

**THE BODY AND THE WITNESSING: A
CORPOREAL READING OF FEMALE
PRECARITY IN THE SELECTED COVID-19
PANDEMIC LITERATURE**

BY

FATYMAH ISHTIAQ



NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES

ISLAMABAD

DECEMBER, 2023

**The Body and the Witnessing: A Corporeal Reading of
Female Precarity in the Selected COVID-19 Pandemic
Literature**

By

FATYMAH ISHTIAQ

BS, International Islamic University Islamabad, 2020

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

In English

To

FACULTY OF ARTS & HUMANITIES



NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES, ISLAMABAD

© Fatymah Ishtiaq, 2023



THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have read the following thesis, examined the defense, are satisfied with the overall exam performance, and recommend the thesis to the Faculty of Arts & Humanities for acceptance.

Thesis Title: The Body and the Witnessing: A Corporeal Reading of Female Precarity in the Selected COVID-19 Pandemic Literature

Submitted by: Fatymah Ishtiaq

Registration #: 116-MPhil/Eng.Lit/-S21

Master of Philosophy

Degree name in full

English Literature

Name of Discipline

Dr. Rabia Aamir

Name of Research Supervisor

Signature of Research Supervisor

Dr. Safeer Awan

Name of Dean (FAH)

Signature of Dean (FAH)

Brig. Shahzad Munir

Name of DG

Signature of DG

Date

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I Fatymah Ishtiaq

Daughter of Muhammad Ishtiaq

Registration # 116 MPhil/ Eng Lit/ S21

Discipline English Literature

Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis The Body and the Witnessing: A Corporeal Reading of Female Precarity in the Selected COVID-19 Pandemic Literature submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

I also understand that if evidence of plagiarism is found in my thesis/dissertation at any stage, even after the award of a degree, the work may be cancelled and the degree revoked.

Signature of Candidate

Name of Candidate

Date

ABSTRACT

Title: The Body and the Witnessing: A Corporeal Reading of Female Precarity in the Selected COVID-19 Pandemic Literature

This research examines female precarity during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sarah Moss's *The Fell* (2021) and Sarah Hall's *Burntcoat* (2021). The study goes beyond the physiological implications of the COVID-19 pandemic to include a capitalistic and psychological analysis of *The Fell* and *Burntcoat* respectively. Judith Butler's concept of precarity, along with Jose Medina and Tempest Henning's concept of bodily testimony is employed to explore different forms of precarity faced by women during the pandemic. More than its economic inferences, the focus is specifically on the sociological aspect of capitalistic and psychological implications of COVID-19 on women. By focusing on the body as the main point of study and studying its role in tandem with the pandemic, the study investigates various forms of female precarity in the selected texts and the role of the body as a witness to the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, the study delves into how the protagonists' individual bodily testimonies in the novels contribute to formulating a broader understanding of the collective bodily testimony related to the COVID-19 crisis. This research is an important addition to the scholarship related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the burgeoning field of medical humanities. It also gives a new dimension to the concept of precarity, previously limited to neoliberalism, by studying it in relation to a medical phenomenon. This research may help in understanding the pandemic beyond its physiology and prepare people to combat such crises in the future.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM	ii
AUTHOR’S DECLARATION	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
DEDICATION.....	x
CHAPTER 1.....	11
INTRODUCTION.....	11
1.1 Introduction to the study.....	11
1.2 Thesis Statement	13
1.3 Research Questions.....	13
1.4 Research Objectives.....	14
1.5 Significance and Rationale of the Study	14
1.6 Delimitation	15
1.7 Chapter Breakdown.....	15
CHAPTER 2.....	17
LITERATURE REVIEW	17
2.1 Introduction.....	17
2.2. Pandemic.....	17
2.3. Illness and literature:.....	18
2.4. Witness theory:.....	20
2.5. Body Politics:.....	23
2.6. Precarity.....	26
5.1 Conclusion	28
CHAPTER 3.....	30
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	30
3.1 Introduction.....	30
3.2 Theoretical Framework.....	30
3.21 Bodily testimony.....	31
3.22 Precarity.....	33

3.23	Collective Bodily Testimony.....	38
3.3	Research Methods.....	39
3.4	Conclusion	40
CHAPTER 4.....		42
SINGLE MOTHERHOOD AS DOUBLE PANDEMIC: A STUDY OF MECHANIZED BODY IN SARAH MOSS'S <i>THE FELL</i>		42
4.1	Introduction.....	42
4.2	Mechanization of Kate's Body in the Pandemic.....	45
4.3	Kate and Bodily Testimony	50
4.4	Conclusion	56
PSYCHOLOGICAL CONUNDRUMS IN THE TIMES OF CORONA: A STUDY OF SUFFERING BODY IN SARAH HALL'S <i>BURNTCOAT</i>		58
5.1	Introduction.....	58
5.2	Edith's Precarity as a Suffering Body:	63
a.	Edith and her Exposure to Pain.....	64
b.	Edith and her Unresolved Trauma.....	67
5.3	Edith and Bodily Testimony	70
5.4	Conclusion	74
CONCLUSION		76
Recommendations.....		82
WORKS CITED.....		83

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Flowchart of Theoretical Framework.....	38
---	----

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I shall begin by thanking Allah Almighty, Who is the source of all knowledge, and without Whose undue favors, I would not have been where I am today. All thanks to my Lord for His countless blessings that He has bestowed upon me throughout my life. I thank Him for giving me the strength and insight to achieve my goals.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Rabia Aamir for her relentless support throughout my research phase. It is indeed my biggest luck to have the chance to work under her supervision which has played a very formative role in shaping my outlook, not only toward academics but also toward life. I have learned a lot while working with her and the research skills that I have developed, owe a lot to her guidance and mentorship.

I am highly indebted to my parents, Muhammad Ishtiaq and Nusrat Ishtiaq, who have been my guiding stars throughout my life. Had they not been there for me, I would have never achieved anything in my life. They deserve credit for giving me support and a facilitative environment for seeking higher education. They truly deserve a round of applause for treating my education as a necessity instead of a luxury. I can still envision my father waiting in the chilling nights of Islamabad, long before my bus reached the stop. I remember the number of times my mother worked all alone just to make sure that I work in peace. They are the true reason of my success and I thank Allah each day for their presence in my life.

In addition to this, I would like to thank my maternal uncle, Mahmood Hussain Raja, for his unwavering support and for being always there to check up on me. I would like to thank my two sisters Amna Ishtiaq and Yamina Ishtiaq for their help, and my younger brother Muhammad Umer for keeping me entertained in my lows. I would particularly extend my gratitude to my sister Amna Ishtiaq, for having faith in me even when I had lost it. I owe her for her dogged devotion and steadfast emotional support throughout my journey.

I would take this as an opportunity to thank all my friends for believing in me. This acknowledgment section would be incomplete without reference to my dearest friend, Zoha Jan Tagi for her unflinching support from the course work to the research phase. Above all, she deserves the credit for being a listening ear to my unending rants. I would particularly thank my friend and class fellow, Fatima Bibi for helping

me in sorting things out when they went south. It was she who introduced me to my supervisor, perhaps the best thing that ever happened to me. I would also like to thank my oldest friend Bushra Ghazanfar for giving me the necessary emotional support and uplift. Finally, I also thank my friends Haleema Zakir, Sidra Naeem, and Rahima Bint e Kamran for making university days memorable, as well as bearable for me.

DEDICATION

To my parents who mean the world to me,

and

My beloved *Nana*, Raja Adalat Khan (Late), from whom I have inherited my love for literature.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the study

COVID-19 has been a global crisis that has affected all spheres of life. Originating from the city of Wuhan, it has now affected almost the entire world. As per the data shared by World Health Organization, the number of deaths because of COVID-19 across the globe is approximately 7 million, while 400 million individuals are infected by the virus (“WHO Coronavirus COVID-19 Dashboard” n.p.). Being first and foremost a medical phenomenon, it is the body that is the first victim of its pestilence. However, limiting the study of COVID-19 to its physiological effects is an understatement. It is true that the body is the first target of its cruelty, but the role which the body plays in conjunction with the COVID-19 crisis is multifold. In addition to destroying the physiology of the body, COVID-19 also operates at the psychological and social levels.

It is a virus that not only infects an individual’s body but penetrates far deeper to mark its imprint on the psychological as well as sociological makeup of an individual. Since the body is the main prop that the virus uses to cast its spell, this research also approaches the body as a medium to articulate the psychosocial ramifications of COVID-19. In other words, the body acts as a witness to the psychosocial trauma of COVID-19. While witness theory has been previously studied and employed to understand manifold experiences and histories, this research deploys witness theory to extrapolate the perilous influences of COVID-19 on the psychological and social fabric of the world, which acts concomitantly in creating and promulgating the many traumas in the wake of the pandemic.

Based on the above-mentioned argument, my research intends to explore the role of precarious bodies in *The Fell* (2021) by Sarah Moss and *Burntcoat* (2021) by Sarah Hall. Given the limited amount of literature produced in the wake of COVID-19, my research focuses on the above-mentioned texts, written in the midst of COVID-19 to carry out a corporeal reading of the impacts of COVID-19 in pandemic literature. Besides the common feature of being written in the same year, the other important theme common to the two texts is the precarity of female protagonists

concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. All the characters that will be discussed from these two narratives share the same, and yet, multiple forms of precarious experiences that they face. The main aspects of their precarious experiences are based on the factors of capitalism and psychology. I want to make it clear that I have studied these factors in their sociological domain and not in their economic or biomedical domain.

The study of the selected texts, dealing with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, uses Judith Butler's conception of precarious bodies as the point of reference. For Butler, precarious bodies are the ones that operate outside the dominant masculine conception of embodiment (Butler, *Frames of War* 14). In this regard, precarity can include all the marginal bodies that are not part of the dominant discourse. Taking Butler's lead, this research delimits itself to the study of female bodies as precarious bodies in the selected texts. It is true that there were other populations that were also affected by the pandemic. For the sake of convenience, I limited the scope of my research by including only the study of female precarity.

Although coronavirus is a global virus that has the potential to infect all humans, it is said that "women are disproportionately vulnerable to the secondary impacts of COVID-19" (Nathini and Nair 4). In the recent debates on the effects of COVID-19 on marginalized communities, it has been termed a "double pandemic" for women (Bettinger Lopez and Bro 1). The imposition of lockdowns by the governments aimed at protecting the masses proves fatal for marginalized communities because "for domestic violence victims—the vast majority of whom are women...home is a dangerous place" (Lopez et al. 1). In the light of these facts, it is quite self-evident that pandemic leaves women vulnerable, which accounts for their precarity. Therefore, this research studies the psychosocial effects of coronavirus by studying the precarity of the female body witnessing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sarah Moss's *The Fell* is a work in the list of pandemic literature that deals with the pandemic experience of a single mother in lockdown with her 16-year-old son. Disgusted by the situation of the pandemic, Kate, the protagonist, decides to breach COVID-19 restrictions and comes across an accident that serves as an impetus for the main action of the story. Since Kate's body is the fulcrum around which the machinery of the story operates, the story is important regarding this research on the body as a witness of the pandemic. In Kate's case, precarity materializes from her capitalistic inclinations that tend to mechanize her body. Since she happens to be a

single mother who has financial responsibilities towards her family, she has mechanized herself to the extent that the leisure of lockdown appears claustrophobic for her.

Sarah Hall, the second novelist whose work is selected for this study, is known for her play with imagery of sexuality to convey her messages and themes. Her novel, *Burntcoat*, is also rich in sexual imagery that amalgamates eroticism and illness to convey its message. The story is about a woman, Edith Harkness, who is an artist stuck in lockdown with her lover when the virus hits the city. Hall fictionalizes COVID-19 in her novel, which illustrates the psychological effects of the pandemic. The novel portrays Edith's trauma manifested in her artwork. In this way, the precarity of Hall's protagonist in *Burntcoat* gives insight into the psychological aftermaths of the coronavirus. Thus, the female protagonists in *The Fell* and *Burntcoat* surface as precarious bodies who exhibit diverse forms of precarity concerning capitalism, and psychology respectively.

These precarious bodies in the selected texts help to understand the body politics and trauma experienced across the globe during the COVID-19 pandemic. These experiences are crucial in understanding the body politics at play with reference to COVID-19. By understanding the body politics experienced by many during the pandemic, not only are the traumatic effects of the coronavirus pandemic brought to the forefront, but these embodied experiences also pave the way towards developing collective bodily testimony that contains the traces of psychosocial effects of coronavirus. In this way, the body emerges as a site of bodily testimony.

1.2 Thesis Statement

Offering a corporeal reading of female precarity in the selected texts published during the COVID-19 pandemic from the year 2020 to 2021, this research explores the COVID-19 pandemic beyond its physiological implications and reads the body as bearing witness to the capitalistic and psychological ramifications of the pandemic, forming a larger compendium of the collective bodily testimony pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3 Research Questions

Having considered the relevant research in the field of body politics, witness theory, and pandemic literature, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How does the female body emerge as a precarious entity during the COVID-19 crisis in the selected texts?
2. How does the female body witness and experience the hostile consequences of COVID-19?
3. What is the significance of bodily testimony of COVID-19 for women reflected in the selected pandemic literature?

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To analyze and examine the precarity of women during the pandemic.
2. To investigate and document various ways through which female bodies provide bodily testimony of the pandemic trauma.
3. To explore and understand the significance of individual bodily testimonies of COVID-19 for women as reflected in the selected pandemic literature and how it contributes to an understanding of collective bodily testimony of the pandemic.

1.5 Significance and Rationale of the Study

This research is based on an interdisciplinary approach towards pestilence, particularly COVID-19. Since COVID-19 is a recent phenomenon in the long history of world pandemics, there is a lack of scholarship on the different aspects and experiences of COVID-19 in literature. My research intends to address this gap and pioneer a deliberate and willful study of pandemic literature. Moreover, this research reads pestilence not only as a medical, historical, and sociocultural phenomenon but also from psychological and sociological perspectives as an experience of viral disease. In doing so, the research engages with medical humanities while bespeaking the multiplicity and versatility of literary studies that provides commentary on various issues surrounding human life. Furthermore, the research also extends witness theory and testimony to the medical humanities, which have previously been limited to the study of war trauma. Moreover, human history is replete with pandemics that have halted the normal functioning of humans. So, there is a strong likelihood that they may recur in one form or the other in the coming times. My research, therefore, adds

a dimension to the study of pandemics and highlights the necessity of acknowledging the trauma associated with pandemics.

1.6 Delimitation

The effects of the coronavirus pandemic are manifold, ranging from physiology manifold, ranging from physiology to economics and even global politics. However, this research primarily focuses on the capitalistic and psychological effects of COVID-19. Due to time constraints and given the limited number of literary texts produced on COVID-19 as the subject matter, this research focuses on the above-mentioned effects of coronavirus on the protagonists of the two selected novels. While studying the outcomes of the pandemic from the perspective of precarious bodies, this research delimits itself to the study of precarity only with reference to female bodies. Furthermore, since pestilence is a bodily phenomenon, in order to study bodily testimony in the selected novels, the research delimits itself to the study of pestilence by choosing the body as a site of testimony for preserving/witnessing pandemic trauma.

1.7 Chapter Breakdown

This research is divided into:

1. **Introduction:** This section introduces the topic and elaborates on keywords namely: precarity, testimony, witnessing and body politics.
2. **Literature Review:** This section discusses the existing scholarship on disease and pandemics in academia. It is further divided into the following parts:
 - I. **Pandemic:** This section will provide a brief history of pandemics while stressing that human history is replete with pandemics. So, it is important to study them from different perspectives.
 - II. **Illness and literature:** This section will give a brief introduction to the correlation between illness and literature. It will also explain how pandemics and diseases are reflected and studied through literature.
 - III. **Witness theory:** This chapter will explain the theoretical developments in witnessing and testimony. This part of the thesis

will also explain the theoretical developments in the relevant field and how those developments are relevant to the current research.

- IV. **Body politics:** This section reads the body beyond corporeal form to highlight the multiple roles played by bodies.
 - V. **Precarity:** This section will explain the concept of precarity and its correlation with female bodies as highlighted by various theorists.
3. **Research methodology:** This chapter explains the main and supporting theoretical lenses deployed in the research. It also highlights the research methods used to execute the research.
 4. **Single Motherhood as a Double Pandemic: A Study of Mechanized Body in Sarah Moss's *The Fell*:** This section will deal with the mechanization of Kate's body, the protagonist in Moss's *The Fell*, as triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.
 5. **Psychological Conundrums in the Times of Corona: A Study of Suffering Body in Sarah Hall's *Burntcoat*:** This section will study the psychological effects of the pandemic in Sarah Hall's *Burntcoat* by taking suffering bodies as the main point of focus.
 6. **Conclusion**
 7. **Works Cited**

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the critical understanding of the theoretical concepts surrounding my research. Being a recent phenomenon, this chapter situates the study of the COVID-19 pandemic within the historical context of pandemics along with reading its capitalistic and psychological implications. In addition to this, the chapter also highlights the theoretical background of the concepts like witnessing, body politics, and precarity while highlighting the conceptual gaps that my research endeavors to fill.

This review of the related literature broadly focuses on the aspects of understanding a pandemic, followed by the manifestations of pandemic/ illness in literature, and finally, it will review the literature from the theoretical perspective of witnessing, understanding the body beyond its physicality, and a brief understanding of the concept of precarity. Given the contemporariness of the chosen novels, as they are published in 2021, a limited amount of critical literature is present on these novels. Therefore, the literature review mainly focuses on the review of the literature from a theoretical perspective. For the sake of convenience, the following parts of the chapter are summarized below:

1. Pandemic
2. Illness and literature
3. Witness theory
4. Body Politics
5. Precarity

2.2. Pandemic

Before plunging into a review of related literature and the details of COVID-19 and its effects, it is crucial to understand pandemics. The phenomenon of a pandemic is related to its spread over a wide geographic area. So, the pandemic is a global concern that transcends the boundaries of time and space. Therefore, in order

to study COVID-19 from a literary perspective, it is imperative to situate the current study within the history of pandemics.

