

“I WEAR A CROSS AT SCHOOL AND CHURCH,
AND AN ALLAH NECKLACE WHILE PRAYING”:
BECOMING AND DETERRITORIALIZATION IN
SELECTED WORKS BY ZOYA PIRZAD

<https://doi.org/10.31577/aassav.2026.35.1.03>

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With the exception of a few scholarly articles published outside Iran concentrating on its historical, political, and sociological dimensions, the fiction of the Iranian-Armenian female writer Zoya Pirzad has generally situated within the formalistic theories by the academic community inside Iran. Some scholars have attributed the broad readership appeal of Pirzad's fiction to her rendering of the everyday concerns of Iranian women living in a patriarchal society. Others have emphasised Pirzad's portrayal of Armenian people and their lifestyle as the reason behind the wide acclaim given to her works in the 2000s by a public of Muslim readers. The present article, however, rather than interpreting her works, aims to discuss the energies and flows within selected works of the writer through the lens of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. We discuss among others terms such as becoming-woman/ child, nomadism, rhizome, de- and re-territorialisation, in-betweenness, to argue that Pirzad's fiction is a locale for transformations and becomings materialised through women and children. However, Pirzad also provides instances of reterritorialisation in order to make women aware of the regimes of signs which entangle them in the name of freedom. In this perspective, rather than merely targeting the nation's male-oriented ambience, Pirzad's fiction proposes becoming as a possibility to improve the situation of women and children in postrevolutionary Iranian society.

Key words: Zoya Pirzad, becoming-woman/ child, deterritorialisation, nomadism, Gilles Deleuze

*Why not walk on your head, sing with your sinuses, see
through your skin, breathe with your belly.*

—Deleuze & Guattari (1987)

Introduction

The idea for writing this article was triggered by an article entitled *Persian Incursions: The Transnational Dynamics of Persian Literature* written by Nasrin Rahimieh (2011). In that article, concerned with Iran and its literary scene, Rahimieh contends that amidst the pressures and censorship which have always been rampant in the country, “the tropes of migration, mobility, and translation have always been central to Persian literary history” (p. 309). In similar vein, the renowned Iranian-Armenian writer Zoya Pirzad has been regarded by many critics as the first writer in the country to launch a serious investigation of the everyday living conditions of Iranian women. Her works have been read and re-read extensively by a large number of Iranian people, especially during the 2000s, with the publication of her two acclaimed novels *I Will Turn off the Lights* (2001)¹ and *We Get Used to It* (2004)². The common perception of readers regarding Pirzad’s *oeuvre* is that of a smooth and easy-to-grasp style, devoid of any significant highs and lows, avoiding setting any traps to the process of reading. However, it has been noted by critics that in the midst of this perfectly straightforward style, Pirzad portrays the domestic drudgery of Iranian women, their duties, and the responsibility they feel for their families. Pirzad’s narrative is seen as a fundamental, yet tacit, critique of women’s life in their society, a critique which seeks to provoke women to get to know the fixed binaries of their society, respond to them, and experience, at least to some extent, traces of true and free womanhood. *I Will Turn off the Lights* (2001) can be regarded as a starting point where the female protagonist, Clarice, after enduring hardship to assert her presence, is given an opportunity to feel free to be herself without being affected by the demands of those around her. In *We Get Used to It* (2004), however, the female protagonist, Arezoo, has obtained a divorce from her husband, has set aside the restrictions once imposed upon Clarice, and explores new horizons of womanhood, whilst dealing with the problems caused by this newly-attained freedom, and trying to find a way to manage her family.

While the last two novels mentioned were well received by a broad community of readers in the 2000s, her collection of short stories entitled *Three Books*

¹ The original title in Persian reads as *Chiragh-ha ra man khamush Mikunam*. Also, the novel has been translated into English as *Things We Left Unsaid: A Novel* by Franklin Dean Lewis in 2012.

² The original title in Persian reads as *Adat Mikunim*.

(1991)³ seems to have gone unnoticed by academia. This collection consists of twenty-seven short and very short stories under the three headings of "Like All Afternoons", "The Bitter Taste of Persimmon", and "One Day before Easter".⁴ With a few exceptions, most of these stories narrate the tales of female characters who deal with their married lives: for some of them marriage is a hindrance to their ambitions and some of them attempt to retain both ambition and married life; some of them struggle to cling to their married lives, while others remain nostalgic for their deceased husbands. The last three interrelated short stories of the collection under the title of "One Day before Easter", however, narrate the life of an Armenian male character named Edmond living on the shores of the Caspian Sea and later in Tehran, his friendship with a female Muslim classmate, Tahereh, and his marriage, and the problems caused to his family due to the marriage of his daughter to a Muslim boy.

