

“Writing Beyond the Ending” and Diasporic Narrativity in Loveleen Rihel Brenna’s *Min annerledeshet, min styrke*

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes Loveleen Rihel Brenna’s memoir, *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* (2012) [*My Otherness, My Strength*]. It focuses on Brenna’s use of literary appropriation techniques, the memoirist’s use of intertextuality, and the role of the *Bildungsroman* genre in her memoir. The article begins by contextualizing Brenna’s diasporic location. Then, using concepts inspired from Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s book *Writing Beyond the Ending* (1985) in conjunction with intertextual references from Brenna’s memoir, the article offers a close reading of *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* to explore the complexity of Brenna’s use of the conventional and unconventional patterns of the female *Bildungsroman* genre in order to understand how her use of the genre engages with the question of women and multiculturalism in Norway.

RÉSUMÉ : Cet article analyse les mémoires de Loveleen Rihel Brenna, *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* (2012) [*Mon altérité, ma force*]. Il met l’accent sur l’utilisation par Brenna des techniques d’appropriation littéraire, l’utilisation de l’intertextualité par l’autobiographe et le rôle du genre *Bildungsroman* dans ses mémoires. L’article commence par contextualiser la situation diasporique de Brenna. Puis, en utilisant des concepts inspirés du livre de Rachel Blau DuPlessis *Writing Beyond the Ending* (1985) (en français, *Écrire au-delà du dénouement*) et des références intertextuelles tirées des mémoires de Brenna, l’article offre une lecture attentive de *Min Annerledeshet, min styrke*, afin d’explorer la complexité de l’utilisation, par Brenna, de modèles conventionnels et non conventionnels du genre féminin *Bildungsroman*, afin de comprendre comment son utilisation du genre aborde la question des femmes et du multiculturalisme en Norvège.

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Introduction



“Is multiculturalism bad for women?” Susan Moller Okin posed this question in a 1999 *Boston Review* article and sparked a debate that polarized feminist scholarship. In this article Okin sowed the seeds for a debate over multiculturalism versus feminism that continues to be relevant in Norway today. Okin argued that group rights may problematically override the purportedly universal rights of women, as some cultural groups are more patriarchal than others. Although Norway has been globally renowned as a champion for gender equality, the country has also experienced the relatively recent immigration of people from non-Western cultures whose gender values appear to clash with Norwegian values. The debate is further complicated as it challenges the national discourse of tolerance. This combination of factors has ignited a vigorous discussion about the crisis of Norwegian gender equality in the media, in academia, among Norwegian feminists, and among Norwegians of immigrant background.

Two images exemplify this ideological clash, or Norway’s struggle to reconcile Norwegian feminism with multiculturalism. The first is Shabana Rehman’s self-portrait published in *Dagbladets Magasinet*, a popular Norwegian weekly (Ringheim). In the controversial image (see Figure 1), Rehman throws aside a teal garment to reveal her nude body painted in the Norwegian flag’s brilliant blue, red, and white. The image depicts Rehman’s transition from an oppressed immigrant Muslim to an empowered Norwegian woman. Rehman is intentionally provocative in her message. In reference to this image she told *Time* magazine that she “is a free woman” and that she “take[s] [her] clothes off to provoke the authorities in order to expose them” (Wallace). She uses her status as a celebrity to provoke and to prod the “authorities” (the Pakistani patriarchy and the Norwegian media) to inquire as to why the women’s question takes second priority to ethnic preservation in Norway’s Pakistani community. The second image was published in *Avisa Nordland* [Nordland’s newspaper] on March 8, 2008 (see Figure 2) in honour of International Women’s Day and was also published and discussed in the book *Likestilte norskheter: Om kjønn og etnisitet* (2010) [Equal Norwegianness: On Gender and Ethnicity]. The cartoon depicts Tora Aasland, Norway’s Minister of Research and Higher Education, picketing with a sign that demands: “KVINNEKVOTERING AV MATEMATIKK-PROFESSORER” [FEMALE QUOTAS FOR MATH PROFESSORS]¹ as a burqa-clad woman looks on (Berg, Flemmen, and Gullikstad 10-11). Additionally, motion squiggles illustrate that Aasland is in the process of passing one of the two supporting handles of her picket sign to the burqa-clad woman as though inviting her to join in on the Norwegian gender equality struggle. The juxtaposition of Norway’s stereotypical women-friendly

quotas against the cultural practices of some of the country's new Norwegians aptly portrays Norway's gender equality dilemma.



Figure 1

Shabana Rehman, a Pakistani-Norwegian comedian and public figure, throws off her traditional Pakistani clothing in favour of revealing her naked body painted with the Norwegian flag.



Figure 2

The cartoon depicts Tora Aasland, Norway's Minister of Research and Higher Education, picketing with a sign that demands "FEMALE QUOTAS FOR MATH PROFESSORS" as a burqa-clad woman looks on ("Typisk kvinn folk").