J.N. Hays, in his book *Epidemics and Pandemics: Their Impacts on Human History* (2006), supplies the history of 50 diseases, beginning from the Epidemic in Athens (430-427 B.C.E) to contemporary tuberculosis. His book does not differentiate between the modern distinction of epidemics and pandemics. He argues, “Modern disease understandings and categories differ significantly from those of past ages and places” (Hays xi). Thus, he uses the term epidemic and pandemic interchangeably in supplying the history of pestilence worldwide. His research on the pandemic is important in highlighting the significance of my study. Since my research focuses on the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an apprehension that the research might lose its relevance in the future. In this regard, Hay’s historical evidence of the existence of pandemics in human history provides a good argument that since human history is rife with pandemics that have changed the course of history, there is a strong chance that they may occur in the future as well. Therefore, my study intends to focus on the imperative of studying pandemics from different critical perspectives.

In a similar vein, Christian W. McMillen in his book *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction* (2016) narrates the history of seven diseases starting from plagues to HIV/ AIDS. The history of pandemics is important to note that the pandemic is not a recent phenomenon. Rather, human history is replete with examples of such diseases that are responsible for disrupting and at times even halting the normal functioning of life. Albert Camus, in his famous novel *The Plague* (1947, 2010) confesses the recurring nature of pestilence. He says: “There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise” (Camus 37). This quotation speaks of the recrudescence tendency of pandemics and also highlights the importance of the study of pandemics with reference to human history. Since pandemics are deemed to repeat themselves in different forms, it is necessary to study them from various perspectives, a gap that my research tries to fulfill.

2.3. Illness and literature:

As literature and society go hand in hand, pandemics find a recurrent presence in literature. Tim Parks observes, “Every illness is a narrative, what matters is the version you tell yourself” (37), so the importance of literature in highlighting the

otherwise occluded narrative versions of pestilence cannot be ignored. Therefore, my research returns to literary texts as the primary source to understand pandemics and their effects on human existence.

Virginia Woolf in her famous essay “On Being Ill” (1926) stresses the necessity of highlighting disease in literature, in addition to love and wars. She complains that “people write always about the doings of the mind” at the expense of “ignoring the body” when actually “all day, all night the body intervenes” (Woolf 34-35). Here, Woolf points out the necessity of using illness as a subject matter along with foregrounding the multidimensional role of the body in our daily lives. So, Woolf’s essay provides the lacuna about the representation of the body and its struggles in literature, a gap that my research endeavors to fill.

David K Coley, in his book *Death and Pearl Maiden: Plague, Poetry, England* (2019) stresses the importance of literature in serving as a testimony to the otherwise muted pestilent narratives of history. Coley stresses the apparent silence of medieval historiography regarding the issue of the Black Death. He uses four medieval poems as the point of reference “to address historical amnesia and also stresses the always compromised state of historical memory” (Coley 4). He presents these poems as a literary witness to the Black Death prevalent in medieval England. According to him, “the witness which literature provides in history is never a straightforward one” (Coley 2). He further states that “the presence of the disease may be muted by posttraumatic inarticulacy and by critical misprision, but it is a presence nonetheless, and one that urgently demands to be given a voice” (Coley 7). Coley’s views on disease give an important starting point for my research that draws on pandemic trauma because of the coronavirus. COVID-19 being a recent viral phenomenon might not have overt descriptions of the traumas associated with it. Having said that, one cannot ignore the disheveling tendencies it contains within itself. Therefore, in order to highlight the chaos, which the pandemic has set in motion, my research turns to literary texts as the point of reference.

Likewise, Elizabeth Outka in her book *Viral Modernism: The Influenza Pandemic and Interwar Literature* (2019) also brings to the forefront the erasure of the influenza pandemic from the literary tradition of the interwar period that mostly depended on war narratives as the basic theme of the stories. She insists on the necessity of studying pandemic trauma, in addition to the trauma associated with

wars. Outka contends that before generating global responses to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, it is more important that “people have to see the threat and be willing to act” (Outka 254). In other words, Outka emphasizes the importance of seeing the pandemic as a visible and palpable threat and emphasizes the need of tracing its presence in literary texts. She further declares that her investigations “remind us that even a modern catastrophic pandemic that has already happened can be hidden unless we learn to read for its presence” (Outka 254). Thus, Outka underlines the necessity of reading pandemics from a literary perspective.

Outka and Coley both are of the opinion that pestilence should not be treated as a minor incident of history that is pushed under the rug. Instead, it must be treated as an active part of history that demands attention and inclusion in the research. Therefore, my research focuses on COVID-19 and its study within capitalistic and psychological domains as reflected in the literature produced during the recent global outbreak of COVID-19.

Another aspect of utmost importance is that the manifestation of the pandemic and its effects in the literature exist either overtly or covertly. While exploring traces of the influenza pandemic in interwar literature, Outka offers two terms that are of particular interest to my research. Firstly, she defines “viral realism” to refer to texts that dealt with the influenza pandemic overtly. According to Outka, viral realism includes texts that “make visible the miasmatic atmosphere the pandemic produced, detailing the hidden suffering it inflicted” (4). At the same time, Outka uses another term “pandemic modernism”, which reveals “the subtle but significant presence of the viral tragedy within iconic modernist texts that are not typically seen in the light of the outbreak” (4). Although both terms are meant for the study of pestilence in modern literature, my research utilizes Outka’s approach to reading pestilence in the literature produced on and during COVID-19.

2.4. Witness theory:

Witnessing and testimony are important concepts within the domain of trauma theory. Before explaining witness theory, I need to clarify that although most of the literature on witness theory is produced in the backdrop of Holocaust trauma, certain theoretical underpinnings of witness theory create room to include other sorts of trauma as well (Alexander 24) (Masood 7). In other words, the contextual malleability

of witness theory makes it relatable to pandemic trauma as well.

Kelley Oliver in her essay “Witnessing” (2019) defines witnessing from a phenomenological perspective. She says, “Witnessing is defined as the action of bearing witness or giving testimony, the fact of being present and observing something” whereas testimony “is a spoken or written account of something seen or experienced” (Oliver 337). As the current research deploys the body as a site of witnessing and the subsequent space where testimony is recorded, the two terms i.e., witnessing and testimony, despite being slightly different are used interchangeably throughout my research.

Moreover, Oliver divides witnessing into two types, “eyewitness testimony based on firsthand knowledge, and bearing witness to something beyond recognition that can’t be seen” (Oliver 337). My research focuses on the embodied aspect of witnessing and testimony with reference to the COVID-19 pandemic, so the second type, i.e., “bearing witness” which accounts for subjectivity, is of primary concern. While borrowing concepts from phenomenology, Oliver explains subjectivity regarding testimony as a relation of the subject with his/ her socio-political context. In this regard, witnessing for her is the consciousness that is situated in cultural and historical contexts (Oliver 338). This aspect of Oliver’s theorization is crucial to understand the phenomenon of witnessing/ testimony within the broader socio-political context of COVID-19. Although COVID-19 is a universal phenomenon and nearly all humanity has witnessed its devastating effects, the extent of witnessing varies according to the subject’s socio-political aspect, as Kelley highlights in her theorization. In simple words, one cannot extricate the subject’s testimony from its socio-political context. Therefore, my research aims to situate the embodied testimonies of the protagonists within their socio-political contexts, by reading their testimonies related to the COVID-19 pandemic from capitalistic and psychological perspectives.

Furthermore, the work of Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman is essential in giving a theoretical dimension to the concept of witnessing and testimony. Laub in his essay “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival” (1991) defines witnessing at three levels. Firstly, witnessing involves being actively involved in the traumatic experience. Secondly, witnessing involves being a witness to others’ testimonies. Thirdly, witnessing involves “being a witness to the process of

witnessing” (Laub 75). While extrapolating the types of witnessing, Laub confesses the inability to articulate the traumatic event through verbal acts. For him, the Holocaust is an event so devastating that it cannot be articulated through verbal acts. Thus, he calls Holocaust an “event without a witness” (Laub 80). However, in the essay, he himself suggests that “if words are not trustworthy or adequate, the life that is chosen can become the vehicle by which the struggle to tell continues” (Laub 78). This statement somehow suggests the possibility of bearing witness or providing testimony outside and beyond language. Thus, Laub hints at one of the primary concerns of my research, i.e., the possibility of the body acting as a witness to a traumatic event.

In the following chapter of the anthology, Shoshana Felman (1991), while explaining the testimonial significance of Albert Camus’s *The Plague*, posits the possibility of witnessing through the body. She proclaims that “the specific task of literary testimony is... to open up... what is happening to others-*in one’s own body*, with the power of sight (insight) usually afforded by one’s immediate physical environment” (Felman 108). Therefore, according to Felman, the act of witnessing can occur at the bodily level, where the body can provide the testimony of the traumatic event for one’s own sake as well as for others to bear witness. These theorists do suggest the possibility of the body acting as a witness. However, I have not used these theorists in my research because of the lack of a clear-cut theorization of embodied testimony.

Similarly, while explaining the crisis of witnessing with reference to the survivors of Auschwitz, Giorgio Agamben (2002) contends that “at a certain point, it became clear that testimony contained at its core an essential lacuna; in other words, the survivors bore witness to something that it is impossible to bear witness to” (13). Just to reiterate, Agamben is stressing the incapacity of the survivor to articulate the events of trauma, and this incapacity creates a void and eventually results in the “crisis of witnessing” (Laub 80). As a result, the inarticulacy of trauma calls for other forms of its manifestations, thus giving a hint towards the tendency of the body to act as a witness.

By the same token, Dana Amir (2018) presents four types of bearing witness. These types are metaphoric witnessing, metonymic witnessing, and psychotic modes of witnessing which are further divided into the excessive mode and the *Muselmann*

mode. The metaphoric witnessing for Amir is the mode of witnessing where there is a shift from the first-person narrative to the third-person narrative (10). In this regard, the metaphoric mode of witnessing not only represents the traumatic event but also gives it a new meaning “producing an integrated narrative within which the traumatic events are not merely repeated but also undergo transformation” (Amir 11). The metonymic mode of witnessing, on the other hand, is marked by its narrative stagnation and is “characterized by the same sense of isolation, fragmentation, disorientation and lack of coherence that are typical of the traumatic experience itself” (Amir 11). The third category of witnessing in Amir’s theorization is the psychotic mode of witnessing which is further divided into excess mode and *Muselmann* mode.

Unlike the above-mentioned modes of witnessing, *Muselmann's* mode lacks narrative manifestation “since it essentially attacks both the ability to narrate and language itself” (Amir 11). In other words, this mode of witnessing foregrounds the inarticulacy of the trauma in the verbal context. The excessive mode goes a step further where “the traumatic object becomes an addictive and gratifying object in its own right” (Amir 14). Amir’s psychotic mode of witnessing highlights the inability of language to communicate the traumatic incident efficiently.

Such gaps open room for the possibility of testimony/ witnessing beyond linguistic acts. If language is unable to communicate the trauma efficiently, it opens room for other forms of witnessing/ testimony to ensure articulacy of the trauma. Therefore, my research utilizes the body as the main source that acts as a witness to the traumatic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, to overcome the inarticulacy of the traumatic effects of the pandemic in verbal context.

2.5. Body Politics:

The conception of trauma acknowledges addresses and adumbrates the inarticulacy of pain. This inarticulacy in turn accounts for a “crisis of witnessing,” as Laub points out (80). It is at this point that the body comes to the forefront in depicting traumatic experiences. The Cartesian dualism of mind and body always places the mind at the center, while pushing the body towards the periphery. However, the poststructuralist and deconstructionist turn in the critical atmosphere brings the interest from the center to the peripheries, that is, from the mind to the body. It is when the body is understood to be as primal as the mind.

As, according to Aristotle, human existence can be divided into 4 parts: vegetative level, appetitive level, deliberative level, and contemplative level. He says that each component of the body has an internal function that it has to fulfill, which he calls *telos*. The first part is the vegetative part. It is the conception of the body in the biomedical sense. The *telos* for this level is to keep the body healthy. The second part of the human existence which Aristotle discusses is the appetitive level. It endorses that apart from corporeal form, the body has a function to construct “an intelligible world of appearance” (Hooft 183). So, the *telos* for the appetitive part of our existence is the “enjoyment of desire itself” (Hooft 184). These parts of the human existence are discussed in Hooft’s article “The Suffering Body” (2000). The third level of existence is the deliberative level. Hooft writes that “deliberation or rational thinking is just one of the functions which whole persons perform and through which they can fulfill themselves in their being” (185). For Aristotle, deliberation is quintessentially a human attribute that is linked to action. So, the external goal of this part of our existence is to create a strategy to render a particular action, while the internal goal, i.e., *telos* is the satisfaction that one gets through successful rendering of the task.

The fourth part of our being which Aristotle identifies is the contemplative part. Unlike the deliberative part, “contemplative reason is about the things we cannot change” (Hooft 186). It is “detached from our active lives and is fulfilled by thinking about eternal and changeless things” (Hooft 186). The external goal of this aspect is to get an understanding of the existence and universe while the internal goal is the sense of satisfaction or wholeness that one gets through it. The importance of Aristotelian theorization about the stages of human existence is that it endorses that the human body cannot be limited to only the biomedical domain. It has an emotional side (appetitive level), as well as a spiritual side (contemplative level). My research is not directly linked to the emotional or spiritual side of human existence. However, Aristotle’s insistence on other aspects of human existence, in addition to corporeal form, opens room for an investigation that reads the body beyond its corporeality. My research addresses this gap to include capitalistic and psychological perspectives and intends to read the body as well as pestilence, beyond its physiological and corporeal implications only.

Since the body needs to be understood beyond its corporeal form, it explains the importance of the body as a site where various ideologies interact. Michel

Foucault in his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1977), explains the struggle between various power relations with the body as the main focus. According to him, “the body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration” (Foucault 83). In this way, Foucault conceives the body as a site where history is written and rewritten, as well as a site where power relations mark their existence. Based on this premise in the postmodern discourse, the body is often treated as the “threshold of subjectivity, the point of intersection between the private and the public, the personal and political” (Westley 7). It is crucial to understand that body is not only a biological entity that serves as a barrier between what is inside and what is outside. Instead, it appears as a site where trauma is perpetually written and rewritten. Therefore, my research uses the body as the main prop to understand the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on human existence.

Once the political role of the bodies is understood, the next step of the research process demands a detailed study of body politics in conjunction with the pandemic environment. To scrutinize the role of the female body as a witness of pandemic trauma, the concepts of Kandida Purnell in her book *Rethinking the Body in Global Politics* (2021) are significant. To explain global body politics in the context of the pandemic, Purnell explains the process of “(re/dis) embodiment”, which, according to her is “the continuously contested and intense local-global, social-political process through which bodies continually come to be or not be” (Purnell 1). In other words, Purnell’s conception of “(re/dis) embodiment” refers to the ongoing local and global processes which constantly mold and shape the bodies. In the context of the pandemic, Purnell stresses that the treatment of bodies is subject to local and global factors that can help in shaping our understanding of the bodies. In this regard, the body concerning Purnell’s research appears as a site where local and global impacts mark their existence.

It is important to note that Purnell’s conception of (re/dis) embodiment is to trace the broader body politics that got unleashed because of the pandemic. Purnell’s conception of (re/dis) embodiment aims at accentuating the broader body politics associated with the coronavirus pandemic. Thus, the process of (re/dis) embodiment paves the way for understanding the body as a site of testimonial inscription, one of

the main endeavors of my research. Purnell's research highlights the inimical effects of the coronavirus pandemic in the global atmosphere beyond the physiology of the body. However, unlike Purnell's inquiry into the collective aspect, my research uses a bottom-up approach, where I study the effects of the pandemic on individual bodies from a capitalist and psychological perspective, to trace the broader implications of the pandemic on humanity.

2.6. Precarity

Precarity is a polysemous term extending over economic and social terrains. Although the theory of precarity appeared at a particular historical moment, its implications are manifold that transcend the boundaries of time and space. The concept of precarity, initially developed in the backdrop of neoliberal labor conditions, has percolated into racial, feminist, postcolonial, and other critical debates. Therefore, it is believed that "precarity has an objective side defined by deregulated social structures and neoliberal politics, and a subjective side, articulated in feelings such as vulnerability, stress, a pervasive feeling of being dependent and insecure" (Kirsten 20). In this regard, the concept of precarity is also related to several semantic fields including vulnerability, uncertainty, etc.

Moreover, the three terms within the umbrella term of precarity theory that are of paramount importance include precariousness, precarity, and precariat. I shall begin this section by supplying a detailed critical examination of the above-mentioned terms. Secondly, in this section of the literature review, I intend to explore the multidimensional view of precarity while supplying an overview of the contours of the debate about the precarity theory.

The literal meaning of precariousness is a hazardous state where one does not feel safe. In this regard, it may be considered synonymous with insecurity, instability, or unsteadiness. In critical discourse, precariousness corresponds to a situation where the subject is exposed to some kind of harm. It is "the basic vulnerability and instability that is held in common by all living things – human and non-human – as it is conditioned, intensified, and managed by political structures" (Hogg 20). On the other hand, the concept of precarity is more specific and circumscribed. Precarity is the "unequal exposure to harm" (Naeff 71). In this regard, precariousness and precarity differ in their scope. The former reflects the general vulnerability shared by

all humans owing to their dependence upon the social structure, while the latter manifests the inequality within the general vulnerability, as some individuals are more susceptible to harm than others. Since my research focuses on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the female body, my research uses the concept of precarity that highlights the inherent differences among humans regarding exposure to harm.

Another term that is crucial in understanding the precarity theory is the precariat. Guy Standing in his 2011 book *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, while discussing the Euro May Day¹ protests defines precariat as “an army of unemployed and a detached group of socially ill misfits living off the dregs of society” (8). The term appears as a portmanteau for proletariat and precariousness. However, precariat differs from the proletariat because the latter has the guarantee of security in exchange for his/ her subordination, but in the case of the precariat, no such security is provided, owing to neoliberal flexibilizations. As a result, “they [precariats] are floating, rudderless and potentially angry, capable of veering to the extreme right or extreme left politically and backing populist demagoguery that plays on their fears or phobias” (Standing 4). Thus, the precariat is a class of individuals who lack stable labor conditions and so engage in social mobilization.