As far as we are concerned with the available academic literature on Pirzad's works, her works have had their academic fans both inside and outside Iran. Scholars concerned with Pirzad in Iran have to a large extent focused on the formal qualities of Pirzad's narratives. Therefore, it could be contended that these scholars have viewed, reviewed, and critiqued her works through the lens of stylistics (Tajalli et al., 2019), feminist stylistics (Nikoubakht et al., 2012), sociology (Bagheri Mazra'eh et al., 2021), narratology (Yasami & Deneshgar, 2023), and aesthetics (Ha'eri & Roudbar Mohammadi, 2013). A number of Iranian scholars outside Iran, however, have been concerned with in-depth qualitative interpretations of Pirzad's works while considering the social, political, historical, religious, and literary context of the country. Gheytnchi (2007), for instance, argues that Pirzad's *I Will Turn off the Lights* satisfies the curiosity of readers, especially those affected by the postrevolutionary totalising ideologies, including censorship within the country, about the private life of the Other, i.e., Clarice, her family, and their Armenian lifestyle, which had been inaccessible to Iranian readers hitherto. Assuming a comparative literature perspective, Rahimieh (2011) reviews a wide span of Persian literary figures, including Hafiz, Rumi, Jamalzadeh, Hedayat, Alavi, Al-e Ahmad, Shariati, and Pirzad. She argues that although the history of Persia has long been affected by barriers safeguarding the nation from external influence from the world, its literature depicts examples of tropes of migration, mobility, and translation which have always been part and parcel of Persian literature. Rahimieh devotes the latter part of her paper to Pirzad's Clarice and her "territorial and linguistic displacement" (p. 307) as an Iranian-Armenian. Her argument also includes Pirzad's collection of stories "One Day before Easter" in

³ The original title in Persian reads as *Seh Ketab*.

⁴ This collection of short stories has been translated into English as *The Space Between Us* by Amy Motlagh in 2014.

which she depicts Tahereh as a girl going back and forth between Muslim and Armenian identities. Concerning Pirzad's *I Will Turn off the Lights* (2001), Yaghooobi's (2019) materialist-feminist reading seems to deem Clarice as suffering from existential angst while arguing that, being entangled in everyday life, Clarice is an "incoherent subject with clashing identities that pull her in different directions" (p. 103) "caught in an intense internal struggle that finds her trying to reconcile her multiple, and conflicting, identities" (p. 104).

With regard to the available literature on Pirzad's selected works, although some of the above-mentioned scholars have considered issues of identity and mobility in her works, it can be averred that no study has ventured a serious reading of her works from the vantage point of Gilles Deleuze's positive view of life, i.e., his ideas on becoming, deterritorialisation, and nomadism, to name a few. Marking Pirzad's *oeuvre* as an example of the Persian literary heritage, this article is an affirmation of Rahimieh (2011) who speaks of "transcultural encounters and clashes" as well as "creative and transformative travels and return journeys" (p. 296) in the literary context of Iran. Holding this view, regardless of the historical, social, and religious context present in Pirzad's works, valuable as they are in their own dimensions, the present article aims to examine the intensities and flows available in a number of characters in Pirzad's selected works. This reading, while focusing on the positive actions as well as productive energies available, attempts to consider how Pirzad's characters, especially females⁵ and children, demonstrate vitality and productiveness while encountering one another, and to what extent they can set off on the road towards becoming. Rather than locating their origins or the outcome of their actions, we focus on what Pirzad's characters produce, i.e., lines of movement, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation, and our outlook is thus in line with Deleuzian thought, which prefers experimentation over interpretation (Deleuze, 2007, p. 49). Thus explained, this article traces the lines of becoming, continuity and vitality in selected works by Pirzad and examines, in addition to considering them as players who are active in the ordinary sense of their life trajectory, the extent to which her characters approach becoming or distance themselves from it.

Becoming-Woman: Travelling to Find a Weapon

The fiction of Zoya Pirzad abounds with females as well as children, and this makes her works a productive locale, especially when it comes to discussions of

⁵ Inspired by the Deleuzian line of thought, we regard movements including feminism and masculinism as mere regimes of signs or ideologies subjecting themselves to images, thus leading us from one sign to yet another.

vitality, newness, and transformation in literature. What is intended by the latter terms is to regard works of literature as locales of interaction, encounter, and productivity, an approach which is far more accessible through women and children. The idea of becoming-woman proposed by Deleuze regards setting aside fixities defined by the western male-centred thought which propagates terms such as individuality or subjectivity. According to Deleuze (1987), for deterritorialization to be achieved, both men and women need to become a woman (p. 278) while "free[ing] up the fixed relations that contain a body all the while exposing to new organizations" (Parr, 2005, p. 67). Pirzad's *oeuvre*, therefore, is no exception. As it has been penned by a female writer, regardless of its social, political, and cultural milieu, a thorough reading, and not interpreting, of its energies and flows may disclose new aspects of her fiction which seem to have been overlooked. The fact, however, that the context of Iran and its influence have been foregrounded in academic research on Pirzad's work is obviously due to the tumultuous situation of the country following the 1979 revolution, the enmity between Iran and the United States, and isolation of the country by the world (Rahimieh, 2011, p. 296), which continue even to date. Needless to say, these figures can also be sources of discontinuity and reterritorialisation, thus giving themselves over to predefined models. As Deleuze (1987) has argued, each deterritorialisation entails reterritorialisations (p. 54), which means that, in our case, women can also be trapped within the signifying regimes of representation.