These images illustrate the concept of intersectionality²—in this case the intersection of gender equality, ethnicity, and religion and/or faith—and explore Okin's question regarding whether multiculturalism is bad for women. Okin's question is considered tired, even passé, in academia as it is viewed as overly simplistic and to some scholars even racist. Yet despite its reputation in academe, Norwegian women of immigrant background continue to investigate Okin's question and their intersectional citizenship by using their own life experiences as the subject for their analysis. In this article, I analyze Loveleen Rihel Brenna's

memoir *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* and the way its narrator engages with the question “is multiculturalism bad for women?” in her Norwegian-Indian context. My analysis of Loveleen’s³ memoir will focus on her use of literary appropriation techniques, the memoirist’s use of intertextuality, and the role of the *Bildungsroman* genre⁴ in her memoir. Using concepts inspired from Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s book *Writing Beyond the Ending* in conjunction with intertextual references from Loveleen’s memoir, I will offer a close reading of *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* to explore the complexity of Loveleen’s use of the conventional and unconventional patterns of the female *Bildungsroman* genre in order to understand how her use of the genre engages with the question of women and multiculturalism.

Loveleen Rihel Brenna: Author and Activist

At age 5, Loveleen moved with her family from India to Kristiansand, Norway (Brenna 57). Loveleen made her debut in the Norwegian media at age eighteen when she participated in a Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) documentary that followed the lives of multicultural youths in Norway. The documentary that introduced the Norwegian public to the young immigrant, and vice versa, paid special attention to Loveleen’s arranged marriage to Daljeet Kumar⁵ (Kumar 10). Loveleen has studied psychology, multicultural perspectives, pedagogy, and has a Masters degree from the University of Oslo in educational leadership. Loveleen’s resumé is extensive; she has been an activist for multicultural children’s issues, a government administrator, and an author. She has held important national positions such as: a board member of Norway’s Red Cross, the leader of *Foreldreutvalget for grunnopplæringen* (FUG),⁶ the leader of the *Kvinnepanelet* [Women’s Panel], the leader for the *Barne- likestillings- og inkluderingsdepartementet* [Children, Equality, and Inclusion Department], and a faculty board member at Oslo and Akershus University College (HiOA) of Applied Sciences. In addition to her official duties, she holds courses, lectures, and seminars about what it is like to grow up between two or three cultures (Kumar 7). These interactions with the Norwegian public have served as inspiration for her writing projects. She’s written several nonfiction pieces—books, articles, and blog posts—as well as a memoir. Her first book, *Mulighetens barn: Å vokse opp mellom to kulturer* (1997) [Opportunity’s Child: Growing up Between Two Cultures] is a compilation of letters she received from Norwegian children of immigrant background. *Mulighetens barn* explores the reality, challenges, and identity conflicts of “bindestreksbarn” [hyphenated children]. Most recently, Loveleen published *Min annerledeshet, min styrke*, which, according to Loveleen, provides an account of an immigrant woman’s successful journey to a national leadership position (Loland). In 2012, Loveleen established her own nonprofit, SEEMA A.S.,⁷ and her own

consulting firm, Loveleen's konsulentfirma A.S., whose missions are to assist women of immigrant background in the Norwegian job market.

Contextualization

As my literary analysis hinges on political and societal discourses, I will provide a brief contextualization of Loveleen's Norwegian framework. Norwegians have historically understood and defined their country as a homogeneous nation. Norway, which gained its independence from Sweden in 1905, was not originally known as a destination country for immigrants but rather as a country with a population prone to emigration. In spite of this outgoing trend, Norway was not entirely homogeneous. Coexisting alongside the white Christian protestant majority population were the Sámi, Finns, Romany, as well as Scandinavian nationals from neighbouring countries, among others. Even though Norway has a long history of migration, the country's migrant narrative tends to be treated solely as a present-day political issue (Sturm-Martin). Due to the immigration wave of the 1960s, Norway has experienced the growth of a multicultural society. The country has been forced to confront new ways of conceptualizing Norway and Norwegianness, the scholar Anniken Hagelund identifies that the phrase "we are living in a multicultural society" has become a familiar rhetorical trope in Norwegian politics (Hagelund 182). Grete Brochmann, a Norwegian sociologist, has analyzed the problematic nature of a newly multicultural society, explaining that "[n]ew multicultural states are groping for good symbols for the new diversity. The traditional national symbols have lost aspects of their force and legitimacy in the conflict with both internationalization and immigration" (Brochmann 11). As the issues of minorities and migration are unavoidable in politics and everyday life, Norway's political discourse and policy have begun to explore its former experiences with cultural diversity where they previously stressed the country's homogeneity (Hagelund 182). Interactions between the minority and the majority population have been far from conflict-free. The immigration debate began as a push towards integration, with equality as the basis for this policy, but has become a highly politicized issue. The welfare state, created to help all within state borders, is threatened by economic exhaustion and strained by overpopulation as well as overuse. Integration becomes an even more challenging process when immigrant values are perceived to clash with the values of the host country.

The Norwegian national narrative is typified, among other traits, by its commitment to equality, particularly gender equality. Since the 1970s, due mostly to the policies of the Labour Party, Norway has been transformed into one of the most gender equal nations in the world. However, Anh Nga Longva, in her article "The Trouble with Difference: Gender, Ethnicity and Social Democracy," challenges the national narrative of equality. Longva exposes the deceptive simplicity of the

Norwegian word and concept *likhet*. *Likhet* is the Norwegian word for both equality and similarity/sameness. In Norwegian, to be equal is synonymous with being similar, or the same. The etymology of *likhet* reflects the cultural understanding that to be equal is first and foremost to be alike (Gullestad 1984, 1992, 2002; Longva). The concept of egalitarian individualism is no stranger to the Western world, however many researchers have argued that there is a stronger emphasis on sameness in Norway as well as the other Nordic countries (Gullestad 2006). In her article, Longva analyzes how Norway’s oppressed others have achieved equality and become recognized members of Norwegian society through redistributive justice. She begins her argument by discussing gender equality, showing that what seem to be extremely progressive and groundbreaking proposals are problematic because they are shaped on a male rather than a female model, where women are instead admired for “their ability to transcend the traditional image of women as creatures for whom biology is destiny” (Longva 158). The myth of the “strong Norwegian woman” (who is first and foremost autonomous, a woman who can “have it all”) contributes to the pressure for Norwegian women’s assimilation to masculine traits. Longva’s central argument is that a *mono-gendered* society is not necessarily a *degenderized* society. The policies implemented by the Norwegian government have created a *mono-gendered* society with maleness as the norm (Longva 158).