In Standing’s conceptualization of precariat, he does not only resort to insecure labor conditions. He stresses that, in addition to precarious labor conditions, precariat “also implies a lack of a secure work-based identity” (Standing 9). In other words, the precariat feels the lack of “a solidaristic labour community” (Standing 12). This aspect of Standing’s theorization is important with reference to my research. As I mentioned earlier, the major theorizations on precarity are produced in the backdrop of neoliberalism. However, when Standing also includes “work-based identity” as a parameter to define precariat, he also touches upon the social side of precarity theory. As pointed out earlier in the chapter, I intend to study the concept of precarity from the sociological perspective only, so when Standing includes identity as a parameter to define precarity, he opens room to study the precarity theory in a sociological context. This aspect broadens the scope of the precarity theory by acknowledging its effects on other parts of the social being other than the economy, a gap my research intends to address.

¹ It is an annual political day of action against the precarity propagated by neoliberal labor conditions celebrated across the Europe. It takes place on 1st May each year, traditionally celebrated as Labor Day across the globe.

It is true that “writing on precarity is plagued with conceptual ambiguities” (Choonara 433). However, all the theorists on precarity agree on the point that precarity corresponds to a situation of insecurity in either economic or social terms. There is no doubt that different populations suffer different kinds of precarity. So, one may have male or female precarity. However, for the sake of convenience, I am delimiting my research to the study of female precarity only. Since my research is focused on female precarity, the term “precarity of feminization” holds significance (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 191). This term highlights the disproportionate distribution of vulnerabilities among different genders. It is because precarity “reflects a gendered reality that affects differently the lives of men and women” (Garrido 582). Encarnación Gutiérrez-Rodríguez asserts that it is not the women's participation in the precarious jobs that manifests the precarity of feminization but “every social activity culturally associated with the identity of women is automatically degraded and, therefore, precarized” is what reflects the precarity of feminization (Garrido 583). In this regard, the precarity of feminization “reflect[s] specific historical processes of differentiation and regulation of the social, epitomized in domestic and care work as expressions of precarity” (Gutiérrez-Rodríguez 199). Thus, a better understanding of the complexities of precarity with reference to female gender helps to understand the specific historical processes that regulate and differentiate social roles, which ultimately helps in revealing the impact of precarity on women's lives. Moreover, it also helps in getting a better picture of female precarity that must include the socio-political context of the women.

All these theorists bespeak the multidimensional conceptual understandings of precarity. In this regard, precarity and vulnerability may be somehow synonymous. Precarity indeed reflects the tendency of vulnerability, but they both differ in their essence. Vulnerability is caused by external factors and can be overcome. However, precarity is a vulnerability subjected to perpetual social and political renegotiation. The concept of precarity is more relevant to my research as it not only includes the general tendency of being vulnerable but also acknowledges the inequality in the propagation of vulnerability, as a socially motivated phenomenon.

5.1 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a literature review regarding the basic theoretical concepts utilized in my research. And, as pointed out at the beginning of

this chapter, the selected texts for this study are quite new and there is not much criticism available on them except for some book reviews, etc., therefore, they are discussed in the analysis chapters in detail. A detailed literature review on the issues of pandemic, illness and literature, body politics, witnessing, and precarity helps me to situate my research within the academia, with reference to its theoretical standpoint. Moreover, this literature review also helps me in pinpointing the gaps pertinent to research in this area of corporeal reading in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. These gaps help me in formulating my research and they provide me with the necessary background information to proceed with a topic as complex as pandemics and their reflection in literature.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research methodology used in this research work. This chapter explicates the main theories used for analyzing the work along with reference to the supporting theoretical lenses that help me to delve into the research questions. While for the research method, I primarily use textual analysis as the main research method and substantiate my analysis with quantitative data occasionally.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Before discussing the theoretical framework for this study, it is important to refer to the concepts of Giorgio Agamben and David K Coley which may serve as a preliminary point to ponder. Coley stresses the potential of the literary texts to act as a “witness defined less by verisimilitude and directness than by oblique referentiality, linguistic play, and allusive embodiment” (6). In other words, talking about medieval pandemics, Coley is endorsing the potential of literary texts to act as a witness to the trauma of pandemics. However, within the umbrella term of literary texts, it is important to delimit the metaphors that can serve as a witness to pandemic trauma. While theorizing witnessing and testimony, philosopher and writer Giorgio Agamben states, “The authority of the witness consists in his capacity to speak solely in the name of incapacity to speak – that is, in his or her being a subject” (158). Therefore, Agamben is pointing out the incapacity of the witness to speak, despite having the ability to speak about his/her trauma. Given the incapacity of the witness to articulate his/ her trauma, this opens room for other modes of articulacy.

Thus, Agamben and Coley stress the importance of literary texts to act as a witness to traumas that are otherwise unspeakable. This insight provides a starting point for my research that draws heavily upon the literary texts as a source to study and explore the traumas associated with the pandemic. My research takes on the theoretical insights which take the issue of testimony/ witnessing beyond the verbal acts of speech. Therefore, the following part of theoretical insight serves as the main and supporting lens to read the selected novels.

3.21 Bodily testimony

Jose Medina and Tempest Henning's chapter "My Body as a Witness: Bodily Testimony and Epistemic Injustice" in the book *Applied Epistemology* (2021) serves as one of the main theoretical lenses for my research. They highlight the role played by the body in bringing about testimonial acts in order to highlight the epistemic injustice. Their discussion is particularly limited to black people. Although my research is neither related to epistemic injustice directly, nor is it concerned about the issues of race, I have adapted their theoretical insight to highlight the role of the female body to act as a witness and consequently a site to record the bodily testimony of the capitalist and psychological impacts of the pandemic.

Their analysis consists of three parts: the importance of bodily testimony, the method of giving bodily testimony, and thirdly the use of bodily testimony to bring about the subsequent change. Primarily, they define testimony as "a communicative act with informational content that is either intended by the communicator or reasonably ascribed by the audience" (Medina and Henning 173). In other words, testimony for them comprises an expressive articulation that has an elucidative intent. Although the theorization on witnessing and testimony is limited to the verbal expression of trauma or happening, Medina and Henning underline the possibility of articulation beyond the verbal level. They further accentuate, "While the philosophical literature on testimony often restricts testimonial acts to illocutionary speech acts, there are definitions of testimony that are broad enough so as to include communicative acts of all sorts, verbal or not" (Medina and Henning 173). It is for this reason that instead of using the term verbal acts they ascribe communicative acts to the phenomenon of testimony or witnessing because they believe that testimony is possible outside language and verbal acts.

Since testimony can exist beyond verbalization, it opens room for other forms of communication, which in this case is bodily testimony. They contend, "the body can be communicatively significant not only in modulating testimonial acts but also in constituting testimonial acts so that the body of the communicator can function as a vehicle or expressive medium of testimony and become a source of knowledge acquisition in its own right" (Medina and Henning 175). This shows that the body not only possesses the controlling influence on the testimony itself, but it also has the potential to express a situation that is otherwise unexpressed. Based on this premise,

my research analyzes the body as a medium that witnesses and testifies to the traumas of the pandemic.

The second aspect of their theorization is the method of bodily testimony. Picking up on Miranda Fricker's theorization on epistemic injustice, they describe the role of the body as a witness to the two kinds of epistemic injustices; hermeneutical and testimonial. However, Medina and Henning's point of dissent from Fricker is that Fricker only limits her analysis to the verbal instances of testimony. Conversely, Medina and Henning stress that even if the victims cannot express their happenings in words, they can always express their issues through their bodies. Whether the issue is testimonial or hermeneutical injustice, the body can express the inexpressible.

They further claim that the communicative potential of testimony lies in "the context of communication, the embodied positionality of the communicator, and the receptivity of the addressee(s) or audience" (Medina and Henning 175). In this regard, testimonial injustice arises when there is a lack of testimonial intelligibility because of the witness's positionality. On the other hand, hermeneutical injustice arises when the victim him/ herself is unaware of the ill happenings around him/her. They argue:

A testifier who uses her body in this way to express a communicable content and a performative force can be marginalized when her bodily gestures and facial expressions are not taken seriously and given credence... amount to a case of testimonial injustice. But if the testifier's bodily expression is not even understood or recognized as containing any content, then the epistemic marginalization operates at a different level—at the level of intelligibility—and might qualify as a case of hermeneutical injustice. (Medina and Henning 176)

As I have highlighted earlier, my research does not focus on the issue of epistemic injustice directly. However, Medina and Henning's theorization on epistemic injustice can be adapted to study the precarity of the protagonists in the selected novels.

The protagonist in the first novel, *The Fell*, faces the issue of lack of testimonial credibility, as the people around her are unable to understand her reaction to the pandemic. Not only her son, but she is unwilling to pay heed to her body's testimonial evidence against the pandemic. As a result, her body manifests her precarity through bodily harm. On the other hand, the protagonist in the second novel

Burntcoat faces a lack of testimonial intelligibility. She is suffering from a kind of pain she cannot comprehend. Her undecipherable, yet piercing pain reflects itself in her sexual relationship with her partner during the pandemic.

Thus, the protagonists of the two novels reflect the detrimental effects of the pandemic through bodily testimony. Medina and Henning further argue, “Our expressive capacity to protest exceeds the words available to us” and reflect through various “corporeal schemas” (177). For them, the corporeal schemas, in their analysis, are limited to gestures that have a testimonial significance. However, my research uses their conjecture to understand female corporeality in its role as a witness and a record of testimony through body language that is not only limited to the facial gestures but the body’s response to the various psycho-social stimuli of the pandemic.

3.22 Precarity

Once the role of the body to act as a witness to the pandemic is understood, it is imperative to delineate the specific demographics of individuals that my research considers as its focal point. Although COVID-19 appears as a global phenomenon that affects all the masses, certain bodies are affected more than others. In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic has discriminatory ramifications, as certain population is more vulnerable than other. To scrutinize the differential treatment of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, my research delimits its study of pandemic trauma, through the bodily testimony to precarious bodies, the second umbrella theoretical aspect.

Precarity is a situation marked by uncertainty and insecurity. As Judith Butler states that “one’s life is always in some sense in the hands of the others” (*Frames of War* 14). This shows that the human body is always dependent on external factors which account for its precariousness. Butler further states, “The ‘being’ of life is itself constituted through selective means; as a result, we cannot refer to this ‘being’ outside of the operations of power, and we must make more precise the specific mechanisms of power through which life is produced” (*Frames of War* 1). Considering Butler’s views, the human body is to be understood in terms of its dependency on infrastructure. Thus, Butler’s profound insistence on the inveterate tendency of human existence to rely on external factors highlights the precariousness of life.

Despite Butler’s insistence that all human bodies are somehow linked to power structures, it is crucial to understand that some bodies inevitably surface as

more dependent than others. In other words, some bodies are more precarious than others. For this purpose, she comes up with two terms, precariousness, and precarity. Although these two terms are closely related, the difference between the two terms is important to understand the discriminatory treatment that women undergo due to the pandemic. Therefore, the following part of this section is dedicated to an understanding of precariousness and precarity.

For Butler, precariousness is the existential dilemma of the human race. She herself says, “The more or less existential conception of ‘precariousness’ is thus linked with a more specifically political notion of ‘precarity’” (*Frames of War* 3). This definition makes it clear that the phenomenon of precariousness is linked to human vulnerability by virtue of its existence, while the phenomenon of precarity understands human vulnerability in tandem with power structures. While defining precariousness, Butler states:

Lives are by definition precarious: they can be expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed. In some sense, this is a feature of all life, and there is no thinking of life that is not precarious-except, of course, in fantasy, and in military fantasies in particular (*Frames of War* 25).

This means that human life, owing to its dependency on social institutions and power structure, its deterministic qualities, and the perpetual fear of its collapse, is precarious in nature. In this regard, it will not be wrong to say “of all life that it is precarious” (*Frames of War* 23). Since the human body is entwined with social institutions and power dynamics, Butler’s profound analysis helps us to recognize the precariousness of human life. The deterministic aspects of existence, coupled with the ever-present threat of its collapse, underscore the precariousness of human existence.

However, power structures affect certain populations more than others. She states, “Bodies come into being and cease to be: as physically persistent organisms, they are subject to incursions and to illnesses that jeopardize the possibility of persisting at all” (*Frames of War* 30). There is no doubt that with reference to the pandemic, the general vulnerability of the human body is quite eminent. However, the extent of vulnerability is differentially distributed among the masses because of the power structure. This alludes to Butler’s concept of precarity which acknowledges the uneven distribution of vulnerability among humankind.

As I have explained earlier, the human body is linked to the power structure. While theorizing the issue of vulnerability, Butler “challenges the dominant ontological understanding of embodied subjects” by foregrounding the dependency of the human body on “infrastructure”, which she takes as “environment, social relations, and networks of support and sustenance” (“Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance” 21). It is for this reason “to be a body is to be exposed to social crafting and form, and that is what makes the ontology of the body a social ontology” (*Frames of War* 3). This highlights the normative aspect of human existence and also stresses that human lives are dependent on the power structures for their existence.

Before understanding the concept of precarity, two terms need attention. Regarding human existence, Butler comes up with two terms recognition and apprehension. For Butler, recognition is a “stronger term”, whereas apprehension is “less precise, since it can imply marking, registering, acknowledging without full cognition” (*Frames of War* 4-5). Since human existence is normative in nature, the bodies that exist outside the normative discourse are differentially treated. Such bodies are ‘living, but [they are] not a life’ (*Frames of War* 8). Such bodies exist outside “the frame furnished by the norm” and as a result, their “ontology cannot be secured” (*Frames of War* 8). Butler is of the view that if a being exists outside the normative phase, it may be apprehended as living but it is not recognized as life.

This differential treatment of the bodies that exist outside the normative frames alludes to the concept of precarity. Unlike precariousness, the concept of precarity for Butler is more political. She says:

Precarity designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. Such populations are at heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection. Precarity also characterizes that politically induced condition of maximized precariousness for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence who often have no other option than to appeal to the very state from which they need protection. (*Frames of War* 25-26)

Although the COVID-19 pandemic is a human calamity, certain populations are more susceptible to its inimical effects. Since my research focuses on the traumatic

repercussions of COVID-19 on the female population, the concept of precarity is more useful.

As Butler says, “the shared condition of precariousness leads not to reciprocal recognition, but to a specific exploitation of targeted populations, of lives that are not quite lives cast as ‘destructible’ and ‘ungrievable’” (*Frames of War* 31). Drawing on Butler’s understanding of precarity, my research studies the effects of COVID-19 on precarious bodies, that is, bodies that exist outside the realm of the dominant understanding of the embodied subject. In this regard, my research reads female bodies in the selected texts as precarious bodies.

Although Butler uses her theoretical insights on precarity to highlight the issues of war, she also links her theory to biopolitics. She says, “These debates would have to be linked with new trends in biomedicalization and new modes for administering life, as well as new perspectives in biology that link the bios of the human with that of the animal” (*Frames of War* 16). By situating her theorization within the field of biopolitics will help to understand “how ‘life’ itself is being defined and regenerated” (*Frames of War* 16). She further states that “such paths of inquiry would be necessary to situate the discourse of life within the sphere of biopolitics and of biomedicalization more specifically” (*Frames of War* 17). Although the reference to biopolitics is quite brief, it bespeaks the contextual malleability of Butler’s theorization. By drawing the parallels between two disparate fields, Butler stresses the adaptability of her theoretical insight. Therefore, in my research, I use her theoretical insights to study a medical phenomenon and intend to highlight the precarity of female bodies during the pandemic.

As per Butler, power structures propagate the phenomenon of precarity through certain frames. Literally speaking, a frame is a rigid structure that aims to enclose something. Butler writes, “We cannot easily recognize life outside the frames in which it is given, and those frames not only structure how we come to know and identify life but constitute sustaining conditions for those very lives” (*Frames of War* 23-24). In other words, frames are the power structures that control, monitor, and regulate human beings. She further says, “Just as the ‘matter’ of bodies cannot appear without a shaping and animating form, neither can the ‘matter’ of war appear without a conditioning and facilitating form or frame” (*Frames of War* 29). In other words, by necessitating a shaping element for physical bodies and wars, Butler posits that wars

require certain influences called frames that account for their existence and promulgation.

In my research, I study the precarity of female bodies regarding two frames, social implications of capitalism, and psychology. While Butler's analysis of precarity is linked to the phenomenon of wars, I adapt her theoretical insight to study female precarity concerning the pandemic. I also use other theorists as secondary lenses to support my claims. The understanding of precarity regarding this research can also be drawn from Silvia Federici's conception of mechanized bodies. I refer to her two texts, i.e., *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism* (2020) and *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004).

Federici underlines the role of the capitalistic system in mechanizing the bodies. She suggests that the body undergoes the process of mechanization that accounts for "the destruction of its autonomy and creativity, and no account of our psychological and social life should ignore this reality" (Federici 83). Sarah Moss's protagonist in the novel *The Fell*, appears as the mechanized body, who because of her capitalistic preoccupations and her responsibilities of being a single mother, manifests the capitalistic overtones, in her reaction towards the lockdown situation.

With reference to psychology, the concept of the suffering body is to be explored in Sarah Hall's novel *Burntcoat* in conjunction with Peter Fifield's theorization of pain and suffering. The idea of the "suffering body" is given by Stan Van Hooft (179). According to Hooft, a body that fails to fulfill one of its internal functions is said to be suffering (190). However, to get a clearer understanding of the concept of pain, I also use Peter Fifield's theorization of pain. While working on pain and the body, Peter Fifield in his essay, "The Body, Pain and Violence" (2015) presents pain as an elusive concept that "would take in both bodily suffering associated with harm, but also certain experiences less clearly attached to the body such as grief or guilt" (117). He further explains pain as "a highly intricate composite of material and non-material factors, including genetic predisposition, personal and cultural education, cause and severity" (Fifield 117). Since the protagonist in Hall's novel seems to be suffering from psychological tension, her suffering body accounts for her precarity.

My research thus studies the precarity of the female body from the social aspect of capitalism and at the psychological levels by exploring mechanized and suffering bodies in the chosen texts.

3.23 Collective Bodily Testimony

COVID-19 being a bodily phenomenon demands a corporeal record of its ramifications. This alludes to the conception of collective bodily testimony. The last part of Jose Medina and Tempest Henning's chapter is dedicated to the concept of collective bodily testimony. This corporeal record of pandemic trauma in the form of collective bodily testimony is important in highlighting the importance of the body in the politics associated with and determined by the pandemic. These testimonies act as "powerful critical tools for resisting epistemic oppression and for creating communicative solidarity against epistemic marginalization and epistemic injustice" (Medina and Henning 188). Moreover, such an embodied testimony also becomes the vociferous representative of the narratives that are otherwise occluded from the metanarratives associated with such an event. In this regard, the record of an embodied collective testimony of the adversarial effects of the coronavirus pandemic is important in tracing the true historiography of the pandemic.