The possibility for change and becoming-woman can be plainly seen in the character of Danik, partly in "Sea Shells" and more in detail in "White Violets" in various aspects including creativity and nomadism. Here, Danik, the protagonist's co-worker at school, charts the life of a woman who has taken refuge in Tehran from Tabriz, where she has been disparaged, persecuted, and excommunicated by the Armenian community due to her intention to marry a Muslim boy. The reader is presented with an image of creativity on her part from the very first scene where she is to be interviewed by Edmond at school: Here, Mr. Adamian, the school superintendent, who "would love to speak harshly of the simplest matters and concoct educational theories" (Pirzad, 1991, p. 268), summons two boys to the office as they have brawled over a coin. Following the children's accusing each other of lying, Adamian resorts to attributing this fact to their families:

"I have mentioned recurrently that children who accuse each other of lying belong to families ..."

This time Danik interrupted Adamian. She closed her briefcase and asked me: "Do you mind?"

She didn't wait for my reply. She turned to the children: "Where's the coin?" She took the ten Rial coin and put a five Rial coin each in the hands of children: "Go half on it! OK?" (p. 269)

This creativity of Danik's shows to what extent women can be sources of newness as well as management. Here, Pirzad contrasts Danik with the to-be-retired Adamian in order to show that a nomadic character such as her can create novelty, even if she has escaped her hometown. As Deleuze (1987) quotes George Jackson, nomadic characters create lines of escape and enter new horizons in order to come up with new opportunities and to invent new instruments: "I may be running, but I'm looking for a gun as I go" (p. 204). Accordingly, in contrast to Rahimieh's (2011) reading of Danik's escape to Tehran as "self-imposed isolation and exile" (p. 308), Danik's refuge to a new environment is not a renunciation of flows; rather, her travel to this new environment, while leaving behind the codes prescribed by the society, helps her continue her flow without falling into the trap of the present signifying machines. It also needs to be clarified that the notion of nomadism is not confined to physical movement. As Colebrook (2002) has explained, this term refers to "[allowing] thought to wander, to move beyond any recognized ground or home, to create new territories" (p. xxvii). With this regard, it could be argued that Danik is an experimenter of physical, as well as intellectual nomadism, an idea which will be further explained below.

As we read the account of Danik, we find her to be a woman who flees the signifying regimes which ascribe already-made roles to women. We are informed in "White Violets" that Edmond's wife, Martha, is in the habit of picking on Danik: "Your name must go down in history! The first Armenian woman who didn't know how to cook!" (Pirzad, 1991, p. 301) The notion that she does not know how to cook is, however, shattered somewhere near the end of the story when she invites Edmond to dinner at her home: "Danik's dinner table is impeccable" (p. 314). This bears witness to the fact that Danik continually attempts to flee the codes binding her to specific responsibilities. This is not an all-out renunciation of responsibilities, as is understood through the above quotation. In this sense, Pirzad confronts us with a character who takes up the position of in-between, where one is unable to distinguish her role: "without future or past, without memory, which resists the binary machine-woman-becoming which is neither man nor woman" (Deleuze, 2007, p. 26). This type of characterisation makes Danik a still unfathomable character to Edmond, even by the end of the story. This is related to the secret that Danik keeps regarding her escapade from Tabriz and only reveals it to Martha who discloses it to Edmond later: "They have inflicted her with whatever you may think of! She has been kicked! The parish has excommunicated her! Children and adults have spat in her face in streets and alleys!" (p. 306).

Danik's act of hiding this feminine secret from Edmond, while disclosing it to Martha, is an instance of becoming-woman, which hinders it from turning into a fixity. As Deleuze (2007) puts it, "characters and authors always have a little secret, on which the craze for interpretation feeds" (p. 46). Edmond's curiosity to know the secret of Danik can be construed as a tendency to interpret and fathom the

unknowable. Nevertheless, Danik opens up about her secret to Martha within their feminine circle in order to stop it from turning into a fixity. At the end of the story, having been invited to dinner on the eve of Easter, Edmond struggles to question Danik about her past and her avoidance of marriage. This is, however, accompanied by Danik questioning him about his life following the death of Martha and his accusing Alenoush (his daughter) of her death. The revelation of Edmond's secret arouses a feeling of irritation in him: "Why did she mention it? I had not mentioned it to anybody. I didn't even dare thinking of it" (Pirzad, 1991, p. 317). This shows that keeping secrets by males leads to their turning into fixed ideas, thus becoming unbearable to them. In contrast, Danik becomes a secret herself where she touches upon secrets while disallowing them to be interpreted. Moreover, the very fact that women can be secretive while hiding nothing (Deleuze, 1987, p. 289) intensifies the idea of becoming-woman, which is also related to the idea of affect.