Issues of equality are not just a matter of gender but also of race. In her analysis of *likhet*, Longva also provides a case study of the Sámi, Norway’s indigenous population. The Alta river protests⁸ put minority issues on the map in Norway, and, due in large part to these protests, the Sámi have since received cultural recognition.⁹ Cultural recognition, however, was not actualized until after the Sámi in Norway “were subjected between the 1850s and the 1960s” to harsh assimilation policies that have “wrought extensive and, some would claim, permanent, damage on this national minority, such as loss of language and traditions, and a fading perception of history and identity” (Longva 170). Longva illustrates that the Sámi people did not receive equality until after they had been forcibly assimilated, or Norwegianized. In regard to Norway’s relatively new multicultural population, Longva questions *likhet*’s role: how is Norway to reconcile difference based on ethnicity? If ethnic minorities follow the historical trend of Norway’s oppressed others (women and the Sámi), today’s Norwegian immigrant minorities can hope to achieve redistributive justice only through assimilation/Norwegianization. Is it possible, in the Norwegian context, to break this historical trend and to think about dichotomies (male/female, indigenous/Norwegian, Norwegian/immigrant) in a non-dichotomous way? Is it possible to distinguish between equal and same, and unequal and different? Is an imagined sameness needed to establish “peace and quiet”—in other words, can *likhet* be achieved in multicultural Norway?

Norwegian literature written by authors of immigrant background has engaged with and complicated these questions. Within the last three decades, immigrants and their children have contributed to rewriting the national narrative through various forms of literary expression, for example short stories, plays, poetry, and novels (Kongslien 2006). In their works, these new authors and performers raise questions of identity, nationality/ethnicity, and location. This migrant expression began to emerge in other parts of Scandinavia in the 1970s with the publication of short stories, poetry, and novels by members of the region's immigrant populations (Kongslien 2007, 197). However literature written by authors of immigrant background did not appear in Norway until 1986 when Khalid Hussain published his book *Pakkis* [Packi].¹⁰ Ten years later, Nasim Karim published *IZZAT: For ærens skyld* [IZZAT:¹¹ For the sake of honour], which features a female protagonist, as opposed to Hussain's male protagonist, and foregrounds women's issues. These books highlight the coming-of-age problems experienced by second-generation immigrants of the largest immigrant group in Norway, Pakistanis (Kongslien 2007, 209-12). These two works ushered in a new genre into the Norwegian canon, which the literary scholar Ingeborg Kongslien labels Norwegian "migration literature" but notes that this literature has also been termed "intercultural literature" or "multicultural literature" (Kongslien 2014, 113). I suggest a terminology change when discussing this genre in a literary context to "diaspora literature," and I will use this term throughout this article. I suggest this change because "multiculturalism" and "migration" are terms often associated with failed political projects of European nation-states. Additionally, "multiculturalism" has recently been coopted by fear-mongering right-wing groups in Norway. Although groups in Norway are actively attempting to reclaim the term from far-right extremists,¹² due to the contentious political nature of the term and the baggage it carries it isn't a fruitful tool in a literary analysis or a discussion of literary discourse. Although originating from the great Jewish exodus (from the Greek word *diaspeirein* meaning to "disperse"),¹³ diaspora in literary theory today refers to the dispersion of any people from their original homeland. I offer Avtar Brah's clarification of diaspora, "the concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins while taking account of a homing desire, as distinct from a desire for a 'homeland'" (Brah 16). In this way, the term diaspora sidesteps nationality, while simultaneously relying on the notion of the nation and nationhood and allowing authors to go beyond the "Norwegian vs. immigrant" dichotomy typified by the terminology of immigrant literature, migrant literature, or multicultural literature. Therefore a switch to the term diaspora literature in the field of Norwegian literary studies would better reflect the realities of modern migration without a perceived association with far-right extremist thought.

Regardless of its label, this literature has proved integral to the Norwegian debate over multiculturalism because it articulates the ethnic minority voice and

challenges the notion that Norway is an ethnically and culturally homogeneous nation. Memoirs within the genre function as another vehicle for challenging Norway’s national narrative. Memoirs written by minority women and academics have been published in Norway to mixed reception. These memoirs, like other forms of literary expression, address issues of identity, nationality, ethnicity, and place. Female authors of immigrant background who write in this genre have tended to highlight their personal relationship to the intersection of gender and Norway’s diasporic communities of which they are members. These non-fiction memoirs are presented in various modes, for example: books, stand-up comedy, politics, YouTube videos, journalism, and anthologies. Loveleen’s memoir offers a unique perspective on diasporic identity that does not rely on the tired “us vs. them” dichotomy. Her interpretation of her own life story and its Norwegian context confronts challenges by bridging understandings, fusing two identities together, and prioritizing patience.

