology of superiority that is taking a new form of linguistic imperialism in postcolonial societies. Nonetheless, the liberation of characters from colonial discourse and placing them into the postcolonial world indicate the intertext's output. By highlighting the issue of rising linguistic neo-imperialism by slightly modifying the old tools and techniques of former colonisers in the once-colonised society of India, Siddiqi not only tends to change the perspective of the original text *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by exposing the bleak reality of the European Centre but also brings the attention of the readers to the newly emerging imperialist agenda. Productivity can be seen not only in modifying the names of characters but also in transforming the figures into a different context. However, the borrowing of characters from the pretext, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), in original or modified form does not negate the uniqueness of the intertext, *The Centre* (2023), as Olofinsao (2017) confirms that "the claim to originality is not about isolation. Rather, it is about association." It stems from how "the borrowed material" is integrated into the pretext (as cited in

Mechgoug, 2022, p. 108). Siddiqi has done this deftly to shift readers' insights on neo-imperialist ideology and refresh their view of the source text.

CONCLUSION

Siddiqi uses the intertextual modes of integration and interfigurality in *The Centre* (2023) to increase artistic richness and to create counterpoint, irony, and continuity with *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Using intertextuality as a postcolonial strategy, she is overly critical of the lingering effects of colonialism and the new forms of Western linguistic neo-imperialism. Thus, she tends to prove Phillipson's (2012) warning true that "[l]inguistic imperialism [is] alive and kicking" (as cited in Zeng et al., 2023, p. 1). Siddiqi's *The Centre* (2023) is a deliberate and self-conscious reply to the colonial narrative of *Heart of Darkness* (1899), revealing the actual image behind the sophisticated face of civilisation and the hierarchical view that elevates specific languages over others. This process of developing counter-discourse through intertextuality takes the readers further and further away from the original text of Conrad but also close to something new, a new articulation, while reproducing the old simultaneously. Siddiqi does not use intertextuality as merely a mechanical technique to embellish her intertext; instead, her use of intertextuality is conscious and is directed to the specific purpose of writing back to the centre to subvert or appropriate colonial ideological force by involving in a dialogical process of answering to *Heart of Darkness* (1899). However, what emerges because of the intertextual rewriting of the canonical text of Conrad is the uniqueness of *The Centre* (2023) as a fresh text demonstrating how Siddiqi has thoughtfully utilised the borrowed elements.

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