The following flowchart summarizes the theoretical framework for this research. This research uses Jose Medina and Tempest Henning's conception of bodily testimony along with Butler's conception of precarious bodies as the main theoretical lenses, which form the basic premise to trace the embodied testimony of pandemic trauma. Within precarity, certain supporting theoretical lenses are referred to. These supporting lenses include Sylvia Federici's concept of mechanized bodies and theorizing about suffering bodies by Peter Fifiield and Stan Van Hooft. The precarity of female bodies concerning social implications of capitalism and psychology along with the tendency of a body to act as a witness to pandemic trauma help in formulating the collective bodily testimony of COVID-19.

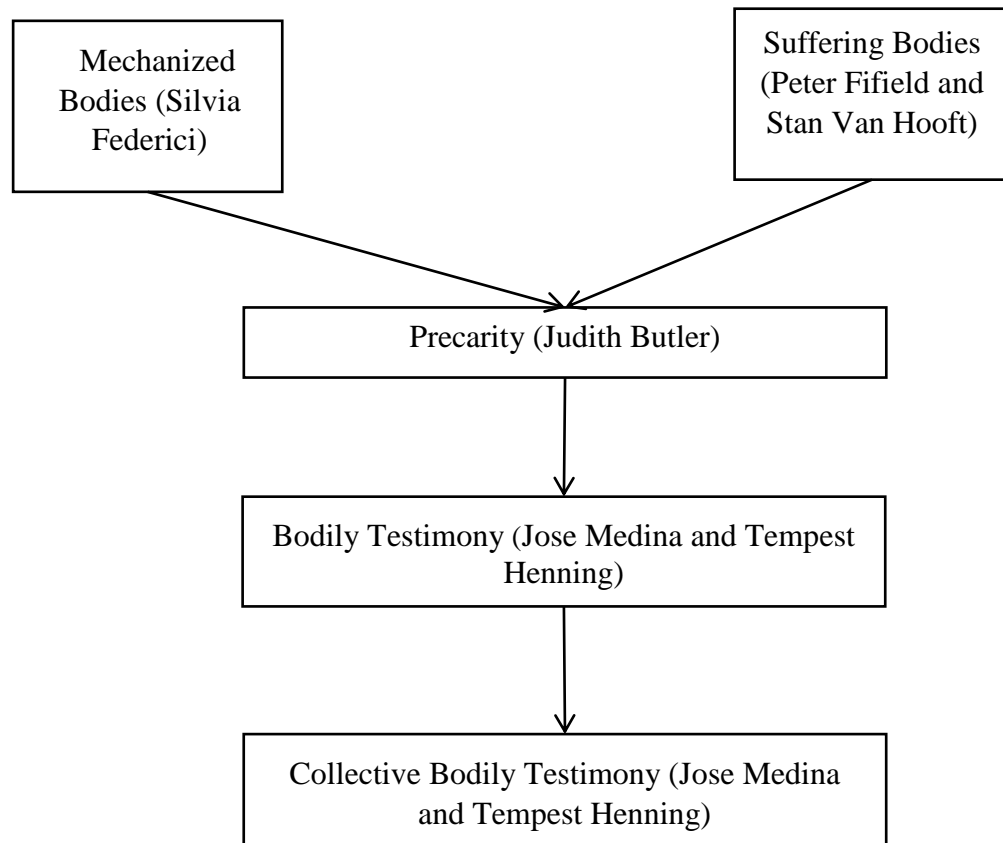


Figure 1: Flowchart of Theoretical Framework

3.3 Research Methods

The research mainly uses textual analysis as the primary research method. While extrapolating textual analysis as a research method, Catherine Belsey in her essay “Textual Analysis as a Research Method” (2013) says that her “contention will be that textual analysis is indispensable to research in cultural criticism” (160). Since this research also falls under the broader category of cultural criticism, so it deploys textual analysis as the primary research method to meet the research objectives. Belsey explains textual analysis “as a research method [that] involves a close encounter with the work itself, an examination of the details without bringing to them more presuppositions than we can help” (Belsey 160). In other words, Belsey stresses the importance of focusing on the texts to carry out research.

However, in stressing the importance of the text itself, Belsey does not ignore the importance of knowledge outside the text as she says, “interpretation always involves extra-textual knowledge” (163). This means that, unlike close reading, textual analysis despite giving primary focus to the text also relies on extra-textual

resources to strengthen the analysis central to one's research. Based on this approach, the current research explores the precarity of female bodies at the capitalistic, and psychological levels to provide a broader picture of the trauma associated with the pandemic.

To strengthen my claim, my research also refers to quantitative data occasionally. The quantitative data is collected from various sources including newspapers, websites, surveys, and official statistics. The rationale behind the use of quantitative data along with textual analysis is to substantiate my argument with quantitative data. This quantitative data supplements the selected texts for this study and also rules out any inherent bias that may be seen in the texts of the two novels, if any. As pointed out by Denzin, "the bias inherent in any particular data source, investigators, and particular method will be canceled out when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators, and methods" (14). Therefore, the major focus of my research is the qualitative analysis of the selected texts, substantiated with quantitative data when needed. Thus, the reference to quantitative data contributes in providing an objective picture of the research.

3.4 Conclusion

In a nutshell, in this chapter, I have outlined and elucidated the research methodology used in my thesis. Firstly, I have outlined my theoretical framework that uses Jose Medina and Tempest Henning's conception of bodily testimony along with Judith Butler's idea of precarity, as the primary theories to read the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic for women. Furthermore, I have also delineated my supporting lenses to read the effects of the pandemic with reference to the social implications of capitalism and psychology. These lenses include Silvia Federici's theorization on the mechanization of the body because of the sociological impacts of capitalism, and Stan Van Hooft and Peter Fifield's theorization on suffering bodies. The reason for choosing such a dense theoretical framework is the lack of academic scholarship on various perspectives of the COVID-19 pandemic. So, in order to understand the complete picture of the various effects of the pandemic, I must refer to various theorists to create a framework that provides a corporeal reading of female precarity in the selected COVID-19 pandemic literature.

Finally, I have explained the research methods to carry out my research. I

have used textual analysis as the main research method to delve deeply into the research questions with occasional use of quantitative data to strengthen my claims. The following chapters of the thesis include the analysis of the selected texts in light of the research methodology laid in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

SINGLE MOTHERHOOD AS DOUBLE PANDEMIC: A STUDY OF MECHANIZED BODY IN SARAH MOSS'S *THE FELL*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter studies female precarity in the times of corona, by keeping in view the social aspects of capitalistic considerations. I will study the detrimental effects of the capitalistic system on female corporeality as observed during the pandemic. In this regard, Silvia Federici's theorization and discussion on the mechanization of a body in her book *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism* (2020) and *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004) is important and is serving as the supporting theoretical lens in this chapter. Finally, I will explain the role of the protagonist's body as a witness to the pandemic trauma through the phenomenon of bodily harm.

The selected novel is the story of a woman, Kate, who is locked inside her house with her 16-year-old son Matt during the pandemic. Kate is a single mother who has the financial responsibility of raising her son singlehandedly. The story revolves around Kate's attitude towards the lockdown, where she feels anxious and perturbed. She is observed doing various meager tasks that reflect her anxiousness. The story reaches its climax when Kate decides to breach the lockdown restrictions and go for a walk on the fell (a type of small mountain). During her voyage, Kate meets an accident and gets injured. The following parts of this chapter include a detailed scrutiny of the effects of capitalism on Kate's body that account for her precarity during the pandemic, along with a discussion on the role of Kate's body in recording the bodily testimony of the pandemic.

Before exploring the contribution of the capitalistic system with reference to female precarity, it is important to note that I use these terms purely in sociological terms. As I have already highlighted in the literature review, despite emerging as a concept in the backdrop of neoliberalism, the concept of precarity, in this research, is deployed in its sociological context as propounded by Judith Butler. Likewise, when I

study female precarity with reference to capitalism, I only include the sociological implications of capitalism as part of my analysis.

Capitalism is said to have debilitating effects on the ways of life. It has stressed, underlined, and glorified the concept of overburdened subjects. The work culture is mechanized to the extent that the boundaries between humans and machines are almost blurred. These blurred boundaries have reconfigured human embodiment, where human bodies are reduced to machines. It is said that capitalism has always “force[d] people to work at the service of others... and restructure[d] the entire process of social reproduction, remolding our relation not only to work but also to our sense of identity” (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 77). Thus, one can say that capitalism has tailored the ways of life to suit its exploitative tendencies.

Although capitalism has affected all humans alike, women have been the main victims of capitalistic exploitation. They have been subjected to double jeopardy along with “a double process of mechanization” (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 14). Although at face value, the capitalistic system seems to provide an opportunity to gain economic independence, which in the view of feminists like Betty Friedan appears as the main source of female emancipation. However, just as Friedan had to retract her earlier insistence on the economic independence of women in her book *Feminine Mystique* (1963), by providing a counterargument in her later book *The Second Stage* (1981), where “she wished to rescue [working women] from the hardships of the so-called double day” (Tong 44). In a similar fashion, Federici stresses that in the garb of economic independence, women are “paying a high price for the relative autonomy [they] have gained” because irrespective of the economic position they have acquired in the outside world, “the domestic work does not disappear” (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 36). Consequently, women end up “constantly worrying, constantly feeling rushed, anxious, or guilty, especially for not having enough time with the children” (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 37). Thus, capitalism affects women more than men.

In addition to this, capitalism has also waged a war against the female body. When studying the detrimental effects of capitalism, it is important to put the body at the center of the discussion, for, capitalistic exploitation owes a lot to corporeal existence. While discussing the effects of capitalism on female body, Federici propounds that “the body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory

has been for male waged workers: the primary ground of their exploitation and resistance, as the female body has been appropriated by the state and men and forced to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labor” (*Caliban and the Witch* 16). In other words, the female body acts as a slate where the capitalistic exploitation can mark its existence. In this regard, “the body can be for women both a source of identity and at the same time a prison” (*Caliban and the Witch* 16). Considering this argument, it can be said that capitalistic exploitation and corporeal existence go hand in hand and the former cannot exist without the latter.

Capitalism has mechanized the female body. As I have discussed earlier in this chapter that capitalism extends its exploitative tendencies by taking the body as the main point of its action. It is one of the utmost endeavors of capitalism to turn “the mechanization of the workers’ bodies into a scientific project, through the fragmentation and atomization of tasks, the elimination of any decisional element from the work process, and, above all, the stripping of the work itself from any knowledge and motivational factor” (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 12). The lack of motivational factor dashes the edifice of human existence to the ground and consequently “we are prepared to accept a world that transforms body parts into commodities for a market” (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 123). Kate's character seems to be a mirror reflecting these capitalistic overtones prevalent in society.

Sarah Moss's *The Fell* is conspicuous of such capitalistic ethos in the form of Kate's character. Kate is a single mother who has social and financial responsibilities because of her role as a mother. Consequently, she is reduced to a mechanized body whose only purpose is to provide for her family. She cannot assume to exist outside her role as a single mother. Her responsibilities as a mother overpower her individuality resulting in the mechanization of her body. In other words, Kate's maternal responsibilities mingle with her corporeality, resulting in the mechanization of her body.

Kate's mechanization is exacerbated due to the pandemic. During the pandemic, Kate is subjected to increased mechanization as COVID-19 aggravated the precarity of women. The situation is worse for women like Kate who are single mothers and have the entire responsibility of bringing up their children on their own. A study by UN Women shows “Women have done 29% more childcare per week than men during the pandemic, based on data from 16 countries” (“COVID-19: Rebuilding

for Resilience” n.p.). Another research shows that the average time spent on childcare increased from 26 hours per week to 31 hours during the pandemic (*Whose Time to Care?* 5). Likewise, a study on single mothers in Israel shows that “changes since the pandemic outbreak – worries about employment, reduction in income and children – contributed significantly to SRH [self-rated health] and symptoms of depression and anxiety: the greater the worries, the poorer the SRH and the higher the levels of psychological distress” (Soskolne and Debby 1628). A research by Pew Research Centre Analysis states that “the share of unpartnered mothers who are employed and at work has fallen more precipitously than among other parents” (Barroso and Kochhar n.p.). They showed that since the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, as compared to the 76.1% employment rate of single mothers in September 2019, only “67.4% of unpartnered mothers with children younger than 18 at home were working, employed and on the job” in September 2020 (Barroso and Kochhar n.p.). Another research states that 80% of all Australian female businesses owned by mothers and with pandemic restrictions... [resulted] into mothers sacrificing time on their businesses” (Bowie n.p.). It is for this reason, Brendie Kerdick states that COVID-19 is “the death of the working mother” (n.p.). These statistics bespeak the precarity of women in the times of corona. Therefore, to understand Kate’s precarity due to her mechanization in the times of corona, I borrow the concepts of Silvia Federici, who has given a remarkable commentary on the mechanization of human life and its tedious existence.

In the following parts of this chapter, I will discuss the deleterious effects of the pandemic on Kate’s body, in tandem with capitalism, that account for her precarity. In addition to this, I will discuss the role of Kate’s body in recording the embodied testimony of the pandemic through the phenomenon of bodily harm. Thus, the following parts of the discussion can be summarized:

- Mechanization of Kate’s body in the pandemic
- Kate and bodily testimony

4.2 Mechanization of Kate’s Body in the Pandemic

The capitalistic system promulgates the work culture that foregrounds the necessity of busy schedules. It is reiterated via various policies and social setups to such an extent that such culture is naturalized. As a result, the opportunity for a break

feels like a burden on one's sanity and one feels incarcerated instead of feeling relieved. To elaborate on this aspect of capitalism, I explain various aspects of Kate's mechanization by using Federici's theorization.

Capitalism glorifies the overburdened subjects by blurring the boundaries between humans and machines. The obsession of capitalism with automatism is problematic not because "the machines are taking over, but also that we are becoming like machines" (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 18). As a result, "our loss of identity and powerlessness is further intensified by the computerization and automation of work that promote highly mechanical, militaristic, dehumanizing types of behavior, in which the person is reduced to just a component of a broader mechanical system" (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 84). This aspect of capitalistic work culture has inimical effects not only socially, but also psychologically and corporeally.

With the government's obduracy in quelling the movements and activities of the masses as part of the nationwide policy regarding COVID-19, the protagonist seems to be at war with these policies because she has to provide for her family in any case. To add fuel to the fire, she is also a single mother who is adept at taking everything into her own hands. As a result, she is mechanized to an extent that the leisure that country-wide lockdowns provide, feels like a thorn in her side. Even the free time that she can use as a source of recreation or rejuvenation, feels like a burden on her existence. Her obsession to prove her utility during her leisure time is a reflection of her capitalistic preoccupations because capitalism operates through a culture that ensures efficiency and increased productivity. Being a capitalistic subject, Kate feels an innate pressure to prove her utility. Thus, capitalism pushes individuals to prove their utility even when there is no apparent reason to prove it.

This insistence of capitalism on efficiency and productivity creates a culture of overwork. Through capitalism humans "are prepared to accept a world that transforms body parts into commodities for a market" (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 123). This culture refers to a goal-oriented and competitive environment where people run a rat race in order to outdo others. Consequently, the leisure they are provided with turns out to be a source of anxiety and frustration because the people are accustomed to busy or overburdened work culture. Kate suffers from similar anxiety pertaining to the free time she is provided due to the lockdown.

Due to her overindulgence in her responsibilities, she is mechanized to the extent that the free time, which the lockdown provides her, appears claustrophobic for her. She is seen doing unimportant activities just to seem productive and efficient. Moss writes, “She looks around: clearing out, again, getting rid of stuff she can’t bear to see any more, things that make her too sad” (Moss 21). Her obsession with cleanliness in one place manifests her boredom; on the other hand, it reflects her futile effort to appear productive and someone who has not lost utility. As it is said earlier in the novel, “A Tidy House is the Sign of an Empty Mind”, so Kate’s engrossment in cleanliness and de-cluttering to a maddening extent reflects her empty-mindedness (Moss 10). The point here to highlight is that the feeling of empty-mindedness reflects her engrossment in capitalistic work culture.

Kate upholds the societal perceptions that denounce household chores as an inferior kind of work. Marxist feminists have argued for a long time that household chore is to be considered an active form of work. However, since “gender is the result of a long process of disciplining and that it is maintained not simply through the imposition of ‘norms’ but through the organization of work, the division of labor, the setting up of differentiated labor markets, and the organization of the family, sexuality, and domestic work”, so domestic labor is often denounced as an inferior form of work (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 46). Likewise, Kate’s capitalistic inclinations do not leave any room for her to accept the household chores as a productive form of labor, and therefore she finds it a hard pill to swallow. It is for this reason that she categorizes the tidiness of a house or indulgence in cleanliness as a sign of an empty mind.

The second biggest flaw of capitalism is that it has fostered the concept of productivity and efficiency to the extent that people tend to look for these phenomena even in their leisure time. Due to the body’s mechanization, leisure which is supposed to serve as a source to get a break from the tedious and monotonous routines, ultimately turns out to be a space that is to be utilized for some productive purpose. Federici propounds, “Automatism, however, has also been the product of a work-life of infinite repetition, a life of ‘No Exit,’ like the nine-to-five in a factory or office, where even the holiday breaks become mechanized and routine, due to their time constraints and predictability” (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 12). Kate’s character reflects these undertones of a mechanized body.

Kate seems to be doing this herculean task of proving her utility to her capitalistic self during her leisure time. It is for this reason that sometimes she seems to be doing gardening and sometimes cleaning. These all activities appear as an effort on her part to prove that despite the closure of the institutes and the restriction on movements, she is doing work that has some productivity and utility. It is said, “she’ll be in the garden, must have managed to go out there and get on with something instead of wandering in and out the way she has the last few days” (Moss 7). Here, the act of gardening does not appear as her effort to satiate her aesthetic sense nor does it appear as reflexive of her love towards nature. Instead, it appears as her effort to prove her productivity.