“Writing Beyond the Ending” in *Min annerledeshet, min styrke*

Min annerledeshet, min styrke is an attempt to “write beyond the ending.” In other words, the memoir depicts how Loveleen broke with expected traditional gender roles of Indian women in diaspora and gained a leadership position at a national level. Rachel Blau DuPlessis coined the term “writing beyond the ending” in order to revise “the way we read works written by women of the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries” (Dorr 307). She elaborates on the concept in her introduction:

Narrative in the most general terms is a version of, or a special expression of, ideology: representations by which we construct and accept values and institutions. Any fiction expresses ideology; for example, romance plots of various kinds and the fate of female characters express attitudes at least toward family, sexuality, and gender. The attempt to call into question political and legal forms related to women and gender, characteristic of women’s emancipation in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is accompanied by this attempt by women writers to call narrative forms into question. The invention of strategies that sever the narrative from formerly conventional structures of fiction and consciousness about women is what I call “writing beyond the ending.”
(Blau DuPlessis x)

In her book, which has been lauded by feminist literary critics (see Dorr), Blau DuPlessis pays close attention to narrative strategies. Blau DuPlessis argues that twentieth-century women writers used the “poetics of critique,” or rebellious narrative techniques, in order to write beyond the conventional narrative

structure of the nineteenth-century romance plot. In her first chapter, “Endings and Contradictions,” she outlines the conventional pattern of the *Bildungsroman* with a female protagonist and identifies a convention of novelistic closure in works by nineteenth-century British women writers—most notably Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Emma* (1815), and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847). The plot typically features a young girl growing into adulthood, leaving the “relational triangle” or the intense love/hate relations with her parents for an initiation into adulthood, where her destiny lies within the domestic sphere as wife/mother, her vocation and her sexuality collapsed into one (37). In the chapters that follow, Blau DuPlessis describes a variety of deviations from this conventional narrative sequence that developed because of a “desire to scrutinize the ideological character of the romance plot and related conventions in narrative, and to change fiction so that it makes alternative statements about gender and its institutions” (x). Women writers of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, via the “poetics of critique,” have challenged the conventional patterns of the female *Bildungsroman* by reassessing the conventional plot sequence of the novel by writing alternative and oppositional stories about men, women, and community. This breaking of the conventional pattern of the female *Bildungsroman* often involves the following elements:

1. a mother/daughter relationship that is conflicted because the daughter both desires and resists the example or demands of her mother for conventional feminine destiny;
2. a daughter who occasionally identifies with her father (however she is conflicted because she is not male, as he is);
3. a complex and conflicting relationship between the demands of sexuality (being a wife/mother) and a desire for individualism and/or vocation; and
4. a troubling adult relationship with her family, community, and nation, resulting from the rebellions against the conventional feminine destiny.

Blau DuPlessis’ observations about historical change in women writers’ narrativity are insightful as my analysis will show how Loveleen strategically uses these two plot sequences (both the conventional pattern and the breaking of the conventional pattern) in her memoir in order to illustrate a move from the domestic to the public sphere. The first half of *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* echoes the conventional plot sequence of nineteenth-century romance novels, whereas the second half of the memoir breaks with the conventional plot in a manner similar to other works of twentieth-century women writers. The conventional pattern, the first half of the memoir, follows her coming of age under her parent’s roof, her dedication to her husband Tito (her first husband, an Indian man Loveleen’s parents arranged for her to marry), and her role as a mother to their

two sons, Manav and Siddhant. Loveleen describes accepting her role as an Indian wife and mother, "Jeg bestemte meg for å bli enhver indisk svigermors drøm. Det var ikke vanskelig. ... Jeg forsvant inn i den mest indiske delen av meg for å sikre meg et godt ekteskapelig liv som indisk hustru, svigerdatter, mor og gift datter. ... Jeg lukket døren. Nordmenn var blitt 'de andre'" [I decided to be every Indian mother-in-law's dream. It wasn't hard. ... I disappeared into the more Indian part of myself to secure a good married life as an Indian housewife, daughter-in-law, mother, and married daughter. ... I locked the door. Norwegians became 'the other'] (Brenna 119). At this point in her life, Loveleen strove to thrive in the conventional pattern by being the perfect housewife, daughter, daughter-in-law, and mother. Furthermore, Loveleen attempted to be an exemplary image of Indian femininity, which she describes with adjectives such as "lydig, plikttoppfyllende, oppofrende, flink på skolen, flink i husarbeid, høflig, bluferdig og sømmelig" [obedient, dutiful, devoted, good at school, good at housework, polite, bashful, and modest] (Brenna 74) –adjectives that do not necessarily align with an exemplary image of Norwegian femininity (sporty, strong, sexy, independent, autonomous).

In stark contrast, the second half of Loveleen's memoir rebels against the understood conventional Indian femininity as it details her divorce, her marriage to Johnny Brenna (a Norwegian man of her choice), and her vocational journey to a successful national leadership role. Throughout the memoir's turn from convention to rebellion, Loveleen is conflicted about her Indian upbringing. She expresses anger and confusion towards her mother (exemplifying the first point in Blau DuPlessis' pattern), who defined her daughters and sons by their gender roles.

