

## **Poetic Representation of Immigrant Bengali Women**

### **from Queens, New York: A Qualitative Exploration of Narrative in Relation to Physical and Cultural Migration**

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A final thesis project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of the Master of Arts in Urban Studies at City University of New York (CUNY) – Queens College.

**KEYWORDS:** research-poetry, found poems, migration, transcript poetry, creative methods, poetic analysis, poetic inquiry

#### **ABSTRACT:**

**Poetic Representation of Immigrant Bengali Women** from Queens, New York: A Qualitative Exploration of Narrative in Relation to Physical and Cultural Migration is a qualitative poetic inquiry and collaborative creative writing project. Five participants were interviewed and invited to engage in a collaborative writing process with the themes of immigration, cultural negotiation, and oral family history. All participants identified as college-educated Bengali women with a connection to Queens, New York, as well as being an immigrant or relative of an immigrant in the United States. From transcriptions of one-on-one interviews and personal notes, research-poetry was created to center on the participants' lived experience and yield insight into a number of themes found in participants' narratives related to immigration, physical/cultural migration, the American Dream, model minority myth, cultural negotiation (integrating, differentiating, rejecting, assimilating, etc.), trauma, and oral family history. Participant and interviewers worked together to finalize pieces of poetry explore research-poetry as a way to honor and voice the narrative of immigrant Bengali women from Queens, New York.

## INTRODUCTION.

Migration is intrinsically a process of negotiation between cultures during which immigrants and their children construct new identities, community organizations and structures, and cultural sensibilities. The process of integrating one's multiple cultural identities is a complex process through which migrants develop new identities and self-concept. This requires great cultural understanding and empathy for migrants and their children.

More research and data collection is needed to understand how the process of migration affects societies, families, and children. This is essential to inform policies and to mitigate adverse impacts. Families and children need to make informed decisions regarding migration. There are significant gaps in the data regarding the effects of migration on families, specifically children.<sup>1</sup> UNICEF states, "Marginalization and discrimination in the country of settlement, barriers to accessing social services, challenges to the rights to citizenship and identity, parents' economic insecurity, and social and cultural dislocation may affect some children ... The Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is the duty of any country to ensure that all children enjoy their rights, irrespective of their migration status or that of their parents. Children are affected by migration in all regions of the globe, but the understanding of its effects is highly limited."

In the international community, there are efforts to understand the lived experience in the matters of migration. In order to train and inform workers on the ground, quantitative data is often supplemented with qualitative data. This qualitative data tends to be in the form of in-depth interviews and ethnographic reports. However, these traditional methods can be dense and challenging for those who are not familiar with traditional research methods. Readers may be overwhelmed and unmoved by this type of qualitative data despite their intentions to develop their understanding of the lived experience of migrants and their children.<sup>2</sup>

This qualitative poetic inquiry and collaborative creative writing project implements methodologies that researchers and poets (Carr, Ellingson, Faulkner, Furman, Glesne, Lahman, Leavy, Prendergast, Richardson, etc.) have used in order

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF-Office of Research Innocenti. Migration and Children. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef-irc.org/article/606-migration-and-children.html>

<sup>2</sup> Furman, R., Lietz, C., & Langer, C. L. (2006). The Research Poem in International Social Work: Innovations in Qualitative Methodology. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 24-34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500305>

to condense qualitative data so that the data can be easily consumed and accessible to readers. This is done through the creation of research poems from transcriptions of one-on-one interviews and personal notes.<sup>3</sup> Through poetic expression, the hope is to illuminate fragments of interviews and conversations which convey moments of insight that the reader may be able to connect to. The poetic pieces are meant to be enhance and resonate with each other to order to better emphasize the lived experience of immigrants and their families and yield insight into a number of themes found in participants' narratives related to immigration, physical/cultural migration, the American Dream, model minority myth, cultural negotiation (integrating, differentiating, rejecting, assimilating, etc.), trauma, and oral family history.

Research poems can serve as a means to create knowledge that will affect readers intellectually and emotionally through its unique presentation of data about the human experience. Furthermore, poems about individual experiences can engage all ages and lend themselves to discussions of universal immigration themes while also highlighting the human aspect of immigration often left out by political rhetoric. These poems have the potential to give voice and representation while also inspiring others to see urban phenomena such as migration in a new and different light.<sup>4</sup> It can be a democratic process to promote dialogue by including participants as collaborators.<sup>5</sup> Some of the questions that poems can inspire include: What motivates a person to leave his or her home country? How welcomed do they feel when they arrive? What are their challenges and celebrations?