Likewise, she also tries to engage in other activities as well just to prove her productivity in the capitalistic environment. It is said, “she should make something, she thinks, that would probably help. She started a scarf with some wool that Kiran gave her but the idea of sitting still and poking needles into tiny loops makes her shudder and anyway it’s already wonky and has holes. Baking” (Moss 28). In simple words, Kate feels obliged that she has to work. She cannot put a full stop to her mechanized routine and enjoy the few days of leisure that are bestowed upon her. Therefore, she keeps on thinking of different ways to utilize her free time. Even in her hobbies, she is looking for productivity. The very reason that “the idea of sitting still and poking needles into tiny loops makes her shudder” (Moss 28) shows how much she is mired in the grueling task of proving her productivity and efficiency. Thus, leisure time for Kate is nothing but a space that she is compelled to utilize for productive chores.

Kate is in awe of the freedom of the outside world. She seems to be a patient with Stockholm syndrome (a condition in which you are drawn toward one’s captor inadvertently). For her, the grind of the capitalistic world was so enchanting that she feels throttled in its absence.

She wishes sometimes you could just sign a disclaimer, like a Do Not Resuscitate order, promising that if you get sick you won’t go to hospital, won’t make any demands or expect any help, and in exchange you could take your own risks, decide how much you want to stay alive and at what cost to your sanity, but of course that’s not how it works, it’s not that the government care if you feel ill or die cheaply at home. (Moss 30)

This shows that she is under the influence of capitalism to the extent that she is willing to prioritize the grind of the work culture over her own life.

While “for most women, working outside the home means to be imprisoned in jobs that destroy their bodies and minds” (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 37), Kate’s *idée fixe* with the outside world is emblematic of her capitalistic mindset. She should have taken the leisure that came with the lockdown as an opportunity to get a break from the monotonous and daily grind of the capitalistic world. Thus, she is inclined towards the outside world.

An argument here could be that a person’s obsession with going out can be an attempt on his/ her part to break free from the shackles of the capitalistic system. However, Kate only wants to go out for walks, etc. to become more productive and to provide for her son. She finds this sort of going out liberating because of capitalistic motivations. She herself says, “The point is that single parents should stay alive if only to earn the money, not that she's earning enough money, and if walking a few more minutes, another mile or so, over the darkening hill makes it easier to stay alive, what harm does it do?” (Moss 52).

Here, it is crucial to consider the dynamics of Kate’s life. As I have highlighted earlier, Kate is a single mother who has a responsibility towards her child. In her case, she does not want to go out to take a breath in the fresh air. Instead, she has capitalistic motivations behind her well-being. So in Kate’s case, going out cannot be understood with reference to her attempt at embracing freedom. Rather, it can be argued that her actions are predominantly driven by a desire to enhance her prospects for capitalistic gains. In other words, her motivations are directed toward pursuance of economic benefits rather than seeking personal liberation.

On the other hand, her son Matt, instead of worrying about his mother’s safety, is more concerned about the monetary repercussions of her mother’s breach of lockdown protocol. He thinks,

Use mountain rescue for hunting criminals? There’s no way Mum can afford the fine, isn’t it like twenty grand or something, she doesn’t earn that much in a year, what if she goes to prison, how will someone who can’t even stay in her own house, who needs to be out the hills every day no matter the weather, survive prison?” (Moss 69)

In simple words, he is unwilling to understand the psychological and emotional turmoil of his mother. Instead of empathizing with his mother, he thinks, “Isn’t everyone distressed these days (Moss 69). He turns to a generalist approach that serves to marginalize the individual miseries. He further says,

It was stupid of her to go out, she could have waited, couldn’t she, another week, kept skipping and digging the garden and leaving her yoga mat all over the sitting room, plenty of people don’t go for walks from one month to the next, and if she was going to go for a walk the least she could have done was to tell him. (Moss 90)

Her son’s inability to empathize and understand the dilemma of his mother is reflexive of Kate’s precarity, where her own son is unable to view her outside her role as a provider. He says, “That’s what you do, isn’t it, that’s what people do, you don’t just walk out on your family” (Moss 54). Thus, Matt refuses to understand the psychological and emotional standing of his mother and sees her as a provider.

Matt’s refusal to empathize with his mother adds to her precarity and reduces her existence to a mere supplier. Federici comments that “Women, in capitalist development, have suffered a double process of mechanization. Besides being subjected to the discipline of work, paid and unpaid, in plantations, factories, and homes, they have been expropriated from their bodies and turned into sexual objects and breeding machines” (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 14). Viewing Kate’s body with reference to her son’s attitude towards her secret venture to the mountains also reflects the capitalistic ethos because Kate’s existence is reduced to her maternal responsibilities.

In conclusion, Kate’s body is mechanized through the intersection of capitalism, the pandemic, and her maternal responsibilities. This mechanization is reflected in Kate’s attitude toward leisure time and also in her son’s inability to understand her position. Consequently, Kate’s body is deprived of its human essence and it is reduced to the role of a provider, which contributes towards her precarity.

4.3 Kate and Bodily Testimony

Kate’s body has been the victim of capitalistic exploitation owing to her role as a single mother. Her torment is augmented due to the pandemic when the country-wide lockdowns have an incarcerating influence upon her. Apart from being

mechanized, her body also turns out to be a site where capitalistic exploitation marks its existence, which consequently helps in recording the bodily testimony of the pandemic. Federici highlights, “bodies are also texts on which power regimes have written their prescriptions” (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 53). So the record of Kate’s precarity because of capitalistic mechanization is manifested in the form of bodily testimony. This bodily testimony is reflected in the form of bodily harm. So, the second sociological aspect of capitalism that I will try to unearth in this chapter is bodily harm.

The over-insistence of capitalism on productivity has created unsafe working conditions. The workers are under constant pressure to provide better results. Their main focus is their productivity. They are more inclined to produce better and more efficient results. As a result, the workers are forced to work under circumstances that put their safety in jeopardy. Since the focus of my research is the body, so I will focus on the embodied aspect of harm induced by unsafe working conditions endorsed in a capitalistic system.

The last few chapters of the novel when Kate breaches the lockdown restrictions and decides to go for a walk, are standing evidence of the claim that capitalism forces people to adopt an attitude that prioritizes their utility over their well-being. Kate’s accident at the hills and instead of seeking help, her obduracy to set things right on her own bespeaks her capitalistic preoccupations. Even with her injury, she wants to go on. This obstinate behavior, along with her not seeking any sort of help has a capitalistic drive as the main catalyst. She says, “if I go a few metres enough times it will be a lot of metres and maybe I’ll be able to get home before someone catches me out here, breaking quarantine, going out on the hills alone and late in the day and without a phone at the arse end of the year, doing a remarkably good impression of someone rather stupid” (Moss 84). It manifests her obstinacy to rectify things despite her misery. She tells herself, “Hush now, no point in that, there’ll be time enough for recrimination. Get down the mountain and then worry about the other problems” (Moss 84). In other words, Kate is only concerned about getting home. She does not want to think about other problems because for her the bigger problem is to get back home and in order to avoid the fine imposed on her because of breaking the protocol of the quarantine.

Despite the injuries that she has got, she refuses to stop and continues her sojourn. After a short rest, she says, “Time to set off” (Moss 84). Instead of worrying about her health and condition, she thinks about the fine that will be imposed upon her because of the breach of COVID-19 SOPs. At one place in the novel, Moss is also critical of Kate’s actions and says,

How much is the fine, anyway, though however much it is she can’t afford it and she’d rather have an untreated fracture than risk prison, even more stupid to end up in prison because you couldn’t bear being locked up at home than to go get yourself into trouble on the fells when you should know better, when you’re leaving your son – this isn’t going to help. (Moss 85)

Here, Kate’s existence is reduced to a monetary transaction, and instead of prioritizing her mental and physical well-being, her choices are measured in monetary terms.

This means that whether it is her son, or she herself, she is imprisoned in the thought process of not looking at her well-being but the monetary dent that may incur on account of her expedition to go out for a walk. Instead of developing an understanding of her rash choice and giving her empathy, she is judged for her unwise and ill-considered decision for not weighing the pros and cons of her actions. She herself muses, “If you’d just stayed at home the way you were told none of this would have happened. And of course, it’s broken, why else do you think it’s not working” (Moss 83). Thus, Kate’s experiences exemplify the dehumanizing effects of capitalism.

Her capitalistic preoccupations also reflect themselves in the form of her continual persistence. Despite her physical pain, she is not willing to give up on her journey and, she continues her struggle. Under the influence of this mechanistic approach, in a way she even tortures herself and says, “The important thing is not to stop, not to go to sleep” (Moss 80). Instead of realizing the full implications of her continued expedition on the mountain, she tries to reason with herself that it is not even a mountain and that she should be able to complete her walk. As she says, “I need to keep moving. And I haven’t ended up and it’s not, by the way, technically a mountain” (Moss 87). This excerpt shows the mechanization of Kate to an extent where she equates her existence with that of a machine. Just as a machine is expected to perform irrespective of the circumstances, Kate also compels her body to struggle.

She does not possess the basic insight to recognize the problem and devise mechanisms accordingly. Instead, like a classic capitalistic subject, she pushes herself to be part of the capitalistic grind, which in her case reflects in the form of bodily harm.

The so-called persistence takes the form of her undue obstinacy not to seek external help. She refuses to seek any help even when she desperately needs it. She says, “I don’t want help... I’m helping myself” (Moss 83). Kate’s refusal to take help is the result of the intersection of her identity as a single mother and a capitalistic subject. The idea to prove her utility overpowers her and manifests itself in the form of her obstinacy towards the concept of taking help. In another instance, it is mentioned in the novel, “One more verse, and then she’s going to move again, open the rucksack, because there’s nothing in the first-aid kit that will mend a broken leg and whatever is wrong with the bad arm, but there are some painkillers that might take the edge off...” (Moss 80). This excerpt again reflects Kate’s obstinacy towards external help, where despite knowing about her ailing condition and a fractured leg, she chooses to rely on self-help instead of consulting a doctor.

Similarly, her role as a mother vanquishes her entire identity and she cannot think outside that role. She thinks, “Yes, Matt. Poor Matt. But she’s ruined everything now, hasn’t she, she has no way of paying the fine, no one will lend her any money and quite right too, she’d have no money of repaying it” (Moss 107). Instead of worrying about her well-being, she is only concerned about the repercussions it will unfold for Matt. In other words, the failure to acknowledge Kate as an autonomous individual who may experience feelings of confinement or depression as a consequence of the lockdown adds to her misery. Not only by others but she herself is continuously evaluating her existence through the lens of her maternal role by disregarding her subjective requirements.

This emphasis on her role as a mother as her primary responsibility disregards the multifaceted factors that may contribute to her behavior or choices. She fails to acknowledge that before being a mother, she is an individual who has certain personal needs. This failure to acknowledge her existence outside her maternal responsibilities engenders a continuous sense of guilt in her for prioritizing herself instead of her son. She further curses herself by saying,

I can't go any further. My head hurts too much. You were right, it's a stupid idea. It was stupid of me to come up here and stupid to keep going in the dark and very stupid to fall off the rocks and stupid to crawl away from the rocks and I can't see any options now that are not stupid, and also I'm very sleepy and there is pain. (Moss 108)

Just as the women in the past who chose to exercise their bodily autonomy by evoking their reproductive rights were castigated, likewise Kate is cursed and chided for her choice to prioritize her own body over her son. Sylvia Federici explains this phenomenon when she says, “Through the persecution of ‘witches’, women wishing to control their reproductive capacity were denounced as enemies of children and, in different ways, subjected to a demonization that has continued into the present” (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 12). In a similar fashion, Kate is also judged sometimes by her son and sometimes by her own self for putting her needs above her son’s.

Kate’s peculiar treatment of her body is her way of recording the bodily testimony of her precarity during the pandemic. As Medina and Henning contend that “the bodies of subjects who have been hermeneutically disadvantaged and lack adequate words can convey an understanding of what is occurring, and their bodies can protest and warn others” (177). Indeed, people around her cannot decipher her decisions as a result of the lockdown. However, her body comes to the forefront and manifests her precarity because of capitalism during the pandemic. Her body, through its injuries and pain, reflects the disproportionate ramifications of the pandemic. In the final scene of the novel when she lies in the hospital, the narrator of the novel states, “Quite a lot of pain. She’s on her back, leg uncomfortably suspended. There’s a mask on her face. So, I am alive, she thinks, is not pleased” (Moss 132). In this scene, the description of her physical pain because of her mountain fiasco and the presence of a mask on her face alludes to the co-existence of multiple forms of marginalization in Edith’s life. She is vulnerable not only to the pandemic but her vulnerability also stems from her maternal responsibilities, as reflected through her physical pain in the above scene.

Thus, Kate’s pain and the harm that she has rendered on her body are indicative of her precarity. Her vulnerability owing to her maternal role enmeshed within capitalistic preoccupations compels her to subject her body to harm. Although

her testimony regarding her precarity lacks intelligibility as well as necessary sensibility to understand its dynamics, it is her body that takes the reins and turns out to be a site that records and manifests her precarity. Thus, it is her body that records and registers the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on her through bodily testimony.

The significance of such kind of bodily testimony is to create a basis of solidarity against the trauma otherwise ineffable. This alludes to the concept of collective bodily testimony, as propounded by Medina and Henning in the concluding section of their chapter. According to them, collective bodily testimony creates room for solidarity among those who are affected by representing experiences that may be lost in individual testimonies. In other words, through collective bodily testimony, solidarity is achieved by conveying experiences that might not find adequate representation within individual bodily testimonies. They state,

When a group bears witness to collective patterns or trends, bodily collective testimony seems to have an irreducible supra-individual quality that seems lost in accounts that would simply reduce it to individual instances that can be treated and fully understood in isolation from one another. (Medina and Henning 185)

This means that the traumatic accounts which are lost in the individual testimonies, find manifestation in the collective bodily testimony. Collective bodily testimony, in this regard, propagates awareness regarding the traumatic incident and also unites people based on shared experiences. Thus, the collective bodily testimony not only keeps a record of the injustice but also fosters an awareness of commonality.

Kate's bodily testimony is significant in creating the collective bodily testimony regarding the pandemic. Her individual dilemma because of her role as a mother provides insight into various traumas associated with the pandemic. It propagates the understanding that the pandemic is not merely limited to its physiological implications, but it has impacts on the social life of individuals. In this regard, the collective bodily testimony of the pandemic acts as a beacon of light in the inky room where women like Kate are lost because of the inarticulacy of her trauma. The narrator of the novel in the end refers to the positive side of Kate's bodily testimony by saying,

...From the window at the end of the ward the sun comes out and its light rests on her closed eyes, shows on the screens of her eyelids oxygen in blood, the sweet water dripping through the needle in her hand and surging into the cells of skin and brain, heart and lungs and guts. (Hall 132)

In this context, the sun symbolizes hope and optimism. Despite Kate's miserable situation resulting from her expedition in the fell, which stands as a bodily testimony to her precarity, there remains hope for her. This hope materializes metaphorically through sunlight, illuminating her body. In other words, Moss refers to the positive impact of the bodily testimony, which I have highlighted above. Her personal bodily testimony carves out a space that paves the way for similar testimonies, which form the larger collective bodily testimony. Thus, individual bodily testimonies are important in creating a collective bodily testimony that not only reflects the individual traumas but also serves as a basis of solidarity.

4.4 Conclusion

While navigating through Sarah Moss's novel *The Fell*, I have tried to highlight Kate's precarity by studying the mechanization of her body as a result of capitalism. The protagonist of the novel reflects the hazardous and hostile tendency of capitalism in the form of her mechanization. Her body's mechanization is manifested in her anxiousness during the lockdown. Her inability to rest during the leisure hours which the lockdown provided, is a result of capitalism that glorifies the culture of overwork. Secondly, her inefficacious efforts to prove her utility during the lockdown also reflect her capitalistic preoccupations. Thus, Kate appears to be the embodiment of the capitalistic exploitation of the masses in the form of their mechanization.

Kate's exploitation because of capitalism accounts for her precarity. Butler comments, "To say that life is precarious is to say that the possibility of being sustained relies fundamentally on social and political conditions, and not only on a postulated internal drive to live" (21). This shows that the human body is dependent on external factors for its sustenance. Kate's situation, given her status as a single mother, makes her dependent on the capitalistic system to eke out her living. Her desire to exist stems from her maternal responsibilities. Since she is the sole guardian of her son, she is under the utmost pressure to be available for her son. As a result,

Kate becomes part of the capitalistic system that tends to mechanize her. Her dependency on the capitalistic system results in her precarity.

Kate's body acts as the medium that witnesses and records her precarity during the pandemic. Federici comments, "The body has been our [women's] most powerful means of self-expression and the most vulnerable to abuse. Thus, our bodies are evidence of the pains and joys we have experienced and the struggles we have made" (*Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* 53). Similarly, Kate's body not only reflects the abuse rendered upon her due to capitalistic grind, but it also becomes the medium through which she witnesses and records her precarity in the form of bodily testimony.

Kate's Bodily testimony appears in the form of her bodily harm. Kate's ignorance of her bodily safety and continuous subjection to harm is a gesture that not only reflects her precarity but her attempt to provide a testimony to her differential vulnerability in the times of the pandemic. In this regard, Kate's body becomes a testament to her vulnerability during the pandemic, as evidenced by the harm and pain she endures during her voyage to the fell. Such individual bodily testimony helps in creating the collective bodily testimony of the pandemic. Through Kate's individual bodily testimony, Kate creates a niche that opens room for more testimonies of such kind and serves as a sign of hope by creating a basis of solidarity for victims who are affected by the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic.

In short, studying the effects of COVID-19 in relation to capitalism helps in developing a sensibility towards the victims of the disproportionate treatment of a calamity. By encompassing a more comprehensive understanding of Kate's situation, one that acknowledges the psychological and emotional impact of the lockdown, a greater capacity for empathy towards women like Kate may be fostered. It will help in inculcating a sensibility and empathy towards the precarity of women if one faces a situation similar to a pandemic in the future.

CHAPTER 5

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONUNDRUMS IN THE TIMES OF CORONA: A STUDY OF SUFFERING BODY IN SARAH HALL'S *BURNTCOAT*

5.1 Introduction

COVID-19 is a global pandemic that has not only caused physiological disruptions or compromised the immune response of individuals, but it has also left a mark on people's psychology. In this regard, one cannot limit it to a disease of the respiratory system alone because it has far-reaching implications. It has also affected the psychological functioning of individuals. Therefore, this chapter of the thesis examines the COVID-19 pandemic in a psychological domain.