Mamma sa flere ganger at hun var så stolt av oss. Vi kunne lage mat, rydde, sy, strikke, brodere, og var flinke på skolen, lydige og plikttoppfyllende. Den som giftet seg med oss, ville leve lykkelig. Det eneste hun ba om, var at Gud må gi oss familier som verdsatte oss. Av og til var det vanskelig å forstå om hun skrøt av oss, eller om dette var ros til henne selv, som hadde oppdradd oss til å bli så gode koneemner. (Brenna 88-89)

[Mama said several times that she was proud of us. We could cook, clean, sew, knit, embroider, and were good at school, obedient, and dutiful. The one who would marry us will live happily. The only thing she prayed for was that God would give us families that appreciated us. Sometimes it was difficult to understand if she boasted of us or if it was praise for herself, who brought us up to be such good prospective wives.]

It is apparent that Loveleen loves her mother and identifies with her, but she simultaneously resists being trapped by her mother's pride and narrow definitions of Indian womanhood. Also in line with breaking of the conventional pattern,

Loveleen identifies with her father (corresponding to the second point in Blau DuPlessis' pattern) as they both have brave, exploratory spirits. Her father established a life in a new country, and Loveleen similarly explored by creating a life beyond the domestic sphere. "For å forstå mine valg, min indre kraft og ikke minst min stahet for å nå mine mål, må jeg først fortelle om min fars reise. Hadde jeg ikke vært min fars datter, ville jeg kanskje aldri blitt hel og tro mot meg selv" [To understand my choice, my inner strength and, not least, my stubbornness about accomplishing my goal, I first need to tell about my father's journey. Had I not been my father's daughter, I would possibly never have been completely whole and true to myself] (Brenna 26). She takes time in her memoir to detail her father's struggles because she identifies with his journey. Additionally, Loveleen describes her rebellion as a forced shift from her Indian identity to a Norwegian identity, much of which is attached to sexual mores in the diasporic community (see Blau DuPlessis' third point). "Rykter og sladder ville florere uansett, så hvorfor ikke bygge seg opp til å bli et friere menneske istedenfor å la seg tynge av sladder i et undertrykkende miljø? ... Den dagen jeg forlot huset for godt, fikk jeg stempelet 'norsk' i pannen" [Rumours and gossip will flourish no matter what, so why not build yourself up to become a freer person instead of letting yourself gravitate towards the gossip in an oppressive environment? ... That day that I left the house for good, I got 'Norwegian' stamped on my forehead] (Brenna 152-53). In this passage she details her conflict with her family and the Indian community in her Norwegian town. Because of her decision to divorce, Loveleen experiences issues with her ex-husband when he decides to move to the United States, taking her two sons with him (Blau DuPlessis' fourth point). Her memoir provides an example of both types of narrative sequences in one book and thus represents an effort to "write beyond the ending" in the context of an Indian diasporic community within Norway's borders.

Loveleen's own life story is an example of "writing beyond the ending," but this strategy is further emphasized in her memoir as she incorporates intertextual references from the Norwegian canon (texts from nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century authors) as sources of inspiration for her own life story. In what could be described as overlapping intertextuality, *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* explores two levels of "writing beyond the ending." Loveleen's memoir provides accounts of her life that are uplifting and unifying, but she also uses intertextuality or literary appropriation to parallel her personal narrative with narratives grounded in the Norwegian national canon. An avid reader, she uses Norwegian literature as a way of relating to, understanding, and seeking guidance in her own lived experiences. Works of particular significance for the first part of her memoir and the nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* plot structure include: Sigrid Undset's *Kristin Lavransdatter* (1920-22), Camilla Collett's *Amtmannens døtre* (1854-55) [*The District Governor's Daughters*], Henrik Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem* (1879) [*A Doll's House*], and Anne Karin Elstad's *Folket på Innhaug* (1976) [*People of Innhaug*]

and *Julie* (1993). Loveleen uses these Norwegian works to parallel her early life with Norway's past: before Norway's Modern Breakthrough, before religious choice, before women's liberation, and before modernity.

Loveleen begins her memoir at her sister's wake. Through this traumatic event, the reader is provided an intimate and unguarded look into the Rihel family and their community support. "Så mange blomster fra nordmenn! Dette er det sterkeste beviset på at dere er blitt inkludert i det norske samfunnet. Dette har jeg aldri sett i noen andre indiske hjem, sa en av gjestene til Pappa" [So many flowers from Norwegians! This is strong proof that you all have been included in Norwegian society. I have never seen this, ever, in another Indian home, said one of the guests to Papa] (Brenna 17-18). The narrator's description of the number of flowers sent by sympathetic Norwegians to show their support for the Rihel family assures the reader of an eventual successful integration experience and guarantees that the Rihel family is composed of exceptional immigrants. The memoir then jumps back in time and details each of Loveleen's parents' upbringings and describes the terms of their arranged marriage. Moving linearly, the memoir devotes chapters to Loveleen's pre-emigrant life in India, her father's search for a suitable host-country (a process that necessitated sixteen separate journeys), and her immigration to Norway together with her parents. Loveleen's memoir reserves significant space for commentary on her own experiences as a child immigrant in Southern Norway, detailing cultural contrasts, gender role comparisons, the Indian community's cooperation and support, language and interpretation issues, Indian family values verses Norwegian family values, religion, youth rebellion, and circular migration.¹⁴ Her problems reach a climax when Loveleen's parents arrange a marriage for her with Tito, a boy from India. In her arranged marriage, Loveleen suffers from split identity issues; she oscillates between her husband (who views her as too Norwegian) and Norwegian society (where she is engaged in a perpetual struggle to be "norsk nok" [Norwegian enough]). After years of marriage and two children, Loveleen divorces her husband (Tito's adultery justifies her divorce) and steps outside of the domestic sphere in order to explore her own identity and vocation, a project she calls "Loveleen i fremtiden" [Loveleen in the future] (Brenna 173), and which correlates to the twentieth-century *Bildungsroman* plot.