This creative writing project explores factors such as race, ethnicity, and migration which play in the formation of Asian-American culture, specifically Bengali-American culture.<sup>6</sup> The primary question revolves around how Bengali immigrant women and their descendants in Queens, New York narrate their experiences in negotiating multiple cultures as a result of migration. Through poetic inquiry, this project seeks to explore and honor the narrative of diasporic immigrant Bengali women and their descendants. I investigate research-poetry as a collaborative process to respect and empower immigrant voices. I encourage a dialogue in which participants tell the story of growing up with their different

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<sup>3</sup> Meyer, M. (2017). Concrete research poetry: A visual representation of metaphor. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, 2(1), 32-57. doi: 10.18432/a.r.i.v2i1.28766

<sup>4</sup> Ellis, Carolyn & Bochner, Arthur. (2000). Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*.

<sup>5</sup> Fernández-Giménez, M. E., Jennings, L. B., & Wilmer, H. (2018). Poetic Inquiry as a Research and Engagement Method in Natural Resource Science. *Society & Natural Resources*, 1-12. doi:10.1080/08941920.2018.1486493

<sup>6</sup> Asian-American Ideas (Cultural Migration). Retrieved from <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/asian-american-ideas-cultural-migration>

cultural groups, and their cultural identity development within the scope of their entire life story. From interview transcripts as qualitative data, poems are created in an effort to “capture and portray the human condition in a more easily consumable, powerful, emotionally poignant, and open-ended, nonlinear form compared with prose research reports.”<sup>7</sup>

## RESEARCH-POETRY.

*“The poetic representation of lives is never just an end in itself. The goal is political, to change the way we think about people and their lives and to use the poetic-performative format to do this. The poet makes the world visible in new and different ways, in ways ordinary social science writing does not allow. The poet is accessible, visible, and present in the text, in ways that traditional writing forms discourage.”*<sup>8</sup>

– Norman K. Denzin,  
Interpretive Autoethnography, pp. 86

What is research-poetry? And how does it differ from other traditional methods of data analysis? Research-poetry aims to “illuminate aspects of the human condition” through poetic inquiry.<sup>9</sup> This type of poetry can also be considered as found poetry or transcript poetry, because they transform already existing text, such as transcripts, into poems. Indeed, it seems to be that the most common approach in embarking in such poetic inquiry is the creation of research poems from qualitative data such as interview transcriptions.<sup>10</sup>

Poetic inquiry can help to give voice to the participants behind the written transcripts, highlight emotions, and express deeper meanings of data through imagery, rhythm, use of lines and space, language, repetition, metaphor, and voice.<sup>11</sup> Thus, poetic pieces can be created to “show truths that are not usually evident.”<sup>12</sup> And in doing so, this can allow for the opening of research to new understandings.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Faulkner, S. L. 2017. Poetic inquiry: Poetry as/in/for social research. In Handbook of arts-based research, ed. P. Leavy, 208–230. New York, NY: The Guildford Press

<sup>8</sup> Denzin, N. K. (2014). *Interpretive Autoethnography*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

<sup>9</sup> Leavy, P. 2015. Method meets art: Arts-based research practice. 2nd ed. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

<sup>10</sup> Fernández-Giménez, M. E., Jennings, L. B., & Wilmer, H. (2018). Poetic Inquiry as a Research and Engagement Method in Natural Resource Science. *Society & Natural Resources*,1-12. doi:10.1080/08941920.2018.1486493

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Faulkner, S. L. (2014). *Family Stories, Poetry, and Women’s Work Knit Four, Frog One (Poems)*. Retrieved from <https://www.sensepublishers.com/media/2134-family-stories-poetry-and-womens-work.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Fernández-Giménez, M. E., Jennings, L. B., & Wilmer, H. (2018). Poetic Inquiry as a Research and Engagement Method in Natural Resource Science. *Society & Natural Resources*,1-12. doi:10.1080/08941920.2018.1486493

According to Faulkner in *Poetic inquiry: Poetry as/in/for social research*, she notes that there is criteria unique to this type of poetic inquiry. And she goes on to highlight the capacity to use poetic language to evoke both embodied experience, narrative truth, as well as insight, discovery, surprise, and inspiration.<sup>14</sup>

In one particular research-poem inquiry, Langer and Furman explore the lived experience of a Native American woman, Donna, who grapples with identity and assimilation. In this inquiry, they find that research poems are useful when the researcher wishes to present a participant's voice as the primary means to convey data in a compressed form. They assert that the benefit of the compressed form is that it can allow for the reader to focus on the essence of the participant's narrative rather than be overwhelmed by the lengthy transcript data.<sup>15</sup>