As a woman who clearly sets off on the road to becoming-woman and imperceptibility, Danik accomplishes her mission to the end in "White Violets" by triggering a profound change in a male person, i.e., Edmond. While having proved that she acts as a nomadic character whose actions deem her imperceptible and unfathomable, Danik helps Edmond set aside his prejudices and misjudgements by means of affects. As Deleuze recurrently touched upon the idea of affect, it is induced from him that as human beings interact with one another, certain affects are created. Holland (2013) postulates that affects are "the forces a body harbours to act and to be affected by other bodies and actions" (p. 107). In this regard, as is seen in "White Violets", the very interaction of the two bodies, i.e., Danik and Edmond's, can be seen, especially following the death of Martha. Although this very interaction of bodies is significant, it can be forceful as long as it leads to new horizons. Here, instead of exacerbating the shattered relationship of Edmond and his daughter, Danik encourages Edmond to discard his misconceptions about Alenoush and love her as she is: "Isn't it enough for Alenoush to atone for four years?" (Pirzad, 1991, p. 316). Through this interaction, Edmond seems to undergo a substantial change, and this displays the power of affect. In this regard, the interaction of these two bodies becomes visible until they can affect each other to the extent that they can join each other in order to "[compose] a more powerful body" (Deleuze, 1987, p. 257). As Edmond mentions regarding Danik's pep talk, "Danik kept talking the whole time. I heard some of her words and missed some of them" (p. 318). This is also an example of the rhizomatic affect which she brings to Edmond through her feminine small talk. It is in this way that a female character can act as a force of deterritorialisation, thus contributing to a male character setting aside his prejudices and entering new territories.

Another female character who is an embodiment of becoming in the fiction of Pirzad is the unnamed narrator of the short story "Mismatched Socks". The story relates the story of a woman caught up in everyday life. With the deterioration of

her psychological condition, her husband compels her to visit a therapist. At the end of the story, presumably under the effect of drugs prescribed by a therapist, the narrator hints at her situation where she is no longer bound by the restrictions of her predecessor. As can be seen at the outset, she speaks of her wishful thinking: "Some mornings, I wanted to wake up wearing an unironed night gown and mismatched socks, watching a cartoon" (Pirzad, 1991, p. 75). As is shown throughout the story, her struggle for deterritorialisation is constantly blocked. For instance, in the waiting room of the therapist, when she complains to her husband that "the place is like a mortuary" or "I hate nylons", she is met with his reply, "Calm down, honey" (p. 78). As is seen, this is the suppression of the free flow of will and desire imposed by society. The possibility for change and becoming-woman, however, is created when she thinks: "Why would I have to wear nylons when I hate them and remain silent about it?" (p. 78) At the end of the story, the female narrator experiences, at least through a dream, the true sense of desire which is not bound by any signifying regimes of her milieu:

I don't know for how long my therapist and I sit watching Walt Disney cartoons ... I no longer comb my hair, and he has grown his beard long. I have thrown away all my nylons, and he never requires me to sort out his socks. He always wears mismatched socks. (p. 80)

Here, she sets out on the process of becoming whereby she becomes a "Body without Organs". As Message (2005) explains, a BwO can be regarded as an antidote to the organised and articulate organism, thus offering "an alternative mode of being or experience" (p. 33). Therefore, it could be said that a BwO is a body which is not socially organised and is thus fluid. In this regard, the narrator imagines herself in a situation where she is free of the regimes which limit her to pre-defined roles. As narrated by her, she is forced to visit a therapist by her husband. However, the very act of visiting a therapist, as Deleuze (1987) insists, is merely categorising humans within specific territories, which is a suppression of true desire, hence an act of reterritorialisation. As opposed to this, Deleuze embraces free flows of desire where one is not bound to the prescriptions offered by the society. Here, as the narrator says, she has freed her body from the organisation required by her husband and the society, thus experimenting with becoming-woman.