In chapter eleven, Loveleen's plot sequences collide with Norwegian history and literature. The chapter describes Loveleen's experience at Baldwin discotheque. Loveleen lies to her strict parents, telling them she was working a night shift at the *damehjem* [women's retirement home], in order to go to a nightclub. This chapter interrogates two concepts: the duty of Indian daughters verses the duty of Norwegian daughters and the two narrative structures of female protagonists (past vs. present, Indian vs. Norwegian). In chapter eleven, Loveleen has a conversation at the *damehjem* with a resident, *fru* [Mrs.] Andersen, about another resident, *frøken* [Miss] Pedersen. *Fru* Andersen describes the plight of

frøken Pedersen after Loveleen mentions that she sympathizes with *frøken* Pedersen who receives no visitors and never leaves the *damehjem*. *Fru* Andersen unsympathetically and harshly shares her opinion with Loveleen:

- Nei, ho kommer nok ikke i verljuset, uansett, sa fru Andersen med litt skarp stemme.
 - Verljuset, hva er det?
 - Nordlyset, der jomfruene går etter at de dør svarte hun.
- (Brenna 98)

- [- No, she's probably not going to *verljuset* anyway, said *fru* Andersen harshly.
- *Verljuset*, what is that?
- The Northern Lights, where virgins go when they die, she answered.]

From this conversation, Loveleen learns that *frøken* Pedersen gave birth to a child out of wedlock who died shortly after birth. Public knowledge of her loose morals branded her an unfit bride, thereby condemning her to living with her parents for the entirety of her adult life. *Frøken* Pedersen's deviance from the conventional and accepted pattern was shameful to her family, causing them to be the subject of community gossip. Loveleen is shocked by the story and proclaims to *fru* Andersen, "det du forteller nå ligner veldig på den indiske kulturen" [what you're telling me now is very similar to the Indian culture] (Brenna 99). Loveleen interprets this bit of Norwegian history as a parallel to her own present-day Indian community in Norway.

Such conversations spark Loveleen's interest in Norwegian literary history, particularly books that shed light upon how Norwegian women lived in the past. She reads Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem*, Undset's *Kristin Lavransdatter*, and Elstad's *Folket på Innhaug*. Loveleen observes that within the pages of these books "det var som å lese om meg selv, min far, min mor, mine søsken og alle andre jeg kjente med indisk bakgrunn. Jeg kjente meg mer igjen i disse romanene enn i indiske bøker. Bygdedyret i bøkene var det indiske miljøet i mitt liv" [it was like reading about myself, my father, my mother, my siblings and all of the others I knew with Indian background. I felt more alive in these novels than in Indian books. The characters in the books were the Indian environment in my life] (Brenna 100). Throughout the memoir,¹⁵ Loveleen leans on Norwegian literature as a bridge between her two lived situations, her double identity. She notices that, "bøkene jeg leste fikk en ny dimensjon. Jeg la mer og mer merke til likhetene mellom den kulturen jeg var en del av og det jeg leste om, som var Norge før i tiden" [the books that I read acquired a new dimension. I noticed with increasing frequency the similarities between the culture I was a part of and the one I read about, which was Norway in the past] (Brenna 131).

During Loveleen's self-discovery process, she relies heavily upon works that encourage a breaking away from the conventional pattern of the female *Bildungsroman*. For example, she describes Ibsen's character Nora as a source of inspiration, "Ibsens Nora ble en sterk inspirasjonskilde. Det var som om jeg så henne for meg, der hun kjempet seg frem til en egen identitet" [Ibsen's Nora was a strong source of inspiration. It was like I saw her as me, the way she fought for her own identity] (Brenna 160). Nora, Ibsen's notorious female protagonist, slams the door on the patriarchy in order to explore the duties she has to herself, undertaking an implied self-actualization project. Nora was never able to "write beyond the ending" as *Et dukkehjem's* finale is literally a door closing; Loveleen however sees this as an intertextual parallel where she can open a new door and write a new plot for herself. Other titles Loveleen discloses as relevant to the second part of her memoir, in addition to Nora in Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem*, include David Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken's *Third Culture Kids* (1999) and Thorvald Stoltenberg's *Det handler om mennesker* (2001) [*It's About People*]. She also lists notable Norwegian public figures such as Arne Næss, Jonas Gahr Støre, and Kristin Clemet. These works and inspirational figures deviate from Blau DuPlessis's analysis in three ways because the works are non-fiction, they aren't all written by women, nor are the protagonists all women. This deviation is, however, integral to the memoir's Norwegian context. In order to "write beyond the ending," or to disrupt the habits of narrative order, Loveleen clings to a Norwegian narrative of egalitarian individualism, which Longva calls a *mono-gendered* individualism built upon a male model (Longva 158).