There is also an objective to transform, as noted in Patricia Leavy's *The Handbook of Arts*: "Poetic inquiry should transform by providing new insight, giving perspective, and/or advocating for social change."<sup>16</sup> Such inquiry can dismantle stereotypes, challenge mainstream ideologies, and include marginalized voices and perspectives, through empathy.<sup>17</sup> And as Leavy notes, it can be useful in "jarring people into seeing and thinking differently."<sup>18</sup>

The experimental nature of poetic inquiry encourages a "beginner's mind". In Jennings' *Learning Through Teaching Poetic Analysis*, such poetic inquiry is brought forth to students. And although students were initially hesitant to indulge in this type of data analysis, the methodology was eventually embraced as a creative act and valid aspect of scientific inquiry. They were able to explore data from a new angle which invited imagination. There was also a focus on emotion, expression, and meaning in the lives of participants. Jennings observes that employing poetic analysis into methodology heightens rather than threatens validity as such analysis can express the multiple meanings, complexity, and fullness of the lived experience more effectively than participant quotes lifted from an interview transcript.<sup>19</sup> In other

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<sup>14</sup> Faulkner, S. L. 2017. Poetic inquiry: Poetry as/in/for social research. In *Handbook of arts-based research*, ed. P. Leavy, 208-230. New York, NY: The Guildford Press

<sup>15</sup> Langer, C., & Furman, R. (2004). Exploring Identity and Assimilation: Research and Interpretive Poems. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 5(2). doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-5.2.609>

<sup>16</sup> Leavy, P. 2017. *Handbook of arts-based research*. New York, NY: The Guildford Press

<sup>17</sup> Fernández-Giménez, M. E., Jennings, L. B., & Wilmer, H. (2018). Poetic Inquiry as a Research and Engagement Method in Natural Resource Science. *Society & Natural Resources*,1-12. doi:10.1080/08941920.2018.1486493

<sup>18</sup> Leavy, P. (2015). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*. New York: The Guilford Press.

<sup>19</sup> Fernández-Giménez, M. E., Jennings, L. B., & Wilmer, H. (2018). Poetic Inquiry as a Research and Engagement Method in Natural Resource Science. *Society & Natural Resources*,1-12. doi:10.1080/08941920.2018.1486493

words, the condensed form of a research poem leads to a more powerful presentation of data.<sup>20</sup>

There have been a number of approaches to poetic inquiry outside the realm of transcript poems. For example, there have been instances of taking this approach and implementing it to literature reviews and creating free verse poetry.<sup>21</sup> Meyer also takes a unique arts-based approach to research-poetry and creates concrete poems in her efforts to understand the experiences of single mothers of children and young adults. Concrete poetry can be considered as “word-imagery”, “artifacts that are neither word nor image alone but somewhere or something between”, and an “ideogram or a constellation” of words. Her objective in using imagery and metaphor is to invite the reader to become actively engaged in interpreting the text that comes out of the poetic analysis. In other words, the reader’s interpretation is partly based on the poem’s physical shape. She argues that this interrupts the left brain’s task of cognitive processing and invites the right brain to participate in the interpretive process. In doing so, this has the potential to create a more emotionally evocative reading.<sup>22</sup>

It should be noted that as participants become more and more involved in the process of creating these poems, participants can be considered researchers themselves, thus leading to the emergence of the researcher-participant. During this process, there may be reflection or interpretive pieces created by both the initial researcher and the blossoming research-participants. These poems can be created together, and jointly interpreted and analyzed. Langer and Furman argue that this can also be a tool which allows for the fusion of both the perspective of the participants and the insights of the researcher.<sup>23</sup> This method also allows for the investigation and reflection on the issues of power by drawing awareness to power relations in academia and scholarship.<sup>24</sup> Meyer, inspired by methodology employed by research-poets such as Richardson (1992), Carr (2003), Furman (2006), Faulkner (2009), and Ellingson (2011), uses poetic inquiry as the primary means to give voice to not only participants but also herself.<sup>25</sup> And so, these reflection or interpretive poems

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<sup>20</sup> Langer, C., & Furman, R. (2004). Exploring Identity and Assimilation: Research and Interpretive Poems. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 5(2). doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-5.2.609>

<sup>21</sup> Owton, H. (2017). Introducing Poetic Inquiry. *Doing Poetic Inquiry*, 1-14. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-64577-3\_1

<sup>22</sup> Meyer, M. (2017). Concrete Research Poetry: A Visual Representation of Metaphor. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, 2(1), 32. doi:10.18432/r2ks6f