Sarah Hall's novel, *Burntcoat* (2021) narrates the story of Edith Harkness, a radical artist, who is locked in her studio with her lover Halit, an immigrant chef, when the virus hits the country. Although the novel appears against the backdrop of the pandemic, it has certain allusions to Edith's life before the pandemic, including the trauma of her mother's illness, her debilitating health, and the resultant separation between her parents. These events play a pivotal role in formulating Edith's psychology that dictates her actions and choices during the lockdown.

Hall portrays Edith's precarity through several narrative choices in the novel, as well as Edith's own choices. Hall does not mention COVID-19 directly in the novel. She uses an imaginative virus, named Nova or AG3, whose symptoms corroborate with COVID-19. She says:

It [AG3 virus] was – it is – perfect. Perfectly composed, star-like, and timed for the greatest chaos, for transmission across borders, replication, creating galaxies of itself. Perfectly operating in each victim – the patient incubation, methodical progression through the body, careful removal of the defensive sheath. It ascends, hellishly, erupting inside its host. A fever that becomes critical, so destructive the body might kill itself. The virus dies with the host or survives, retreating deep into the cells, lying dormant. (Hall 126)

The description of AG3 appears to coincide with that of COVID-19. The novel is

published in 2021, a time when the world witnesses a hike in the COVID-19 crisis. Given Nova virus's "star-like" appearance, its rapid transmission through body fluids as it is said that "it was on the drops of fluid, under friable skin, on the breath", and the time period in which the novel is published, i.e. 2021, we can conclude that although Hall does not mention COVID-19 directly, AG3 or Nova virus appears as Hall's fictionalized version of COVID-19 pandemic (Hall 126). Consequently, Hall's novel can be included in the broader category of the COVID-19 pandemic literature.

Returning to the main theme of this chapter, in the case of Edith, her precarity refers to her physical and psychological pain that seems to coalesce. Her physical pain appears when she suffers from the viral infection at the end of the novel, but the factors that drive her to that point emerge from her psychological pain. Consequently, Edith's case appears to be a good starting point to prove the psychological ramifications of the pandemic.

For a body that is already suffering from psychological battles, the COVID-19 pandemic appears as fuel to the fire. A report by the WHO states, "Risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 was higher among people living with mental disorders" (*Mental Health and COVID-19* 5). Another report by the WHO states, "global prevalence of anxiety and depression increased by a massive 25%" in the first year of the pandemic. Another report states that "40.9% of respondents reported at least one adverse mental or behavioral health condition" in the late June of 2021 in the United States (Czeisler et al. n.p.). Likewise, a survey in China reports 35% of the respondents suffer from mental distress and anxiety (Qiu et al. 2.).

However, like other implications, the psychological impacts of COVID-19 are disproportionately distributed. A survey conducted by KFF in 2020 states that during the pandemic, "51% of women and 34% of men" report that "worry or stress related to the pandemic has affected their mental health" (Frederiksen et al. n.p.). Another survey conducted in the US reports that during the pandemic, "One in 10 women reported recurrent disturbing thoughts, compared to 16% of a national sample surveyed using the same measure soon after the September 11, 2001 attacks" (Lindau et al. n.p.). These statistics bespeak the psychological impacts of COVID-19 on women and stress the necessity of studying the pandemic from a psychological perspective.

Therefore, in this chapter, I intend to study the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic from a psychological perspective by taking into account Edith's precarity. In order to understand the precarity of Edith by taking into account the psychological ramifications of COVID-19, the conceptualizations of Peter Fifield and Stan Van Hooft are of paramount importance.

The concept of the suffering body is given by Stan Van Hooft in his essay "The Suffering Body" (2000) published by Sage Publications. While using the Aristotelian model to explain his theory of suffering, Hooft concludes that suffering is the frustration of the internal function of any part of human existence. As highlighted earlier in chapter 2 of the thesis, Aristotle divides human existence into four levels: vegetative level, appetitive level, deliberative level, and contemplative level. According to Hooft, a body is said to be suffering when the *telos* (internal function) of one of these levels is frustrated (see pages 13-14). He says that "suffering requires no specific mental state of distress or discomfort... [but] requires only that what can be reasonably posited as a *telos* of the organism, its inherent goal, be frustrated by the circumstances in which it finds itself" (Hooft 190). In other words, according to Hooft, a body that is unable to achieve its internal goal can be considered as a suffering body. He explains that "any failure on the part of human beings to get what they want produces disappointment which is a form of suffering" (190). Thus, in Hooft's theorization, suffering is linked to frustration caused by the body's inability to accomplish its internal functions.

The edifice of Hooft's theorization on suffering stands on the pedestal of the Aristotelian conception of being, which is based on the different functions of the body. As Aristotle keeps the body at the center of his theorization, Hooft also deals with the concept of suffering in embodied jargon. In this regard, a suffering body can be defined as a body that fails to accomplish the *telos* (internal function) for one of its levels of being, as pointed out by Aristotle.

In addition to understanding the conception of the suffering body, there is another distinction that needs attention. Pain and suffering are complex terms, where the former is often related to embodied feelings of discomfort and distress, while the latter is associated with psychological conundrums that an individual might go through. However, Hooft does not coincide with the strict demarcation between pain and suffering as purely physiological and psychological phenomena respectively. He

expounds that suffering “is a comportment or mode of being which colors the entire being of the person in pain including the pain itself” (Hooft 180). This means that Hooft does not treat pain and suffering as distinct entities. He stresses that “the suffering is not a separable event from the pain. It is not a psychological effect of it, and it is not a cognitive grasp of its significance on the part of the sufferer” (Hooft 180). This means that Hooft believes that pain and suffering cannot be viewed in cause-and-effect terms. For him, pain and suffering are phenomena that need to be studied concerning one another, which in return is a justification for their interchangeable usage throughout this chapter.

Thus, in order to get the full grasp of the subject; pain and suffering need to be studied by simultaneously taking into account their physiology as well as their psychology. In this regard, Hooft says that the dilemma of the philosophical tradition is that it has focused on the vegetative and deliberative parts of our existence, leading to the dualism of body and mind (Hooft 187). This focus on mind and body alone has occurred at the expense of the neglect of emotional/ psychological (appetitive) and spiritual (contemplative) aspects of human existence. The spiritual aspect of being is beyond the scope of the current research, but the psychological aspect is important with reference to the selected novel. Therefore, in this chapter, I will study the psychological repercussions of the pandemic on the human body in Sarah Hall’s novel *Burntcoat*. The analysis in the subsequent parts of this chapter accentuates that psychology is as much a part of human existence as is the corporeal form.

This brings us to the subject of the current chapter which aims to argue that COVID-19 trauma is not merely limited to the corporeal form, but it also tarnishes the psychological well-being of the masses. While studying suffering or pain, it is imperative to bring into account their physiology as well as psychology. In other words, studying pain and suffering in just embodied jargon, while ignoring the context that produces or propagates them, seems quite problematic. Likewise, as abstract as they may appear, pain and suffering are not just limited to an individual’s psychology, but they also have embodied existence. Therefore, pain and suffering need to be studied corporeally as well as psychologically. In this regard, Peter Fifield’s theorization on pain is helpful.

Peter Fifield underlines the necessity of studying pain corporeally, as well as psychologically. While commenting on the elusiveness of pain, he contends that pain

manifests itself in the form of “both bodily suffering associated with harm, but also certain experiences less clearly attached to the body such as grief or guilt” (Fifield 117). Here, Fifield endorses that pain or suffering has embodied manifestations and its roots can also be traced in the psychological background of the individual as well. This shows that the conception of pain is pervious, and is “a highly intricate composite of material and non-material factors, including genetic predisposition, personal and cultural education, cause and severity” (Fifield 117). In simple words, Fifield stresses the dual dimensions of pain, i.e., it has material existence that accounts for its physiology, and it also has its non-material existence that construes in making its psychology. Thus for Fifield “pain is not a mechanical experience with a fixed identity and content” but it is a phenomenon whose roots can be traced in “a range of factors” (129). This range of factors can trace its existence in corporeal manifestations as well as psychological factors.

Stymied by the vicissitudes of life and exhibiting indelible trauma during the pandemic, the plight of the protagonist can be studied by taking her body as a suffering body or the point where psychological effects mark their existence on the physical body. As mentioned earlier, Edith’s suffering has both corporeal as well as psychological forms. To get a complete picture of her suffering, Edith’s body is to be taken as a suffering body that seems to reflect her psychological pain as well as her physiological pain. The following parts of the chapter will trace Edith’s precarity that is percolated in her psychology as well as her body, making her a suffering body.

This chapter has two parts; firstly, it discusses Edith’s precarity and secondly, it discusses Edith and her bodily testimony. Edith’s precarity has multiple layers. Firstly, Edith’s precarity occurs because of her exposure to pain which can be divided into two levels: as an eyewitness and as a firsthand experience of pain. It is important to note that she has firsthand experience of pain, but its roots can be traced to her suffering because of her pain as an eyewitness to her mother’s suffering in yester years of her life. Secondly, she has to grapple with her unresolved trauma because of her exposure to pain. In either case, to understand Edith’s precarity in its complete form as well as the role of her body as a witness to pandemic trauma, the following parts of the chapter include:

- Edith’s precarity as a suffering body
 - a. Edith and her exposure to pain

b. Edith and her unresolved trauma

- Edith and bodily testimony

5.2 Edith's Precarity as a Suffering Body:

Sarah Hall's novel employs a unique technique of second-person narration, which effectively portrays pain as a constant companion to the protagonist, Edith. Edith has been exposed to pain and suffering to such an extent that she and the pain have become one. Consequently, her pain appears as a companion to her throughout the novel. Whether this companion is representative of her own personal pain or an embodiment of death itself, is difficult to discern. However, it is quite conspicuous that this companion is present as a consistent lover with whom Edith engages in ongoing conversations. She says, "Most of my life I'd been waiting; you'd been promised, you'd promised to come... But you were, you are, beyond imagination" (Hall 180). This actively demonstrates that her pain, although undecipherable, has been present with her like a shadow. In another instance, Hall reflects Edith's close relation with pain when she says, "I think, it's because you sensed in me a good partner, a millionth wife, who is loyal, who makes effigies in your honor" (Hall 195). The symbol of the wife signifies her deep connection with her pain. Like marriage, it appears that she and her pain have vowed till death do them part.

By utilizing the second-person perspective, Sarah Hall allows readers to step into Edith's shoes and experience the intimate relationship she shares with this enigmatic companion. The use of you in the novel draws readers into the story, making them active participants in Edith's emotional journey. This narrative choice serves to emphasize the close bond between Edith and her pain, blurring the line between her internal struggles and her external reality. It is reflected in the mutual sincerity of Edith's relationship with pain as this companion clung to her like a loyal lover. She says, "You came up behind me and your arms wrapped like eels round my neck and belly, leeches my small bare chest" (Hall 185). As erotic as it may seem, it is reflexive of her deep connection with pain. The symbols like "eels" and "leeches" serve as poignant representations of pain and anguish entwined within her body.

In addition to this, the companion also appears like her confidante. Throughout the novel, Edith's conversations with her pain or death provide insights into her inner turmoil and the depth of her experiences. These dialogues may reveal

her contemplation of mortality, her grappling with existential questions, or her attempts to find solace and understanding in the face of adversity. The consistent presence of this companion underscores the pervasive nature of pain in Edith's life, shaping her actions, thoughts, and relationships. It is for this reason that her companion appears to be her “only certainty” (Hall 195). This companion is more like a friend to her that supports her through her tough times. She says, “You were beside me in the room, as an adult might stand next to a child who needs assistance, who might lie without meaning to” (Hall 193). This shows her deep connection and understanding of pain.

She has been exposed to pain to the extent that her relationship with pain has become her coping mechanism. She cannot imagine her existence without pain. At an instance, she says, “In the height of the fever you were with me... You took my hand, leaned over me with a canine reek, and said, Stay here” (Hall 185). This conversation reflects Edith's pain as her consoler, solace-giver, and comforter. It also shows the level of connection that Edith shares with her pain. She has such a deep connection with her pain or suffering that she cannot imagine her existence without it and finds solace in its presence.

Since I have established Edith's deep relation with pain, in order to get the complete picture of Edith's precarity, it is imperative to understand the dynamics of Edith's life and past experiences that play a pivotal role in cementing her deep relation with pain. Therefore, in the subsequent parts of this section, I will explain the reasons behind Edith's deep connection with pain.

a. Edith and her Exposure to Pain

The first reason behind Edith's deep connection with pain is her repeated exposure to pain or suffering. Edith is exposed to pain throughout her life in different forms. She is exposed to pain either as an eyewitness or through first-hand experience. This increased exposure to pain results in her deep connection with pain.

Edith's first exposure to pain is through her mother's illness. Edith's mother, Naomi, experiences a hemorrhage that leads to a visible decline in her health. She reflects, “They [doctors] saved her life but could not save her self” (Hall 13). This implies that while Naomi's physical health restores, her mental well-being never fully recovers. Consequently, the impact of Naomi's illness extends beyond her physical

state and has detrimental effects on her social life. Edith describes the situation, stating, “She'd [Naomi] survived catastrophic war inside her brain and reconstruction outside” (Hall 2). The “reconstruction outside” refers to an active reconstruction of the dynamics of her social life (Hall 2). This means that because of her illness, her relationship with the outside world also undergoes a complete transition. Thus, Naomi’s condition has harmful effects on her physical as well as social life.

The outside reconstruction is reflected in Naomi’s marital relationship as well. Her illness takes a toll on her marital relationship, which swiftly deteriorates. Edith shares, “My parents' relation deteriorated rapidly” (Hall 27). It becomes evident that her father is unable to cope with the challenges associated with Naomi's illness. He remarks, “You're not the woman I knew, Naomi, not my wife” (Hall 28). Eventually, using Naomi's illness as an excuse, Edith's father abandons them, leaving them in a state of uncertainty. While he offers Edith the opportunity to accompany him, she steadfastly refuses, unwilling to abandon her mother. This exposure to pain in the form of Naomi’s illness accounts for Edith’s suffering.

Apart from Naomi’s illness, Edith is also exposed to pain through Halit’s illness. Edith herself catches the virus, but before being the victim of the virus, Edith is exposed to the intricacies and the complications of the infection and the pain associated with it through Halit’s suffering. While explaining Halit’s ailing condition because of the virus, Edith expresses her observations, “Even before symptoms truly arrived, there seemed to be profound change, in the way you moved, or sat against the wall, staring down, your eyes dumbly asking for something that couldn’t be given” (Hall 167). The detail with which Edith explains Halit’s suffering reflects her increased exposure to pain. It is also a manifestation of her understanding of pain and suffering. She says, “The process of illness is also the dissolution of the self. This time there was no instant switch, no click of the fingers as the brain spat its mess. Instead, a week of increasing debility” (Hall 167). This shows her deep connection and a clear understanding of the pain or suffering. Long before she catches the virus, she knows how the suffering unfolds once the infection starts. The reason for such a deep and profound understanding of suffering is because of her exposure to pain.

The effect of Edith’s exposure to pain is not just limited to her deep understanding of pain, but it also adds to her misery. Seeing a loved one dying in front of one’s eyes is a very painful experience. Edith passes through this painful

experience alone. The virus augments her helplessness and suffering and she is left alone to see her partner crumbling to dust. She expresses her helplessness stating, “There was nothing I could do but watch you burn, listen to you mumbling and shouting out” (Hall 174). It is very agonizing and excruciating to see one’s loved one sink like a stone and do nothing about it. Edith witnesses such misery and sorrow. Her misery continues till Halit’s death when she has to deal with Halit’s incinerating carcass and observe it deteriorating. She states

When I returned, the body was on its back, one hand on the stomach. Its head was tilted, the mouth was open and the eyes had a faint zincing on their surface. Grey-green skin, as if smoked. It radiated nothingness. The entire energy of the room had reversed. I knelt on the plastic sheet and crawled to where the body lay. I moved the heavy arm and put my head against the wall of the chest, which was cool and silent as mud on the riverbank. (Hall 179)

It is again reflexive of Edith’s insurmountable predicament because of her exposure to pain as an eyewitness. She undergoes an excruciating experience, firstly when Halit catches the virus, and secondly, when he dies and she has to deal with his deteriorating dead body on her own. These experiences add to her suffering.

In addition to this, Edith also has firsthand exposure to the virus. After Halit passes away, Edith starts showing the symptoms of the virus. She suffers from the deadly symptoms and the misery all alone. She states, “To live through it was to be an animal in the river, half-drowned, lolling, caught against the few saving branches (Hall 184). It refers to her precarious state when she is suspended between life and death. While explaining her condition at the onset of the infection, she further states,

The fever came fast, was swifter to peak. I pulled the tarpaulin off the bed and lay on the bare mattress. There was sickness and pain in every inch, every membrane. I woke on the floor, several times, once with my head bleeding profusely. (Hall 184)

In another instance, she explains her miserable situation in the words,

It was not possible to stand before a mirror. I watched light wracking inside the frame, saw a shadow instead of my reflection and a sea of bright particles behind me, like an optical migraine (Hall 187).

These quotations show Edith’s painful experience of the virus itself which in turn

accounts for her suffering. It is important to highlight that Edith's suffering is not limited to the infection alone. The factors which drive Edith to this point of pain, anguish, and distress are deep-rooted and far beyond the symptoms of the viral infection. So, to grasp the full picture of Edith's suffering, it is important to scrutinize those aspects as well.