Pirzad's *Three Books* (1991) is replete with female characters who aim to go beyond the feminine in its standard form. Thus explained, they might experiment with what is restricted to the realm of masculine. "A Pair of Socks" is another short story portraying a woman bordering on behaviour expected of men. What she performs is an example of courage and dauntlessness mostly represented to be practiced on the part of men. Here, the female character, called "the woman", persuades her husband against his will to leave home to buy a pair of socks for

a party that night. Her husband warns her that perhaps the gendarmes are after a criminal outside. As he leaves home, the woman lets in the young man wanted by the police in cars whose sound of brakes is heard. Pirzad's description of the situation in which the woman finds herself in is significant:

The woman reached out her hand, took hold of the young man's hand, pulled him inside, and closed the door ... She pushed the young man inside the basement, went inside herself, and closed the door ... The key turned and the door locked. She tilted against the door, closed her eyes, and remembered to exhale. (Pirzad, 1991, p. 63)

The very act of letting in a wanted person by a woman constitutes an act of both courage and mercifulness. Here, Pirzad presents us with a woman who becomes a woman by moving beyond what is expected of her. The courage manifested by her is intermingled with feminine attentiveness as well as kindheartedness. Moreover, it is accompanied by an instantaneous decision on her part without considering the outcome of the situation. This can be seen more theoretically through Deleuze's idea of "in-betweenness" where we find her both courageous and kindhearted – two traits mostly ascribed to males and females, respectively. With this regard, we may argue that the woman is experimenting with becoming as she is acting both as feminine and masculine. This is the ideal of Deleuze's thought in which women and men are freed from the prefabricated demeanour attributed to them by the established organisations of society. As Deleuze (2007) maintains, "[b]ecomings are not phenomena of imitation or assimilation, but of a double capture, of non-parallel evolution, of nuptials between two reigns" (p. 2). At first glance, the act of bravery on the part of Pirzad's woman can inspire admiration in those dissatisfied by the exclusion of women in society. However, reading more deeply, it can be argued that the very instantaneous act of the woman situates her within the realm of becoming where we *qua* readers can no longer regard her as either a woman or a man. Thus explained, we need to regard her as both man AND woman. The conjunction "AND" is a focal point in Deleuze's philosophy, where one is left in a liminal zone, rendering them indiscernible and unlocalisable. This conjunction is anathema to the verb "to be" (Deleuze, 1987, p. 25), thus espousing becoming, change, and inventiveness.

Becoming-Child: Our Maternal Home was not Hers

Children are the *sine qua non* of Pirzad's fiction, and this has been thoroughly exhibited through the characters of Armineh and Arsineh and their playmate, Emily, in *I Will Turn off the Lights* (2001). On the surface their behaviour seems simply

childish, but deep down it is replete with deep philosophical resonances. As a female novelist, Pirzad gives abundant space to the dialogues of these girls, thus presenting them as creative, energetic, and imaginative children. As an example, while the adults disagree about the botanical name of the three trees in the yard, Armineh and Arsineh develop their own primitive terminology to name them:

Regardless of these disagreements, the twins would call the first tree Armineh's and the second one Arsineh's tree ... The name of the third tree was dependent on whom was the intimate friend of the twins ... It's been a while since the third tree has been called Emily. (pp. 31–32)

To mention yet another example, Pirzad has shown to what extent, apart from exhibiting liveliness and imaginativeness which run contrary to the matter-of-fact world of adults, children are untouched by the signifying regimes of sign regarding black-skinnedness: "More than other dolls, the twins were attentive to Tom so that 'the poor thing would not think we loved him less because of his skin colour'" (pp. 37–38).

In addition to the above case, it can be argued that the prime example of Pirzad's dexterity regarding the creation of frisky, energetic, and innovative children is the character of Tahereh in "Sour Cherry Pits". Here, Edmond remembers his friendship with his twelve-year-old friend and classmate, Tahereh, who is the daughter of the Muslim janitor of the Armenian school where he is a student. Being the daughter of the school's janitor and also being accommodated on the first floor of the school building, Tahereh persuades the school board to enrol her in the Armenian school. This favour is repaid as she proves herself to be a remarkable student who outperforms all her classmates: "I wish Tahereh were there to help me. Her Armenian composition, like all other subjects, was better than everyone's in the class" (pp. 238–239).

Here, by being exposed to a story dominated by child characters, the term becoming-child becomes more noticeable. As Deleuze pointed out repeatedly regarding the term becoming, to become a child does not call for one's imitating childish gestures or assimilating their behaviour (Deleuze, 2007, p. 2). In this regard, it can be inferred that becoming-child refers to freeing oneself from the bonds which have always suppressed childish confrontation with the new, thus having it labelled as stupid, untamed, and uncivilised. Similarly, Holland (2013) has stressed "becoming-child does not mean regressing to one's childhood at all... it means accessing or retrieving a behavioural repertoire most of which has been selected out or repressed in the process of reaching mature (molar) adulthood" (p. 108). With regard to our discussion of Pirzad's fiction and children, what makes "Sour Cherry Pits" more notable is the presence of two child characters, i.e., Edmond and Tahereh, different in gender and personality, making it quite palpable

for us to what extent they experiment with childishness. In other words, the childishness practised by Tahereh varies from that of Edmond's, the former characterised by movement and the latter by immobility. Here, the creation of Tahereh is suggestive of forgetfulness, bordering on liminal zones, in-betweenness, and rhizomatic movements, which will be delineated in what follows.