After Loveleen's divorce and symbolic dive into a new narrative structure, her traditionalist Indian parents cut off communication with her, as her divorce shamed the honour of the Rihel family. Stepping out of the domestic sphere becomes a catalyst for Loveleen's emerging visibility and for finding her own voice. She speaks out at conferences and begins a career writing about and counseling parents about immigrant integration in Norway. After reconciling with her parents in a moment of crisis, they encourage her to open up to the idea of pursuing a new husband. The memoir then jumps ahead to when Loveleen meets Johnny Brenna, a Norwegian police officer and TV2's crime expert;¹⁶ they court and eventually marry. Their courtship and marriage is complicated by multiple issues. To name just two: Tito moves to the United States and files for custody of his two sons, while Loveleen's and Johnny's demanding careers burden their relationship. Ultimately, Loveleen retains custody of her sons who identify as more Norwegian than Indian,¹⁷ her relationship with Johnny continues, and her career successfully develops into a national leadership position with FUG and SEEMA.

Loveleen's memoir presents a published narrative that writes beyond the typical female immigrant experience of arranged marriage and/or violence. Marianne Skarsgård, a journalist, highlights the uniqueness of this project,

explaining that Loveleen “viser til at det blant annet er gitt ut bøker om tvangsekteskap og vold, men ikke noen som forteller historien om en minoritetskvinnes vei til lederjobb på nasjonalt nivå” [notes that, among other things, books on arranged marriage and violence are published, but not one that tells a story about a minority woman’s path to a leadership position at the national level] (Skarsgård). *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* provides an example of a minority woman’s successful journey that ends in a national leadership position. This project is important, uplifting, and hopeful. However this project has the potential to be quite problematic. Blau DuPlessis’ analysis of literature requires a progressive view of history that positions these narrative structures on a hierarchy, where twentieth-century narratives are above conventional nineteenth-century narratives. Loveleen uses the *Bildungsroman* genre to situate her lived experiences within the Norwegian literary canon, which could suggest that the Indian diasporic community in Norway lags years back on the linear path to gender equality.

Sammensmeltning [Fusion]

Loveleen is not the first author to discuss the similarities between Norway’s Christian past and the realities of today’s multicultural youth. Human Rights Service (HRS), founded and led by Hege Storhaug, a prominent Norwegian feminist and anti-Muslim activist, published a report called *Feminin integrering: Utfordringer i et fleretnisk samfunn* (2003) [Feminine Integration: Challenges in a Multiethnic Society] that contained stories about the abuse and violence towards multicultural women (women of colour) at the hands of the multicultural patriarchy (men of colour) in Norway. The report recognizes that these narratives do not depict every immigrant family in Norway; however HRS does find the violent narratives to encompass enough large immigrant families to warrant concern (Storhaug and Human Rights Service 141). To translate these oppressive narratives for a Norwegian audience, HRS used Norwegian literary history, particularly literature of the Modern Breakthrough, to illustrate the severity of the women’s human rights abuses.

Dette kvinneundertrykkende bildet kjenner vi igjen fra tidligere norsk (kristen) historie, der kvinner ble ansett som mannens eiendom–også i ektesengen. Våre store forfatter på slutten av forrige århundre som Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Henrik Ibsen, Gabriel Scott, Jonas Lie, Camilla Collett og Amalie Skram, har alle gjennom skjønnlitterære verker beskrevet kvinners (og menns) tragiske ekteskapelige skjebner.
(Storhaug 185)

[This image of the oppressed woman we recognize from earlier Norwegian (Christian) history, where women were considered a man’s property–also in the

marriage bed. Our great authors at the turn of the last century, such as Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Henrik Ibsen, Gabriel Scott, Jonas Lie, Camilla Collett, and Amalie Skram, have all via literary works described women's (and men's) tragic marital fates.]

HRS draws a parallel between Norway's literary, fictional past and the narratives they present of Norway's current, real-life multicultural residents. The non-profit's report likewise acknowledges the potential of "writing beyond the ending" or finding a way to break the conventional plot, as they include policy proposals that advocate for a change in Norway's immigration laws to better "protect" women. HRS depicts immigrant communities as historical, regressive cultures and native Norwegians as having a modern, progressive culture. HRS's report, in contrast to Loveleen's narrative, limits itself to a narrow-minded view of "writing beyond the ending" due to its simplification of the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender. The feminist non-profit recognizes only one way of breaking the conventional plot, namely assimilating to Western, European, and Norwegian cultural and societal norms. Using Norwegian literary history in this way is highly problematic as it places the two cultural traditions in binary opposition: Norwegian/immigrant, West/East, Global North/Global South.

Loveleen's narrative, however, "writes beyond the ending" in a specifically diasporic way as she includes Indian narratives in her story. Just as she read Norwegian literature with her first husband, she acculturates her second husband into Indian culture.

Jeg begynte å lese bøker for ham. Litt hver dag, for det meste indisk filosofi. Deepak Chopra, Dalai Lama, Osho. Dette hadde jeg gjort før, det var nesten som om historien gjentok seg. For tretten år siden hadde jeg lest bøker av norske forfattere for Tito, de første årene etter at han kom til Norge. Nå var det en ny runde, denne gangen med Johnny. Jeg begynte å lure på om det var meg og ikke mennene det var noe galt med.

(Brenna 200)

[I began to read books to him. A little bit every day, for the most part Indian philosophy. Deepak Chopra, Dali Lama, Osho. I'd done this before, it was almost like history was repeating itself. Thirteen years ago I had read books by Norwegian authors to Tito, the first years upon his arrival to Norway. Now it was another round, this time with Johnny. I began to wonder if it was me, and not the men, there was something wrong with.]