Thus, the pain of seeing others suffering as well as her own pain because of the infection are one of the reasons behind Edith's deep connection with pain. It is important to highlight that this exposure to pain in the form of others' suffering and her own infection is one aspect of Edith's suffering. The complete picture of her suffering encompasses other aspects as well. Therefore, in order to get the complete picture of Edith's suffering, which is the cause of her precarity, it is crucial to take into account her other circumstances, which are described in the next section

b. Edith and her Unresolved Trauma

Edith's suffering cannot be solely attributed to the exposure to pain, but it also stems from her unresolved trauma because of this exposure to pain. Seeing her mother and her familial life deteriorate because of Naomi's (her mother's) illness, Edith has to fight certain psychological battles throughout her life. As a result, her childhood trauma follows and haunts her throughout her life. She says:

Something intrudes, ego, repetitions of the past, or small hard fears, like deposits in the kidney, the breast. The awareness of suffering or desire, hope, an unprovable beyond. I tried these things, but the noise in my head would not stop, would always begin again, on the plane, on the descent from the clouds, every emotion and failing leaking in through the cracks in the air. The body is a wound, a bell ringing in emergency – life, life, life. (Hall 91)

The above-quoted excerpt from the novel reflects Edith's unresolved trauma that piles up to assume the shape of her psychological demon that keeps on haunting her throughout her life. It is crucial to acknowledge that Hall uses embodied jargon to reflect Edith's suffering like "deposits in the kidney [or] the breast" (91). Although her suffering stems from her psychological distress, it makes physical manifestations because for Edith, "the body is a wound" (Hall 91). To reiterate, Edith's description of her suffering in embodied jargon endorses the original claim that I intend to make throughout the thesis that the body keeps the score for all mishaps around. In addition

to this, it is important to acknowledge that her suffering because of exposure to pain is not only limited to the act itself, but it has the tendency to transcend from its initial occurrence to proliferate into a lingering traumatic experience for her. This lingering traumatic experience, in return, surfaces as a palpable embodied experience.

Not only does Edith's unresolved trauma make physical manifestations, but it also creates a psychological quandary for her. Her psychological dilemma evinces itself as her precociousness and her abandonment issues that constrict in attaining a corporeal existence. Given her mother's medical condition, Edith takes responsibility for her mother Naomi. This aspect makes her quite mature for her age because she has "more responsibility and no guidance" (Hall 31). As a result, she has an early transition to adulthood where she "tried to help, learnt how to make tea, brushed my [her] own hair, put the laundry on" (Hall 28). This aspect imposes a premature sense of responsibility onto her at a very tender age. She is burdened with a task for which she is ill-equipped, creating a lag in her developmental trajectory.

Moreover, her precociousness also reflects in her tendency to take responsibility for others. In the face of her parents' marital turmoil, she steps up to the plate and takes blame for her mother's ill-doings. She says, "Little things she'd (her mother) done that I knew would annoy my father I claimed as my mistake or cleaned up" (Hall 28). This actively manifests Edith's psychological void. At a time when she herself needs someone to take care of her, she takes the reins and attends to her mother, despite the repercussions it has on her well-being.

Secondly, her unresolved trauma leads to her abandonment issues. As her father leaves her mother in the lurch, she feels responsible toward her mother. As a result, she reflects the tendency to prioritize her presence for her mother more than her own well-being. She says, "Some part of me knew I was making a bad choice, selecting someone who did not exist anymore, and chaos" (Hall 29). Despite knowing the price that she has to pay, she chooses to stay with her mother. This manifests her inclination to put the well-being of others above her own well-being and interests, as well as her abandonment issues.

Her abandonment issues also compel her to make some rash choices later in her life. When Halit receives the virus, she does not leave him. She says, "My whole life is lived differently, or is not lived. But you were incapable of abandonment, of

refusing kindness” (158). Despite his illness and the contagiousness of his disease she urges, “You can’t leave. Please, don’t leave” (Hall 158). It is because of her abandonment issues that she does not leave her partner Halit, even when she learns that he has caught the virus. She continues to stay with him and nurses him. This incident shows that she has abandonment issues and her father leaving her mother in a time of crisis or because of her illness has left a void in her personality. It is for this reason that despite the impending danger, she does not give up on Halit. She chooses to stay with him even after knowing the risks of attending Halit. She says, “I’d seen frightening things, my mother’s stapled skull; I thought, I can tend to him, manage, it will be a form of intimacy. We had accelerated through a lifetime’s relationship and now there would be the carer’s duty” (Hall 168). Thus, Edith’s fear of abandonment compels her to assume the duty of caregiver irrespective of the repercussions.

Thus, in this section, I have explained the reason behind Edith’s deep connection with pain. This section discusses Edith’s suffering by explaining how her body acts as a suffering body because of her exposure to pain, as well as her unresolved trauma. These factors contribute to Edith’s suffering which in turn is reflected through her deep connection with pain throughout her life. Her unexplainable connection with pain is quite explained in her conversation with the therapist after the pandemic is over. She says:

The layers were peeled back as I talked. It all made sense, the therapist said. The core of my childhood was pessimistic. To be robbed of a partner only reinforces the notion. In the past year, we had all seen diabolic things and felt the presence of death... I was encouraged to think I’d made you, that in my childhood you were the defining fear, the expectation – my perspective had been set by it, like a painting’s ghost pavement. (Hall 190)

In the above quote, Edith offers a profound introspection of her journey, showcasing the enduring presence of pain as a companion, guide, or perhaps even a confidante. Edith’s deep relation with pain in one place exemplifies her increased exposure to pain, and in another instance also portrays Edith as a materialization of her suffering body, which accounts for her precarity.

Thus, Hall's skillful use of second-person narration effectively explores the complexities of Edith’s suffering and the ways in which she engages with her own

pain. In the above section, I have provided the reasons for this deep connection, which are her exposure to pain and the resulting unresolved trauma because of this exposure. These factors concatenate in making Edith's body a suffering body, where physical and psychological pain coalesces. As a result of this suffering, Edith appears as a materialization of precarity.

5.3 Edith and Bodily Testimony

As I have explained earlier in the chapter, Edith suffers from pain throughout her life. Firstly, she sees her mother deteriorate because of her hemorrhage. Secondly, she sees her boyfriend Halit suffer from the virus and die in front of her eyes. Thirdly, she suffers from the virus herself. She experiences the intricacies of pain and consequently, that pain becomes a part of her, leading to her precarity. As a result, her body turns out to be the site that records her precarity.

My focus is on the bodily testimony of female precarity during the pandemic, so for the sake of understanding, I divide Edith's precarity during the pandemic in the form of bodily testimony into three phases. Just as the Greek tragedy is divided into exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution, Edith's tragedy in the form of her precarity is also manifested in these phases. Since Edith's predicament is not an ideal Greek tragedy, I limit her bodily testimony to 3 phases; exposition, rising action, and falling action. It is important to state that her bodily testimony is manifested in her sexual encounters with her lover Halit. Thus, in the subsequent parts of this chapter, I will explain Edith's bodily testimony with reference to these three phases.

In the initial days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the virus appears indiscernible to the masses. Likewise, Edith's body, in the first phase, is unable to weigh the danger pertinent to the disease. As a bodily testimony to this indiscernibility, her body in this phase acts as a gateway to the virus. It is very evident in the following particular scene of sexual intercourse where Edith views herself in the mirror. After Halit catches the virus, they both share sexual intimacy despite the contagiousness of the infection. While they both engage in a sexual relationship, Edith also views herself in the mirror. She describes:

The woman was still, and then her hands reached up and back into the darkness, her pelvis tipped towards the alignment of desire. She stirred

whatever was behind her, woke it to perform. Its hands moved to cup her breasts, their significant weight and shape, their erect centres... She watched the pleasure, liked what she saw, her own intoxication. She bent forward, and a lover was partially revealed, dressed in shadows, unidentified... The woman in the mirror watched me too. My lover's head was tipping back, exactly the same – its mouth a dark orifice – then falling forward, and righting. We watched each other, copied each other, patrons of the same club. (Hall 166)

The description of the scene is of paramount importance. The lover of the woman she views in the mirror is “dressed in shadows, unidentified” (Hall 165). Moreover, she compares herself with the woman she sees in the mirror as “patrons of the same club” (Hall 165). It is important to note that the intercourse occurs when Halit has caught the virus and is expected to be in quarantine. However, Edith chooses to breach the protocol and engage in a sexual relationship. So Halit in this particular context is the embodiment of pain or suffering itself.

When she has sexual intercourse with Halit, while he has caught the virus, she is acting as a doorway to the feverish world. It is for this reason that when she views herself in the mirror, she addresses her reflection as a woman because she does not recognize this aspect of her being. In addition to this, she calls the reflection of Halit an “unidentified” lover because, in that particular context, Halit is not merely a lover, but he is an incarnation of pain and suffering. Their passionate union signifies Edith's acceptance of pain permeating her corporeality and intertwining with her very existence. So, in this particular scene, she provides a bodily testimony of her suffering through intercourse.

The second phase of the pandemic for Edith is marked by increased anxiety and exposure to pain and this phase is reflected in the increased vigor in the sexual interaction between Halit and Edith. Their sexual relationship exhibits a pronounced degree of intensity. They were “reckless [and] unprotected” (Hall 52). In another instance, she explains the extremity of their sexual relationship, “I remember breathlessness, elation climbing through my body, charging all the nerves, unbearable restraint. The series of breaches, exquisite” (Hall 51). The reason for this noticeable intensity in their intimacy is Edith's psychological battles which are aggravated because of the lockdown situation. It is for this reason that despite knowing the repercussions, they engage in a sexual relationship while Edith was menstruating. She

says, “I didn’t stop you. I didn’t care... there was red smeared on my thighs... Another taboo broken” (Hall 58-59). This refrainment to abide by the societal as well as medical boundaries of a healthy sexual relationship is the classic example of the desperation and anxiety, that the lockdown aggravates for both of them.

In addition to the intensity of their sexual relationship, it appears that Edith and Halit were two bodies and one soul. In an instance she says, “We could only breathe with our mouths held together” (Hall 25). It shows the connection and interdependency in their relationship. It is crucial to highlight that till Halit’s death, Hall uses the second-person pronoun for Halit. As I have already discussed, the use of second-person narration is Hall’s deliberate narrative choice to underline the importance of pain or suffering in Edith’s life. So, Halit in this regard is the embodiment of pain or suffering that happens to be Edith’s companion throughout her life. So when Edith claims that she and Halit cannot breathe without one another, she is representing her connection with pain that has become an integral part of her existence. Since she is experiencing this connection through embodied interaction, it is an example of embodied witnessing.

However, as time progresses, the initial vigor in their mutual relationship diminishes and instead of being a source of pleasure, their sexual encounter becomes a mechanical activity. This marks the third and final phase, which delineates a significant deterioration of Halit’s health leading to his death. Consequently, this phase indicates a diminishment of vitality in their sexual encounters. Describing her sexual encounter, she says that it “became a commitment” (Hall 163). The intimacy loses its sentimental appeal and ends up being a task that is to be accomplished. It is for this reason she says that “The close heat of our [their] bodies was a hothouse for nightmares” (Hall 105). It can be a nightmare because of two reasons. Firstly, Halit carries the virus and secondly, the incarcerating ambiance of the lockdown makes their relationship lose its romantic aura and become more like a mechanical activity. That is why Edith calls it a “commitment” (Hall 163).

The intensity of their mutual sexual relationship reflects their psychological landscape during the lockdown. As the situation in the lockdowns worsens, their sexual intimacy also marches towards the nadir. Such emotionally diminished encounter aptly reflects how psychological struggles find their way into physical encounters. She explains, “It [sexual encounter] seemed perfect, a perfect escape, and

then after a few moments it seemed wrong and unnatural. Something about the position, or the mood, failed... it wasn't working (Hall 163). This ambivalent sexual intimacy is reflexive of the pernicious effects of lockdown on human psychology. No matter how much one intends to suppress the psychological trauma, they always create ways to make physical manifestations. In the case of Edith, her psychological traumas manifest themselves in her profound struggle to restore the intimacy she once shares with Halit. She says, "I desperately wanted to take us back again and lean forward... but the feeling had gone... I hated myself in that moment, the failure of seduction, being stripped of love's means" (Hall 164). In this quote, Edith's poignant desperation to rekindle the passion in their encounters highlights the deep psychological toll that lockdown has taken on her. Despite her utmost efforts, she is so drained because of her psychological preoccupations that she is unable to develop a meaningful sexual relationship. Thus, her sexual intercourse with Halit serves as a bodily testimony to her precarity.

These bodily testimonies become part of collective bodily testimony which becomes the manifestation of the otherwise silenced narratives. According to Medina and Henning, through collective bodily testimony, individuals can convey the essence of their experience through their body, which serves as a medium that transcends the restrictions imposed by the verbal form of communication to embrace a broad spectrum of human communication through bodily expression. Such testimonies not only reflect the unexplainable trauma but also apprise others of experiences that lack linguistic representation. They contend,

In order to foreclose assertions that hermeneutical lacunas utterly prevent an individual from expressing experiences for which there are no words available yet and from alerting others about incidents or phenomena they cannot verbalize. There can be a 'this' or a 'that' which has no name that is singled out and pointed at to others through bodily communication. (Medina and Henning 178)

The collective bodily testimony, in this regard, is crucial in foregrounding the adverse effects of COVID-19 on women. By highlighting the individual bodily testimonies of the harmful effects of the pandemic, a compendium of collective bodily testimony about the pandemic can be created that will help in preparing humans for future calamities. Edith reflects such preparedness for future calamity when she says,

I'll keep the stove going while I can. I know what to expect, at which point to stop it. Before the acute stage, when I'm turned inside out and can't swallow. Before the fever robs all sense. There's a jug of water beside the bed, boxes of pills. Is that cowardice? I'm just trying to proceed without suffering and distress, execute a choice. I'm trying not to look away, to accept my form tending towards its new state, carbon matter, microbes, the flesh expanding and shrinking, beginning to decay. (Hall 207)

This excerpt underlines the fact that Edith's individual bodily testimony of the pandemic has inculcated a sense of preparedness for future distress. This is the power of individual bodily testimonies that they create a collection of collective bodily testimony, which in return helps people to take preemptive measures regarding future calamities.

Thus, the bodily union between Edith and Halit is the bodily testimony of Edith's precarity during the pandemic. The dynamics of their sexual relation reflect Edith's psychological circumstances and conundrums, and in return act as a witness to her precarity. This individual bodily testimony becomes the part of collective bodily testimony that prepares people for future calamities.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have highlighted female precarity with reference to psychology. I have used Stan Van Hooft's conception of the suffering body along with Peter Fifield's theorization on pain to draw a clearer picture of the psychological dilemma of the protagonist. The ailing condition of Edith's mother, followed by her deteriorating familial life, accounts for Edith's psychological battles. Her situation worsens during the pandemic when she is locked up with her partner in her studio. Thus, Edith's psychological battles contribute to her precarity.

According to Butler, human bodies outside the dominant ontological discourse are precarious in nature. Since the human body is normative in nature, so "a living figure outside the norms of life not only becomes the problem to be managed by normativity but seems to be that which normativity is bound to reproduce: it is living, but not a life" (Butler *Frames of War* 8). Given her circumstances which include her mother's illness and her broken family, Edith's life appears to be operating outside the dominant discourse which contributes to her psychological dilemma. As a result,

Edith's psychological standing adds to her vulnerability which is reflected in the form of her emotional as well as physical suffering from the virus, resulting in her precarity.

Edith's body acts as a witness to her indelible pain and suffering. Medina and Henning propound that "gestures and facial expressions carry testimonial force and content that cannot be fully captured in verbal utterances" (176). Edith's pain might not be reflected through her words, but her body and its responses act as a vociferous testimony to her dilemma. In this regard, the sexual relationship between Edith and her partner Halit possesses the testimonial force to reflect and record Edith's precarity during the pandemic.

Thus, in this chapter, I have first explained Edith's precarity by taking her body as a suffering body because of her increased exposure to pain and unresolved psychological trauma. Secondly, I have explained how Edith's body acts as a testimony to the pernicious effects of the pandemic. In this regard, I have explained Edith's bodily testimony concerning her sexual encounters with her partner Halit. Thirdly, I have explained the significance of the individual bodily testimony in creating the collective bodily testimony pertaining to the pandemic that in return prepares people for future calamities.

CONCLUSION

In my thesis, I explained the concept of precarity concerning female bodies during the pandemic. In addition to this, I also highlighted the role the female bodies play to witness and ultimately keep the record of the ramifications of the pandemic as bodily testimony. The capitalistic or psychological issues appear as a backcloth in front of the COVID-19 crisis. However, they are as much responsible for creating the traumatic experience for the masses as much as the virus. Therefore, the overriding goal of my research was to trace various implications of pandemic trauma on human embodiment.

To assemble the capitalistic and psychological implications of the pandemic at a time when even its medical side was under-researched, seemed like a formidable task. However, through my research, I tried to make sense of various traumas associated with the pandemic, hitherto ineffable to human understanding. With COVID-19 in the backdrop, my research ushered a new phase regarding the scholarship on corporeality. Moreover, this insight helped me in coining a whole raft of insights into pandemic studies.

The thesis is divided into 5 chapters. Each chapter in the thesis is self-contained. The first chapter of the thesis provided an introduction to the topic followed by an understanding of the thesis statement, research questions, significance of the study, and the chapter breakdown. The second chapter of the thesis was dedicated to a detailed review of literature about the themes of pandemic, illness and literature, witness theory, body politics, and precarity. This detailed literature review helped me to situate my research within academia and understand the gaps regarding these topics.

Chapter 3 of the thesis explained the research methodology utilized in my research. It highlighted the main theoretical lenses of research which included Jose Medina and Tempest Henning's conception of bodily testimony, and Judith Butler's conception of precarity. To get a clearer picture of precarity concerning the sociological impacts of capitalism and psychology, I utilized the theoretical insights of Silvia Federici for the former, and Stan Van Hooft and Peter Fifield's theorization for the latter. Due to the recent eventfulness of COVID-19, limited scholarship was available during the pandemic. Therefore, to get a better understanding of the

pandemic, I borrowed concepts from different theorists and devised a dense theoretical framework. Furthermore, this chapter also explained the research methods used in my research which included textual analysis as the primary research method with occasional use of quantitative data.

Based on the research methodology explicated in Chapter 3, the next two chapters of the thesis involved an analysis of the selected texts. In Chapter 4, I included a detailed discussion about the precarity of the protagonist in Sarah Moss's novel *The Fell* because of the sociological impacts of capitalism. On the other hand, in chapter 5, I included an analysis of Sarah Hall's novel *Burntcoat* to trace the precarity of the protagonist during the pandemic because of her psychological situation. In these chapters, I tried to expound the research questions in light of my theoretical framework.