One of Tahereh's characteristics which accentuates her childishness is her propensity to forget. Forgetting is the very cornerstone of children's behaviour, as opposed to adults' tending to remember and conjure up memories of the past. Endowed with reason and rationality, adults are usually known to reflect on memories of the past, which clearly returns them to their safe territories (Deleuze, 1987, p. 294). However, childishness is accompanied by instantaneity and immediacy, plotting friendship here, sulking about something there, and reconciling the matter elsewhere. As is seen in "Sour Cherry Pits", Tahereh teases Edmond in the history class, making him an object of mockery. Following this, however, soon she seems to forget what she has done: "When the bell rang, Tahereh came to me, as if nothing had happened" (Pirzad, 1991, p. 231). Instead of forming a bond, against his will, Edmond keeps sulking, a habit which he has acquired from his father's rationale of the idea of male pride: "I tried to think of my father's word which he repeated in my ears: 'Men live with their pride'... I remembered my mother's words: 'Men call their stupid actions pride'" (p. 231). While Edmond's father teaches his son to preserve his pride, Tahereh's feminine disposition runs contrary to the constructs of the world of males: "Let's reconcile the matter, for Christ's sake!" (p. 232). What can be seen here on the part of Tahereh is an example of experimenting with becoming-child. What she is experimenting with is opposed to the child-rearing method of Edmond's father. What the latter does is to remind his son of the same old masculine traits which have long banished childish playfulness at the cost of growing up as a normal, obedient subject. This, nevertheless, deprives Edmond of experiencing childishness *per se*. Conversely, what Tahereh is experimenting with is true becoming, which breeds continual change, allowing her to expel memories and rationalities and to plot deterritorialisation. It also needs to be noted that the memorylessness mentioned above is practised by Tahereh, a matter which brings to mind the very idea of becoming-girl.

As discussed previously, Deleuze admits that all becomings start with becoming-woman since "animals, women, and girls are considered 'lower' forms of life" (Holland, 2013, p. 107). In line with our discussion here, an example which is in stark contrast to the fluidity of Tahereh, as a girl, is what Edmond's grandmother says with regard to a childhood friend of hers named Anahid who died at the age of twelve. Here, in order to rectify Edmond's hypochondriac obsession about dying at the age of twelve, Edmond's grandmother consoles her male grandson by saying: "Listen Edmond! Anahid contracted meningitis and passed away because she was a girl. Boys never come down with meningitis" (Pirzad, 1991, p. 228).

This illustration bears witness to the suppression of girlhood and its playfulness and how it has been passed on throughout history. Another example which corroborates the male view of women and girls as lower forms is Edmond's father's contention regarding men crying: "My father would mock me if he saw me crying. He would always say: 'Men never cry'" (p. 235). These are but a few examples showcased in Pirzad's fiction which prove the importance of Deleuze's insistence on the idea of becoming-woman/girl: "The girl is the first victim, but she must also serve as an example and a trap" (Deleuze, 1987, p. 276). In the midst of this male-centred ambience, we have Tahereh endowed with energy and creativity. Rather than merely surrendering herself to the normative service of society, Tahereh constantly shatters the false norms ascribed to girlhood. The girlhood experienced by Tahereh can be considered an example of becoming-girl as what she experiments with is an annulment of normal growth and assimilation into the norms of the society. As will be discussed below, she is a true creature of becoming as she borders on liminal zones through her rhizomatic movements, thus escaping recognisable territories.

Deleuze's notion of the rhizome is in direct connection with Tahereh's movements as well as style of life. Deleuze puts forward the concept of rhizome in order to contrast it with the notion of the "arboreal" which refers to the Aristotelian hierarchical, tree-like mode of thought. In contrast, the rhizome spreads horizontally, rather than vertically, with germinations leading to new roots of no origin or endpoint. (MacMahon, 2005, p. 50) Tahereh's childish mode of life is rhizomatic in that she creates connections which are unplanned and unpredictable. As a girl, she sets out on the road of becoming and deterritorialisation by opting for a style of life which is protean.