<sup>23</sup> Furman, R., Langer, C. L., Davis, C. S., Gallardo, H. P., & Kulkarni, S. (2007). Expressive, research and reflective poetry as qualitative inquiry: A study of adolescent identity. *Qualitative Research*, 7(3), 301-315. doi:10.1177/1468794107078511

<sup>24</sup> Fernández-Giménez, M. E., Jennings, L. B., & Wilmer, H. (2018). Poetic Inquiry as a Research and Engagement Method in Natural Resource Science. *Society & Natural Resources*, 1-12. doi:10.1080/08941920.2018.1486493

<sup>25</sup> Meyer, M. (2017). Concrete Research Poetry: A Visual Representation of Metaphor. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, 2(1), 32. doi:10.18432/r2ks6f

are also useful to acknowledge the experience of the researcher and serve as a way for the researcher to enter the research and present themselves in the poetic inquiry.

Given this, it can be argued poetic inquiry supports participatory research and promotes dialogue by including participants as research collaborators who construct and interpret poetic data with us and by engaging readers. Such democratic processes open up multiple meanings and by inviting participants to dive deep into these projects, poetic inquiry can end up engaging relevant communities thereby making the research more useful and transformative.<sup>26</sup> This can help to advance public scholarship, the usefulness of the data, and promote social justice.

## **METHODOLOGY.**

I conducted outreach for approximately 2 months and invited people from my immediate network and through word of mouth to participate in a creative writing project. Individuals were initially approached and invited to participate via email, text, or online social media messaging. During the outreach process, I made clear the target demographic: Bengali women-identifying individuals who currently reside in or have resided in Queens, New York and that identify with any of the following: immigrant, child of immigrant parents, child with immigrant caregivers, DREAMer<sup>27</sup>, immigrant parent, undocumented person, or relative of immigrants.

I communicated with a total of 16 individuals. 13 of those 16 individuals expressed interest in engaging in the project. However, due to various factors such as time constraints and scheduling challenges, it ended up being that I was able to engage a total of five individuals. It should be noted, however, four individuals (who are not involved in this particular project), expressed that they would like to participate at a later time. I expressed enthusiasm to hear of such interest and hope to keep in touch with these individuals for future projects and to build on my findings.

## **DEMOGRAPHICS.**

To add context and depth to the individuals that were interviewed, I would like to note that, though not a requirement, all five individuals had, at minimum, completed bachelor's degrees at four-year institutions in the greater New York area.

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<sup>26</sup> Fernández-Giménez, M. E., Jennings, L. B., & Wilmer, H. (2018). Poetic Inquiry as a Research and Engagement Method in Natural Resource Science. *Society & Natural Resources*,1-12. doi:10.1080/08941920.2018.1486493

<sup>27</sup> "The term "DREAMer" has been used to describe young undocumented immigrants who were brought to the United States as children, who have lived and gone to school here, and who in many cases identify as American. The term DREAMer originally took its name from the bill in Congress, but it has a double meaning about the undocumented youth who have big hopes and dreams for a better future." - Anti-Defamation League. What is the Dream Act and Who Are the Dreamers? Retrieved from: <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/what-is-the-dream-act-and-who-are-the-dreamers>

All participants identified as Bengali and as women. Throughout interviews, other identities that were mentioned include: Bengali-American, American, New Yorker, Indian-American, Bangladeshi, Bangladeshi-American, resident of Queens, South Asian-American, Asian-American, Asian, Desi, South Asian, and Brown.

Other traits shared in common would be that all five individuals spent the majority of their childhood and adult life in Queens, New York and attended publicly-funded primary and secondary schools. All of the individuals were at some point admitted and enrolled in primary and/or secondary schools which required the passing of standardized exams. These schools include The Academy for the Intellectually Gifted at P.S. 122, The Queens High School for the Sciences, Hunter College High School, and The Bronx High School of Science.

The five individuals had varying immigration statuses including but not limited to: citizenship by-birth, citizenship by naturalization, DACA recipient (DREAMer), and more. There were also many differentiations in how individuals obtained their immigration statuses and how they came to the United States. Majority of participants noted that they come from a low-income family background.

### **INTERVIEWS.**

Throughout the project, I took a trauma-informed approach.<sup>28</sup> This was gleaned from my past experiences in the social services field in which I worked to empower survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual violence, crime, etc. In taking this approach, I took care not to give unsolicited advice and encouraged participants to express themselves freely in a safe space. If past trauma came up in interviews and/or during the writing process, I neither ignored nor dwelled exclusively on the traumatic incidents. Instead, I took care to validate and normalize the experiences. If relevant, I related my own experiences to participants with the intention to help participants understand and acknowledge how past traumatic incidents may influence their present. If appropriate, I provided referrals to relevant social services agencies and community-based organizations if the participant was receptive and expressed any particular needs.