My first research question was to inquire about the ways through which the 'female body emerged as a precarious entity during the COVID-19 crisis in the selected texts.' This research question required a deeper insight into the character's situations and backgrounds that qualified them as precarious during the pandemic. In section 4.2, I studied the female precarity in Sarah Moss's *The Fell*, because of the capitalistic system. I read and explained the precarity of the protagonist Kate by taking the theorization of Silvia Federici as my supporting lens. I concluded that Kate's positionality as a single mother contributed to her mechanization, which resulted in her precarity (see section 4.2). Similarly in section 5.2, I studied female precarity because of the psychological dilemma of Edith Harkness in Sarah Hall's *Burntcoat*. For situating my observations on the protagonist's precarity in the theoretical domain, I took the aid of Stan Van Hoft and Peter Fifield's theorizations. I came to the conclusion that the pandemic for women like Edith Harkness, who were already suffering from psychological battles, exacerbated their situation and resulted in their precarity.

The second research question was to understand the ways through which 'the female body witnessed and experienced the hostile consequences of COVID-19.' This research question required a deeper insight into the mechanisms of the characters' bodies involved in registering their precarity in the times of corona as a bodily testimony. In section 4.3, I explained how Kate provided bodily testimony of her precarity through bodily harm. By subjecting her body to a process of harm and

injury, Kate provided an embodied understanding of her precarity. Likewise, in section 5.3, I explained Edith's bodily testimony as reflected in her sexual relationship with her partner.

My third research question intended to explore 'the significance of bodily testimony of COVID-19 for women reflected in the selected pandemic literature.' I explained the significance of individual bodily testimonies with reference to their role in formulating the collective bodily testimony of the pandemic. In Chapter 4, I highlighted that through collective bodily testimony, a sense of solidarity could be created which was a sign of hope for the future (see section 4.3). Additionally, I further explained the significance of the collective bodily testimony in preparing the people to combat future calamities (see section 5.3).

In short, by studying COVID-19 through capitalistic and psychological lenses, I intended to foster awareness that a disease cannot be limited to its physiological implications. I further tried to explain that COVID-19 is not only a medical crisis but it is also a social quandary that needs as much attention as its biomedical side. Furthermore, I stressed the role which such an understanding of the pandemic plays in preparing humanity to combat such medical adversities in the future through a collective bodily testimony. This research also helped in developing a collective bodily testimony about the pandemic that would in return, help in developing a mechanism to cope with the after-effects of the pandemic.

In this regard, my research becomes an important addition in the field of medical humanities. Medical humanities is a burgeoning field in humanities that intends to create the intersection of medicine, healthcare, and the human experience by borrowing perspectives from the humanities, social sciences, and arts. As my research intended to read the COVID-19 pandemic beyond its physiological implications, to include its capitalistic and psychological perspective, it served to provide a human side to the medical phenomenon. By accentuating the social implications of capitalism and psychology for women during the pandemic, my research foregrounded the disproportionate vulnerability directed towards women, which is often ignored in the medical research. Given the contemporariness of the pandemic, there is scarcity of research concerning the pandemic. Consequently, my research becomes a significant addition in the field of medical humanities by pioneering a research on the subject of the COVID-19 pandemic, from capitalistic and

psychological perspective.

The issue with a medical crisis is that it is only limited to its physiological ramifications. The reason I chose to study the pandemic from different perspectives was to highlight the various traumas attached to the pandemic. For every individual, the pandemic unearthed a different kind of trauma. It was important to study those individual testimonies of the pandemic trauma to create a larger collective bodily testimony that would create a basis of solidarity and prepare people for future adversity.

Moreover, I will take the opportunity to clarify certain ambiguities regarding my research. Firstly, the reason I borrowed certain concepts from trauma studies was to highlight the destruction caused by the pandemic. As of now, the number of deaths reported to the WHO because of the pandemic is approximately 7 million (“WHO Coronavirus COVID-19 Dashboard” n.p.). This shows the detrimental effects of the pandemic on humanity. While commenting on the challenges of the pandemic, US President Joe Biden in his inaugural address said, “[COVID-19] has taken as many lives in one year as America lost in all of World War II” (n.p.). The purpose of comparing the death tolls is by no means an attempt to disregard the trauma attached to the World War, but it is an attempt to highlight the necessity to include research on the pandemic and to treat the issues associated with the pandemic as trauma. Elizabeth Outka highlights a similar issue in her research where she compares the trauma related to the First World War and the Spanish Flu by saying:

The way these traumas overlapped often makes it difficult to untangle the effects of one from the other. The pandemic, though, did more than simply intensify the problems the war had started. The virus was both indiscriminant and delocalized, changing both targets and locations. In 1918, women as well as men were in extreme danger, and the domestic space became as deadly as the front lines. The enemy was no longer visible or from a particular nation, but a silent, nonhuman killer, loyal to no country or creed and able to corrupt the body from within. This adversary could move anywhere and attack anyone. Even those appalled by the war could still argue over the worthiness of the cause, but no such political arguments could structure the grief from the pandemic. It’s perhaps no wonder that the anguish went underground. (7)

As I've highlighted earlier, the purpose of comparing wars with pandemics is not to lay a comparison between the two based on their traumatic intensity or to aggrandize the trauma associated with one by disparaging the trauma associated with the other. I have cited this aspect just to underscore the necessity of studying the trauma associated with the pandemic in addition to studying the trauma associated with wars. The concept of trauma is often associated with wars but my thesis argued that the pandemics also play an active part in creating trauma for humanity and they need as much attention as the wars.

Secondly, the reason that I particularly chose female bodies was to highlight the differential treatment which women face. Just as doctors or law enforcement personnel were applauded as front-line workers during the pandemic, women also deserved acknowledgment. They should have been regarded as frontline workers during the pandemic because they were the ones who had to bear the brunt of the pandemic due to their precarity. However, the dilemma is that "few are recognizing, let alone supporting, mothers as frontline workers or acknowledging and appreciating what mothers are managing and accomplishing in their homes under unimaginable circumstances" (O'Reilly and Green 18). In this regard, it was imperative to recognize the struggles of women during the pandemic.

Moreover, women occupy a marginal position in the society. Jose Medina and Tempest Henning have also talked about "testimonial uptake" in their research. According to them, the testimonial injustice is not only limited to the speaker's inability to articulate the trauma but it also extends to the hearer's incapacity to understand that trauma (Medina and Henning 179). In the case of a pandemic, female-related issues were not just limited to the women's inability to express themselves, but they also included the obstinacy of the patriarchal world to accommodate female witnessing. In this regard, my research gave a voice to the otherwise silenced traumas of women.

Thirdly, I particularly used Bultler's concept of precarity as the main theoretical framework because COVID-19 is a pandemic that affected all populations. However, certain populations were more affected than others. While precariousness deals with the general vulnerability that is shared by nearly all individuals by virtue of their existence, Butler's concept of precarity focuses on disproportionate vulnerability, i.e., some populations are more vulnerable than others. In the context of

COVID-19, it is true that all humans are affected by the virus and are in turn vulnerable to it. However, certain populations like old people, women, children, etc. are more affected than others. In order to deal with this differential treatment of COVID-19 towards certain populations, Butler's concept of precarity seemed an apt choice. It was because the concept of precarity acknowledged the existence of differential vulnerabilities.

Finally, there might be an apprehension that my research would lose its relevance later. In the literature review, I highlighted that human history is replete with pandemics. Since human history has many pandemics that have halted human life, there is a possibility that they may repeat themselves. Here, I would further like to explicate the concept by referring to demography. Thomas Malthus in his 1798 essay, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, states that population growth is exponential while the resources or food supplies are linear. He says, "Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio" (Malthus 4). This gap in population growth and subsistence affects the living standards of the individuals.

However, he suggests that through preventive and positive checks the gap between population growth and subsistence can be filled. The positive checks include the intervention of nature in the form of epidemics, floods, and natural disasters that contain the population by increasing the death rate, while the preventive checks include the control of population growth by administering the birth rate through family planning, late marriages, celibacy, etc. As per Malthus, these checks will create ways to contain the exponential population growth, which is often called as Malthusian Trap or Malthusian catastrophe.

Although Malthusian theory lost its relevance in the post-industrial era, certain theoretical underpinnings hold relevance as pandemics can be understood as a positive check to contain population growth. As per the UN's World Population Prospects 2022 report, the world population will reach 8 billion in 2023 (n.p.). In the wake of such exponential population growth, there is a strong likelihood of reoccurrence of pandemics, in a quest to contain the population. Likewise, the historical evidence of the existence of pandemics, provided in section 2.2 of the literature review, suggests that human history is replete with pandemics. So, there is a strong likelihood that they may repeat themselves. Moreover, diseases will continue

to exist as long as the human body exists. Therefore, even if there is no pandemic, my research can be instructive to study any disease beyond its physiology. Even if the era of the COVID-19 pandemic may pass, the diseases will continue to exist in human history for as long as humans exist. In this regard, my research will be instructive to study future diseases, if any, from different perspectives.

Recommendations

Lastly, I would like to highlight the prospects for future research. The dense theoretical framework that I devised for my research offers promising research avenues for exploring various dimensions of female precarity during a pandemic concerning domestic violence, race, post-colonialism, etc. Additionally, the theoretical framework can also be utilized to scrutinize the precarity of groups other than women, who are marginalized because of differentiated vulnerability during the pandemic, which includes racial minorities, immigrants, older population, children etc. Concerning Native American people, Louise Erdrich's novel *The Sentence* (2021) can be used, while to study the precarity of immigrants during the pandemic, Gary Shteyngart's novel *Our Country Friends* (2021) can be an apt choice. This research can advance further studies on the multifaceted impacts of diseases other than the COVID-19 pandemic, on individuals, societies, and healthcare systems. In this way, my research can be seen as expanding the domain of research in medical humanities, particularly concerning literary studies. My research also provides an opportunity to utilize the given theoretical premise in analyzing literary texts dealing with diseases other than COVID-19.

WORKS CITED

- Agamben, Giorgio, and Daniel Heller-Roazen. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. Revised, Zone Books, 2002.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C. "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma." Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. London: University of California Press, Ltd, 2004. 1-30. PDF.
- Amir, Dana. *Bearing Witness to the Witness: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Four Modes of Traumatic Testimony (Psychoanalysis in a New Key Book Series)*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2018.
- Barroso, Amanda, and Rakesh Kochhar. "Amid COVID-19 Recession, Single Mothers Less Likely to Be at Work." *Pew Research Center*, 14 Mar. 2021, www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/11/24/in-the-pandemic-the-share-of-unpartnered-moms-at-work-fell-more-sharply-than-among-other-parents/#:~:text=In%20September%202020%2C%20six%20months%20since%20the%20onset,among%20all%20groups%20of%20parents%2C%20partnered%20or%20not.
- Belsey, Catherine. "Textual Analysis As A Research Method." *Research Methods for English Studies (Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities)*, edited by Gabriele Griffin, 2nd ed., Edinburgh University Press, 2013, pp. 160–79.
- Bettinger-Lopez, Caroline, and Alexandra Bro. "A Double Pandemic: Domestic Violence in the Age of COVID-19." *Gender Based Violence*, May 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/double-pandemic-domestic-violence-age-covid-19>.
- Biden, Joe. *Inaugural Address by President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.* www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/01/20/inaugural-address-by-president-joseph-r-biden-jr. United States of America.
- Bowie, Courtney. "Mother, Wife or Boss? The Impact of COVID-19 on the Modern Woman." *SmartCompany*, June 2020, www.smartcompany.com.au/people-human-resources/impact-on-working-mothers-during-covid-19.
- Butler, Judith. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable? (Radical Thinkers)*. Reprint, Verso, 2016.

- ..., "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance." *Vulnerability in Resistance*, edited by Judith Butler et al., Duke University Press, 2016, pp. 12–27, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11vc78r.6> . Accessed 14 Apr. 2022.
- Camus, Albert. *The Plague*. Translated by Stuart Gilbert, Penguin, 2010.
- Choonara, Joseph. "The Precarious Concept of Precarity." *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 52, no. 3, SAGE Publishing, Aug. 2020, pp. 427–46.
- Coley, David. *Death and the Pearl Maiden: Plague, Poetry, England (Interventions: New Studies Medieval Cult)*. 1st ed., Ohio State University Press, 2019.
- "COVID-19: Rebuilding for Resilience." *UN Women – Headquarters*, 24 July 2023, www.unwomen.org/en/hq-complex-page/covid-19-rebuilding-for-resilience.
- Czeisler, Mark É., et al. "Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, vol. 69, no. 32, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Aug. 2020, pp. 1049–57, doi:10.15585/mmwr.mm6932a1.
- Denzin, Norman. *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2009.
- Federici, Silvia. "With Philosophy, Psychology, and Terror: Transforming Bodies into Labor Power." *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism (Kairos)*, PM Press, 2020, pp. 75–89.
- Felman, Shoshana. "Camus's The Plague, or A Monument to Witnessing." *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, edited by Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, Routledge, 1991, pp. 93–120.
- Fifield, Peter. "The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature." *The Body, Pain and Violence*, edited by David Hillman and Ulrika Maude, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 116–32.
- Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by D.F. Bouchard, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977, pp. 139-164.

- Frederiksen, Brittini, et al. "Women's Experiences with Health Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Findings From the KFF Women's Health Survey." *KFF*, 22 Mar. 2021, www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/womens-experiences-with-health-care-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-findings-from-the-kff-womens-health-survey.
- Garrido, Natalia Flores. "Precarity From a Feminist Perspective: A Note on Three Elements for the Political Struggle." *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 52, no. 3, SAGE Publishing, May 2020, pp. 582–90.
- Gutiérrez-Rodríguez, Encarnación. "The Precarity of Feminisation." *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, vol. 27, no. 2, Springer Science+Business Media, Oct. 2013, pp. 191–202.
- Hall, Sarah. *Burntcoat*. Faber and Faber, 2021.
- Hays, Jo. *Epidemics and Pandemics: Their Impacts On Human History*. ABC-CLIO, 2006.
- Hogg, Emily J. "Introduction." *Precarity in Contemporary Literature and Culture*, edited by Peter Simonsen and Emily J. Hogg, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021, p. 20.
- Hooft, Stan V. "The Suffering Body." *Health*, vol. 4, no. 2, SAGE Publishing, Apr. 2000, pp. 179–195.
- Kendrick, Brandie. "2020 Will Be the Death of the Working Mother." *Scary Mommy*, July 2020, www.scarymommy.com/2020-will-be-the-death-of-the-working-mother.
- Kirsten, Guido. "Studying the Cinema of Precarity." *Precarity in European Film: Depictions and Discourses*, edited by Cuter et al, De Gruyter, 2022, p. 20.
- Laub, Dori. "An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival." *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, edited by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Routledge, 1991, pp. 75–93.
- Lindau, Stacy Tessler, et al. "Change in Health-Related Socioeconomic Risk Factors and Mental Health During the Early Phase of the COVID-19 Pandemic: A National Survey of U.S. Women." *Journal of Women's Health*, vol. 30, no. 4, Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., Apr. 2021, pp. 502–13, doi:10.1089/jwh.2020.8879.

- “Listings of WHO’s Response to COVID-19.” *World Health Organization*, 29 June 2020, <https://www.who.int/news/item/29-06-2020-covidtimeline>.
- Malthus, Thomas. *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. Electronic Scholarly Publishing, 1998.
- Masood, Kinza. *Tracing Cultural Trauma: A Study of Selected Kashmiri Fictional Narratives*. National University of Modern Languages Islamabad, 2022.
- McMillen, Christian. *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)*. Illustrated, Oxford UP, 2016.
- Medina, Jose, and Tempest Henning. “My Body as a Witness: Bodily Testimony and Epistemic Injustice.” *Applied Epistemology (Engaging Philosophy)*, edited by Jennifer Lackey, Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 171–93.
- World Health Organization. *Mental Health and COVID-19: Early Evidence of the Pandemic’s Impact*. World Health Organization, 2022. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep44578>. Accessed 9 Aug. 2023.
- Moss, Sarah. *The Fell*. Pan Macmillan, 2022. EPUB.
- Murphy, Ann. “Witnessing.” *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, edited by Gail Weiss et al., Amsterdam University Press, 2019, pp. 337–43.
- Naeff, Judith. *Precarious Imaginaries of Beirut: A City’s Suspended Now*. Springer International Publishing, 2017.
- Nanthini, S., and Tamara Nair. *COVID-19 and the Impacts on Women*. S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2020. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26875>. Accessed 9 Aug. 2023.
- Oliver, Kelly. “Witnessing.” *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, edited by Gail Weiss et al., Northwestern University Press, 2019, pp. 337–4.
- O’Reilly, Andrea, and Fiona Joy Green, editors. *Mothers, Mothering, and COVID-19: Dispatches from the Pandemic*. Demeter Press, 2021.
- Outka, Elizabeth. *Viral Modernism: The Influenza Pandemic and Interwar Literature*. Amsterdam, Netherlands, Amsterdam UP, 2019.
- Parks, Tim. *Teach Us to Sit Still: A Skeptic’s Search for Health and Healing*. 1st ed., Rodale Books, 2012.

- Purnell, Kandida. *Rethinking the Body in Global Politics: Bodies, Body Politics, and the Body Politic in a Time of Pandemic (Interventions)*. 1st ed., Routledge, 2021.
- Qiu, Jianyin, et al. "A Nationwide Survey of Psychological Distress Among Chinese People in the COVID-19 Epidemic: Implications and Policy Recommendations." *General Psychiatry*, vol. 33, no. 2, BMJ, Mar. 2020, p.2, doi:10.1136/gpsych-2020-100213.
- Soskolne, Varda, and Anat Herbst-Debby. "Health and Psychological Distress Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic for Single Mothers in Israel." *Journal of Family Studies*, Taylor and Francis, Apr. 2022, p. 1628, doi:10.1080/13229400.2022.2068452.
- Standing, Guy. *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011.
- Westley, Hannah. *The Body as Medium and Metaphor*. Rodopi, 2008.
- "WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard." *World Health Organization*, <https://covid19.who.int/>. Accessed 9 Aug. 2023.
- Woolf, Virginia. "On Being Ill." *The New Criterion*, Faber & Gwyver Limited, 1926, pp. 32-45.
- "World Population Prospects 2022: Summary of Results". www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/World-Population-Prospects-2022. Accessed 6 Aug. 2023.
- "Whose Time to Care: Unpaid Care and Domestic Work During COVID-19." *UN Women*, 25 Nov. 2020, data.unwomen.org/publications/whose-time-care-unpaid-care-and-domestic-work-during-covid-19.