Here, again it is the notion of territory which becomes significant. Tahereh constantly deterritorialises herself through rhizomatic movements, thus nullifying her being identified with a certain identity and puzzling her peers due to her not belonging to a certain territory: "Tahereh would talk to grandma and the school principal and teachers as if she were reading from a book of Armenian literature" (p. 245). Also, she has chosen to be in-between states, a characteristic dexterously touched upon by Pirzad in her fiction. Edmond, whose father's theories of child-rearing have endowed him with deeming things to be either right or wrong, once finds fault with Tahereh's wearing a cross necklace while saying her Muslim prayers. As she is constantly labelled as "the daughter of the Muslim janitor" by his peers, Edmond expects her to perform Muslim acts. Interestingly, however, Tahereh chooses a zone between two modes of praying: "I wear a cross at school and church, and an Allah necklace while [as a Muslim] praying" (p. 247). Holding this view of life, instead of being identified or labelled, she experiences an infinite range of identities. This mode of imperceptibility bears witness to the fact that she belongs to no single territory. At school she outperforms all other

students in various subjects, including Armenian composition. This would lead to the Armenian parents rebuking their children: “The daughter of the Muslim janitor speaks your mother tongue better than you!” I thought how did Tahereh manage to write such compositions? Our maternal home was not hers” (p. 239). This also touches upon the fact that while living on the shores of the Caspian Sea, Tahereh is a nomad who does not belong to a given geography. As Deleuze (2007) maintains, “[n]omads have no history, they only have geography” (p. 31). This is in contrast with the position taken by the adult Armenians of Pirzad’s fiction who are mostly concerned with tracing their history. Rather than being concerned with geographical and nomadic adventures, they usually concern themselves with their past and history, which is a barrier to becoming. In contrast, Pirzad’s girl, who is neither this nor that, who is both this and that, instead of tracing lines of identification behind her, chooses to reside in non-identical spots and creates maps of becoming in order to be fluid and dismantle the pre-fabricated models of society.

Reterritorialisations: Travelling but Seeking Personal Weapons

As Deleuze (1987) stated, with every deterritorialisation there is a reterritorialisation (p. 54). In other words, while a number of elements attempt to create planes of becoming, fluidity, and newness, there are a number of forces which seek to bring back segmentation, fixity, localisation, and conformity. These forces work in collusion with the forces of memory, thus “conforming to a code of dominant utterances, to a territory of established states of things” (Deleuze, 2007, p. 74). Apart from many instances of becoming and transformation discussed earlier, Pirzad’s fiction also envisages examples which show how becoming and creativity are blocked or reterritorialised. To begin with, Mrs. Parvin Nurollahi in *I Will Turn off the Lights* (2001) is one of the most notable examples of upholding reterritorialisation in the name of the pursuit of feminine freedom. As a Muslim woman activist in the 1960s, advocating women’s suffrage, Nurollahi is a woman who captivates the main character of the novel, i.e., Clarice, to the point where she breaks away from the Armenian community in order to reconstruct a new identity by assimilating into the Muslim community of Iran (Yaghoobi, 2019, p 106). While Nurollahi’s activities for obtaining Iranian women’s rights and awakening them might be valuable, Pirzad has also provided evidence which warns women against a serious danger: the forces of becoming can themselves turn into forces of fixity. Orchestrating meetings, giving speeches on the subject of women’s freedom, and creating connections with the Armenian community, Nurollahi’s version of freedom proves to be superficial, orienting her towards the same prison she escapes from, subjecting her still to other signifying regimes. While Yaghoobi (2019) has glorified her as “an epitome of a pluralist subject; she has moved beyond the bor-

ders of self, religion, culture, and nationality while maintaining her individuality” (p. 114), she neglects the fact that fighting for rights of women, Nurollahi is also a pop culture enthusiast. In a scene where she and Clarice meet at a bar, she confesses that she has to deliver pompous speeches at meetings as people would otherwise deem her incompetent or regard her words as trivial (p. 194). Also, she prides herself on how she found the model of her English dress in a magazine, how she toured Tehran to find a textile for it, and how much she paid the tailor (p. 196). What Pirzad is touching upon is a diagnosis of the malady of women fighting for their rights while being entangled within the regimes of signs which orient them to territories defined by capitalism and subject them to images which impede the free flow of becoming. This is the danger that Deleuze has repeatedly discussed in his *oeuvre* regarding the power of capitalism: “You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organizations that re-stratify everything, formations that restore power to a signifier, attributions that reconstitute a subject” (Deleuze, 1987, p. 9).

Pirzad’s short story “Apartment” is another locale depicting reterritorialisation, where two couples, stuck in the vicious circle of signifying regimes, define each other within already-made, pre-given roles. It relates the parallel stories of Mahnaz and Faramarz, where the latter expects his wife Mahnaz to adhere to household chores instead of working outside as an accountant, and Simin and Majid, where the latter who is an ambitious businessman overlooks Simin’s skill in housekeeping. This deteriorates the life styles of these two couples to the point that they seek divorce, with its climax somewhere at the end where an estate agent brings Mahnaz to Simin’s would-be-sold apartment. The centrality of the husbands as domineering is undeniable in the story, although the wives also seem not to be cognisant of their womanhood while adhering to the norms of their society. As is seen in the first section of the story, while Mahnaz is overwhelmed with happiness due to her promotion, Faramaz retorts, “Again you forgot to wash the milk glass” (Pirzad, 1991, p. 116), thus reminding his wife that her role is confined to the territory of the house. As their relationship worsens, Faramarz overtly disparages Mahnaz: “I should have married a woman who would stick to her house and life instead of imitating foreign women and thinking of company and progress at work and such bullshit” (p. 117). In the second section, Majid, who is at the opposite pole of Faramarz, ignores the abilities of Simin at home: “I’m not the person to bring you flowers every day and praise your food and housekeeping and sing you love songs” (p. 119). Mahnaz and Simin, however, are examples of women who have conformed to two types of norms, i.e., “emerging” and “residual” ideologies,⁶ in their society. Mahnaz is a woman following the choice of working outside the