In addition to taking a trauma-informed approach, I took a participant-centered approach, and was very flexible. I was prepared to allow individuals the time and space to receive any clarification. I was fully transparent about intentions to form research-poetry based on the interview. Some individuals had further questions and

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<sup>28</sup> Knight, C. (2014, February 19). Trauma-Informed Social Work Practice: Practice Considerations and Challenges. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10615-014-0481-6>



preferred to meet in-person or speak on the phone prior to the actual interview. In my research notes, I considered these meetings and conversations as pre-interviews in which I helped the participant to understand my objectives.

Participants were encouraged to ask questions during the process. My intentions were to empower participants to engage in the process and acknowledge their diverse preferences and needs regarding the direction and outcome of the project. As part of this approach, participants' right to privacy was emphasized to protect identity by promising anonymity, having certain parts of their narrative off-the-record during interviews, or re-visiting the conversation and poetic pieces at any time to make amendments.

The interview was a semi-structured interview based on Storycorp's<sup>29</sup> suggested questions for Latino immigrants<sup>30</sup> as well as general questions relating to migration, identity, origin, upbringing, childhood, life in America and abroad, civil rights, etc.<sup>31</sup>

All five participants agreed to having their interview recorded and then transcribed by me. Length of the interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 120 minutes. Breaks were offered and given when requested. Participants were allowed to pass any question. I guaranteed their confidentiality and invited them to use pseudonyms. If respondents chose to use pseudonyms, those names replaced real names in transcriptions and poetic pieces. Water, snacks, tea, and coffee were available.

Following the interview, participants were thanked for their time. I notified them that I would transcribe the conversation and that I would keep them updated on my progress. The audio recordings were also made available to participants upon request via Google Drive. While transcribing, I referenced Transcribing Guidelines adapted from the Historic Columbia River Highway Oral History Project.<sup>32</sup> Upon completion, I shared the transcription with participants via Google Drive. The five interviews produced a total of 115 single-spaced pages of text.

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<sup>29</sup> Storycorp is a non-profit organization whose mission is to record, preserve, and share humanity's stories in order to build connections between people from all backgrounds and beliefs and create a more just and compassionate world.

<sup>30</sup> Great Historias Questions. Story Corps. Retrieved from <https://storycorps.org/historias-questions/>

<sup>31</sup> Great Questions. Story Corps. Retrieved from <https://storycorps.org/participate/great-questions/>

<sup>32</sup> UC Irvine. Transcribing Guidelines: Tips adapted from the Historic Columbia River Highway Oral History Project. Retrieved from <http://sites.uci.edu/vaohp/files/2014/07/12a.Transcribing-Guideline.pdf>

## CONSTRUCTING THE RESEARCH POEMS: POETIC ANALYSIS OF DATA TRANSCRIPTION & REFLECTION POEMS.

We communicated and shared ideas via email, text, phone, and Google Drive. All five individuals were familiar with general research methodologies and voluntarily provided ideas and feedback regarding the direction of the project. To construct the poems, we read through the transcript, taking care to underline, bold, italicize, and highlight words and phrases that effectively expressed the meaning of apparent themes. Then, we arranged these phrases into lines, and used line breaks and punctuation to further relay meaning, retaining original language and repetition.<sup>33</sup> In accordance to the methods used in Fernandez-Gimenez's 2015 study, each poem was chronologically and linguistically faithful to the transcript and consisted entirely of both my and the participant's words. The majority of poems were intended to assume the voice of the participant and the objective of this method was to synthesize experience in a direct and affective way.<sup>34</sup> We worked collaboratively throughout the process until final poems were deemed satisfactory as an accurate reflection of the participant's narrative.

Methods in which to create research poems are meant to be democratic processes where research-participants or participants and researchers create poems together. However still, a power dynamic was still obvious as I approached individuals as a researcher with a clear objective in mind. This was acknowledged in conversation with participants. Of course, verbalizing it does not necessarily equalize the relationship. I emphasized to participants that there were no hard and fast rules and that they may be involved as little or as much as they would like throughout the process. I invited them to become an active part of the project and made it clear to them that I would not move forward with anything that they did not feel comfortable with. I also emphasized that I would be as transparent as possible. The term "ownership" came up often as I conveyed my hopes to compile the poems and submit them for publication. And so, I emphasized that I saw them as equals, as fellow writers, and that there was complete creative freedom. There were no disagreements but at times individuals requested changes or implemented changes to the poetic pieces themselves which I readily accepted in order to honor their voice and narrative. If they asked for feedback or opinions on changes, I would provide them on request but ultimately, left the final call to them.