⁶ For more on emerging and residual ideologies, see Raymond Williams (1977). Add to references

home, which was an emerging ideology in the face of the norms of Iranian society in the 1990s, thus confining herself to the territory defined by codes of feminine progress and independence. Simin, however, defines her own territory according to codes of residual ideologies defined by her society which limit women to the territory of codes such as being submissive, shy, and husband-loving: "Things wouldn't have turned out like this if I had been pregnant and had a child" (p. 121). In both cases, instead of experimenting with becoming-woman, Mahnaz and Simin choose to stick to what Deleuze calls "assemblages of enunciation", i.e., ideologies, of their time. It should be mentioned that female characters who fail to distance themselves from pre-made codes of behaviour are not exceptional in Pirzad's fiction. Minoush in "Père-Lachaise", Soheyla in "Harmonica" and Arezoo in *We Get Used to It* (2004) are all examples of women who confine themselves to arboreal, segmented style of life while deeming themselves to be active in the process of enlightenment. Thus explained, Pirzad seems to be diagnosing yet another malady among Iranian women which rather than placing them in the process of continual confrontation to become other than before, situates them within arboreal, segmented, and fixed circles designed by capitalism, banishing creativity and endorsing reterritorialisation of identity.

As a final point, attention should be paid to many adults in Pirzad's fiction who exemplify sites of reterritorialisation where rules are constantly recalled and reincorporated. Edmond's father in "Sour Cherry Pits" continually stifles his son's emotions in the name of teaching him concepts including manhood: "How many times should I repeat myself that I don't like these girlish behaviours?" (Pirzad, 1991, p. 233). In this way, the figure of the father attempts to pass to his son traits attributed to maleness, thus setting his son within a territory. In this territory, men are obliged not to be emotional, should not be afraid of things (p. 252), and need to be aware of the history of their tribe (p. 258). Edmond's grandmother is also another adult who is inclined to restore order and law to the family. For instance, she is in the habit of disparaging Edmond for speaking informal Armenian (p. 238). She also reminds the family members that children must follow the rules (p. 254). These examples show how the fluidity of children is deracinated. In this mode, rather than experimenting and thinking *with* the world, regimes of signs are reinstated and reintroduced up until they are deterritorialized elsewhere.

Conclusion

The present article provides a new reading of Zoya Pirzad's short fiction through the lens of Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of life and vitality. Maintaining a vitalistic perspective, we have focused on the characters of women and children in whom hope, forgetfulness, and continuity are highlighted. Drawing on the idea of be-

coming-woman, a number of characters from Pirzad's *Three Books* (1991) were focused upon, explaining to what extent they set out on the road to becoming, imperceptibility, and in-betweenness. With regard to the idea of becoming-child, the twin girls in Pirzad's novel *I Will Turn off the Lights* (2001), Danik in "White Violets", and the character of Tahereh in "Sour Cherry Pits" were discussed, as they constitute Pirzad's materialisation of childish creativity, forgetfulness, and rhizomatic movement which have always been banished by the rational world of adults. As becoming and deterritorialisation are not permanent and entail reterritorialisations or the return to previous regimes, a number of cases where becoming gives place to anti-becoming were discussed in Pirzad's *I Will Turn off the Lights*, "Apartment", and "Sour Cherry Pits". All in all, it can be concluded that apart from being an example of Persian incursion, where mobility and fluidity are showcased in the face of pressures, Pirzad's fiction is a site where the focus is placed on women and children as minorities who are neglected sources of energy, hope, movement, and becoming. Maintaining a Deleuzian pragmatic perspective regarding the text, i.e., what the text can do rather than what it means (Hughes, 1997, p. 27), we may conclude that what Pirzad illustrates about women and children in her fiction cannot be deemed a mere critique of their situation in the society. Rather, by exhibiting scenes of both de- and reterritorialisation, what she is proposing is a solution through which they can *become* without resorting to the images sanctioned by capitalism and its organisations of signifying machines.

Declaration Of AI Use

The author(s) did not use generative AI or AI-assisted technologies in the preparation of this manuscript.

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