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<sup>33</sup> Fernández-Giménez, M. E., Jennings, L. B., & Wilmer, H. (2018). Poetic Inquiry as a Research and Engagement Method in Natural Resource Science. *Society & Natural Resources*, 1-12. doi:10.1080/08941920.2018.1486493

<sup>34</sup> Prendergast, M. (2009). "Poem Is What?" Poetic Inquiry in Qualitative Social Science Research. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 1(4), 541-568. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/irqr.2009.1.4.541>

Throughout the process of creating research-poems out of transcripts, I reflected deeply on the role of the researcher who may end up controlling the “representation” of interview transcripts as poetry. Reflection poems were based on these ponderings, as well as relevant urban theories, personal experiences, and notes taken during the interviews. Such poetic inquiry helped to foster reflection on my own experience in the research process, as well as my relationship with participants and colleagues, and the issues of power in scholarly production.<sup>35</sup> These reflection poems were shared with participants.

## **FINDINGS & DISCUSSION.**

Poetic analysis yielded insights into a number of themes found in participants’ narratives: the concept of the American Dream, the model minority myth, cultural negotiation (rejecting one culture for another, integrating cultures, differentiating cultures), trauma both historical and lived, the impact of migration, the impact of immigration processes, religion as a factor for cultural assimilation, and being first-generation.

In place of the traditional results section are the research-poems laid out in the final product which has been submitted for publication to be part of PEN America’s *Dreaming Out Loud* anthology. The arrangement of the poems and the formatting have all been agreed upon by the participants, who I consider to be my fellow writers. Akin to Rath’s research-poetry work with rape crisis workers, in crafting these poems, we did something with the qualitative data, rather than say something about it. These pieces resist “the desire for analytic certainty” and “invites the reader into the text” to take part in the interpretation.<sup>36</sup>

In embarking in this project and this research, I experimented with and was inspired by methodology used by other research-poets such as Meyer’s approach to concrete poetry.<sup>37</sup> For example, the following piece in which the shape of the actual poem alludes to the traditional shape of a house. This poem came about in speaking about the American dream.

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<sup>35</sup> Fernández-Giménez, M. E., Jennings, L. B., & Wilmer, H. (2018). Poetic Inquiry as a Research and Engagement Method in Natural Resource Science. *Society & Natural Resources*, 1-12. doi:10.1080/08941920.2018.1486493

<sup>36</sup> Rath, Jean (2012). Poetry and Participation: Scripting a Meaningful Research Text With Rape Crisis Workers [37 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 13(1), Art. 22, <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1791/3312#g6>

<sup>37</sup> Meyer, M. (2017). Concrete Research Poetry: A Visual Representation of Metaphor. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, 2(1), 32. doi:10.18432/r2ks6f

I  
kind  
of just want a  
white picket fence  
and a nice house  
and very modest  
sort of things that  
I didn't have growing up

The Bangla language was also incorporated into the final product:

My parents write in Bangla  
It's so beautiful  
Like cursive  
And excellent penmanship

And I just can't do it.

That big line on the top of everything

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মাই পেরেন্টস রাইট ইন বাংলা  
ইট'স বিউটিফুল  
লাইক কার্সিভ  
এন্ড এক্সসেলেন্ট পেনম্যানশিপ

And I just can't do it.

ডট্ বিগ লাইন ওন টপ অব এভরিথিং

Bangla is known for a distinct horizontal line running along the tops of its characters which link them together. In this case, that element of Bangla is applied to the English part of the poem to emphasize its significance. It is also an attempt to show the interplay of the two languages as it shows up in the participant's negotiation of the two languages. Below the English section, there is a transliteration written out in the Bangla language which if sounded out would be the reader saying the English version of the poem.

When Bangla came up in interviews, we collectively decided how to convey the language as well as how to translate it:

Amar oi hoyse. – 'It' happened.

I hope that the future generation  
talk to their daughters  
about what a period is  
so they're not confused.

We don't usually give it a name.  
Sometimes we say period,  
but sometimes we're just like,  
*Amar oi hoyse.*

men in the conversation.

We **need** you to be our allies  
because at the end of the day,  
especially in a place like New York City  
where there are more men than Bengali women,  
we need these Bengali men to also rise up and be like,  
*Hey, ay, bhai, apne je apner bou er saathe erokom eta tik na.*  
(*Hey, yo brother, the way you are with your wife, it's not okay.*)

As can be seen above, italics and bold were also implemented to convey significance to readers. In this case, the italics indicate a different language from English. In other instances, italics also may indicate the participant's thoughts during an incident. Bold and/or larger fonts were also applied for emphasis.

One limitation may be the small sample size. However, for a qualitative research project whether or not this is a limitation is arguable. And whether these poems 'work' as poems is a decision for the reader to make.<sup>38</sup> However, I aimed to "craft an authentic text in which all parties recognize themselves, and perceive their own stories."<sup>39</sup> It should be noted that three out of the five participants described the experience of participating as therapeutic. Indeed, Wakeman's findings note that poetic inquiry can serve as both research and therapy for the writer as well as the readers; it can be a form of research as well as a way of knowing.<sup>40</sup>

Lastly, I would like to convey feedback received from participants as they looked over the final product as well as the finalized poetic pieces.

**Kajol:** "Thanks so much for this! I smiled when I saw some of these excerpts ... My favorites are that "murti" one, because it was such a small but pivotal moment for me, and the one with 'that big line on top,' because it's hilarious and painfully honest. But I also love them all ... It's really come together like a quilt, I enjoyed reading it."

<sup>38</sup> Boyd, C. (2017, July 28). Research Poetry and the Non-Representational. Retrieved from <https://www.acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1396/0>

<sup>39</sup> Rath, Jean (2012). Poetry and Participation: Scripting a Meaningful Research Text With Rape Crisis Workers [37 paragraphs]. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 13(1), Art. 22, <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1791/3312#g6>

<sup>40</sup> Wakeman, B. E. (2015). Poetry as Research and as Therapy. Transformation, 32(1), 50–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378814537767>

**Nikita:** *“I loved this, made me tear up a little ... Thanks for transcribing this and including me in your project. I feel so honored about that ... Oh my god, I don’t even know what to say. I’m so glad you thought of this ... I love it! I don’t want to change anything.”*

**Nadia:** *“These look amazing ... I would love to see these published.”*

**Bushra:** *“First and foremost, I want to thank you for listening to my story. It was great to be able to catch up with and share these experiences that once felt not so normal. I really like this ... Thank you for being so true to the content.”*

**Sara:** *“Haha, I like them! Some of them remind me of raps and I like the visual structuring of others (lines, spacing, etc).”*

Please note that I do not intend for participants’ feedback to serve as testimonials to research-poetry. This process required constant communication and open-mindedness. There was significant back and forth with participants before settling on the final pieces. But as they say, all’s well that ends well.

## **Acknowledgements:**

The author would like to thank the participants in her research project as well as faculty and staff at CUNY Queens College.

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## **APPENDIX A. Interview Questions.**

1. How do you relate to immigration and/or being an immigrant? How does migration play in your life? In your family's life?
2. Why did you or your family decide to move to America?
3. How did you migrate here?
4. How do you answer, "Where are you from?"
5. What roles did you play in your family life? In your school life?
6. Is there anything you want to share about relationships and dynamics in your family?
7. What was the importance of language in your life? Whether it be Bangla, English, etc.
8. What role does the Bangla language play at home?
9. How did you relate to Bengali culture? Or broadly speaking, South Asian culture?
10. How was your culture at home? Outside the home?
11. How did you identify with being Bengali and how did that play in your day to day life?
12. What is your understanding of being a citizen/resident of this country?
13. What aspects of your religion and culture migrated with your family?
14. If you meet another person, Hindu-Bengali, or Bengali from Kolkata, not necessarily Bangladeshi, do you feel a connection? Or how do you process that in terms of how you identify yourself as Bengali and how they identify themselves?

15. Do you feel that you can identify yourself, for example, as a 'global citizen,' or 'Asian,' or some other broad category that would include other cultural identities?
16. In terms of identity, how would you describe yourself?
17. How did you identify with being Muslim/Hindu/etc. and how did that play in your day to day life?
18. How did your parents respond to your assimilation into American culture?
19. Is there anything you ever wanted to tell another person or ask another person regarding your own identity?
20. Are there any cultural traditions from your home country or your family's home country that you observe?
21. How do you understand the Asian model minority myth? How does this affect your relationship with colleagues and superiors?
22. Do you see a lot of common ground between your cultural identities?
23. What are some metaphors or cultural sayings that resonate with you and your journey in the United States?
24. As a child, how did you understand your immigration status and the changes it went through?
25. Is there any metaphor either from Bangla or English that you feel like sometimes might be able to describe where you fit right now in America as however you identify?
26. Do you feel a greater preference for one culture over the other(s)?
27. Do you feel very different from one cultural context to another?
28. Do you prefer to consider each cultural identity as being very distinct and separate from each other?

29. What are some of the things that you grew up with or that you learned from your parents that you'd like to pass on to the future generation? Is there anything about being Bengali or Bengali culture that you'd want them to learn about?
30. Are there any aspects of another culture or American culture that you would want the future generation to take more from rather than Bengali culture?
31. Is there any message that you would like to convey to young Bengalis in Queens?
32. If you can finish any of these sentences, feel free to tell me more about it. I was the first person in my family that... or who ... / If you can finish any of these sentences, feel free to tell me more about it.
33. As a child, growing up, how did you think things would be when you were older?
34. Do you have any stories about how things have changed for the better as a child of an immigrant?
35. Have you ever seen any barriers that people in your community or yourself have faced in terms of education, housing, or health, entertainment, job opportunities?
36. Is there anything or any particular story relating to the challenges that you've seen other people face or anything else that you'd like to tell me?
37. Is there anything or any message you want to send to those who may be undocumented or those who are currently in the immigration process?
38. Any important lessons that you've learned in your current journey as a child of an immigrant?
39. What are your relationships like and how do you maintain them with people from other racial and ethnic groups in America?

40. How are your relationships with people from your home country?
  41. Are there any stories that you feel like people don't know but that they should know about your home country?
  42. What do you think your future holds?
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## **APPENDIX B. Correspondence with participants.**

Individuals were approached and invited to participate via email, text, or online social media accounts with some variation of the following:

Would you be willing to engage in a collaborative creative writing project with me? It will consist of a 30-40 minute interview (which I can either record and then transcribe, or take notes as you share -- your choice).

The theme centers on migration, particularly how women with Bengali roots living in Queens negotiate multiple cultures.

From the interview transcription, I will create poems that honor your narrative. I will share these poems with you to assure to get your feedback and to assure full transparency. I plan to write under a pen name/pseudonym and of course I will preserve your anonymity. You may choose to be under a pseudonym as well.

I am hoping this project will evolve and grow as time goes on so feel free to share your thoughts. You will have full creative freedom in this project, and of course, complete anonymity. Let me know if you are available for an interview.

Variations of the following language were sent along with the transcription document to participants:

Hope this finds you well. Please see attached for the transcript of our conversation. As I mentioned before, the hope is to create poetry from the transcript. I was wondering if there are any parts of the conversation that stand out to you and that you would like to incorporate into any final pieces. Feel free to highlight, make comments, and make changes if necessary.

I have also been reflecting on our conversation and have highlighted parts of the conversation that stood out to me in my personal notes. And I am happy to share that as well - just let me know! It would be great to hear back from about a week from now. Looking forward to receiving your reply.

We communicated and shared ideas via email and Google Drive. Here is an example of a message I would send along with documents with poems in progress to the participant:

I shared a document with you with some poetry created from our conversation. I am processing our conversation and am going through the transcript from time to time.

I took care not to change anything you said. Please feel free make to any changes. Always open to hearing your thoughts and ideas. And let me know if other parts of our conversation resonate with you. You have total creative freedom in this. Hope to hear from you soon!

Message I would send along with reflection poems in progress to the participant:

Would you mind if I shared some poetry that I have been working on which has been shaped by or inspired by our conversation? And let me know if any parts in particular resonate with you!

Message to participants regarding submitting poetic pieces for publication in an anthology:

I have the opportunity to submit work for an anthology which will be published this summer. The deadline to submit is May 15. Writing to inquire whether you are open to having any or all of the pieces at the bottom of the email into the anthology? The majority of my fellow writers will be sharing experiences being undocumented, negotiating life in America, and/or being part of the immigration process.

At the end of the day, I will only include these pieces if you are completely satisfied and approve of them. If I get the green light, I will keep you updated on formatting and hope you can be part of that too, esp. if you have a vision for how you would like the published piece(s) to look like. I plan to write under a pseudonym. How would you like the byline to be? I will leave this up to you if we move forward because it is your voice, your narrative. Happy to speak about this further so feel free to let me know if a phone conversation is better!

Message to participants to update them on how their pieces fit in with the rest of the pieces:

I have compiled the pieces to be submitted. Let me know if you have any thoughts/suggestions/idea re: font, spacing, design, placement of poems, etc. Feel free to let me know if you would like to add any graphics or sketches to your pieces as well. I appreciate feedback especially if anything should be brought to my attention.

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