This negotiation exemplifies Loveleen's diasporic narrativity. She negotiates between her two cultures and invites her Norwegian family to see the values and lessons of Indian culture. Loveleen finds other ways of bridging gaps and finding common ground with others who have lived dislocated or diasporic lives. She explains that "jeg likte å lese om Gandhi gjennom Arne Næss' briller, da ble både

det norske og det indiske i meg ivaretatt. Denne sammensmeltningen gjorde at jeg følte meg hel. Jeg kjente det samme i møte med norske misjonær- og diplomat-barn, som nå var blitt voksne, som hadde vokst opp i India” [I liked to read about Gandhi through Arne Næss’ lens, then both the Norwegian and the Indian in me was safeguarded. This fusion made me feel whole. I felt the same with Norwegian missionary and diplomat children, now adults, who had grown up in India] (Brenna 203). Loveleen’s *sammensmeltning* (fusion) calls into question essentialist models of Norwegianness as well as the idea of a homogenous Norwegian culture. She feels at home with others who understand *sammensmeltningen*, or those capable of a dual perspective. *Sammensmeltningen* is the notion of a diasporic consciousness or identity, and Loveleen invokes this fusion and duality as a positive affirmation of their identities.

However as Loveleen details in this passage, “writing beyond the ending” simply isn’t enough to live up to the liberated Western standard:

Begrepe ne minoritetskvinne, innvandr er, indisk jente og fremmedkulturell kvalte halve meg, følte jeg; de ugyldiggjorde og ignorerte store deler av min personlighet, mitt liv og min identitet. Det var ikke noe galt i å være minoritetskvinne, men alle de forestillingene folk hadde om minoritetskvinner, gjorde meg så annerledes fra kvinner generelt at det ble en belastning for meg. Jeg var glad i mine naboer, lærere, klassekamerater, foreldrene til vennene mine, de ansatte på butikken jeg handlet i, mine kollegaer og alle andre nordmenn jeg kjente. Jeg elsket Camilla Collett, Sigrid Undset, Henrik Ibsen, Amalie Skram, Anne Karin Elstad, Tove Nilsen og Jens Bjørneboe. Fiskeboller, får ikål, frikassé, komper, kjøttkaker og kokt torsk var blitt yndlingsrettene mine. Men selv om Norge hadde vugget meg i søvn, oppfostret meg og gitt meg omsorg og støtte i tju eåtte år, ble jeg likevel plassert i en kategori som skilte meg fra alle de andre, utenfor resten av barneflokk en til “mor Norge.” (Brenna 206)

[The concepts minority woman, immigrant, Indian girl, and culturally distant suffocated me; I felt they invalidated half of me and ignored large parts of my personality, my life, and my identity. There was nothing wrong with being a minority woman, but all the stereotypes people had about minority women made me so different from women in general that it was a burden to me. I was fond of my neighbours, teachers, classmates, parents of my friends, the staff at the store I shopped at, my colleagues, and all of the other Norwegians I knew. I loved Camilla Collett, Sigrid Undset, Henrik Ibsen, Amalie Skram, Anne Karin Elstad, Tove Nilsen, and Jens Bjørneboe. Fish balls, mutton stew, fricassee, potato balls, meatballs, and boiled cod had become my favourite dishes. But even though Norway had rocked me to sleep, nurtured me, and given me care and support for twenty-eight years, I was still placed in a category that separated me from all of the others, outside the rest of “Mother Norway’s” flock of children.]

Sammensmeltning must work in two directions. Loveleen was able to "write beyond the ending" and rupture the traditional narrative structure thanks to her location in Norway, but her diasporic identity could not provide her *likhet*. Despite her sincere efforts, Loveleen cannot escape the Norwegian/immigrant divide.

Herein lies the main goal of *Min annerledeshet, min styrke*: to promote *sammensmeltning* as a positive descriptor of Norwegian identity. In doing this, Loveleen critiques both the Indian community in Norway and her Norwegian host country. Loveleen, who has put down roots in Norway, asks her diasporic readers to do the same and allow themselves to settle in their host country for the sake of their children. She also asks her fellow Norwegian citizens to permit such a transition. To illustrate this highly contentious and complicated process, she uses the metaphor "treet med plastposen" [tree in a plastic bag] (Brenna 142-49). Gardening, a shared Indian and Norwegian interest, serves as an apt metaphor for diasporic consciousness. Loveleen compares her diasporic experience with the process of transplanting a tree. A tree is transported from the nursery to a new garden with a plastic bag around its roots, which parallels her Indian community in Norway, "De hadde fått kuttet over røttene—mange av båndene til sine foreldre, søsken, naboer, venner, landet og omgivelser. Uten å være klar over det, hadde de fått en plastpose rundt røttene" [They had cut the roots—many of the ties to their parents, siblings, neighbours, friends, country, and environment. Without being aware of it, they had gotten a plastic bag around their roots] (Brenna 145). The plastic bag is a symbol of a longing for the homeland and one's home traditions, which is an approach that is often criticized for being nativist in attitude or a form of strategic essentialism. "Jeg opplevde det indiske samfunnet i Kristiansand som en koloni av frukttrær med plastposer rundt røttene. Selv om flere av dem hadde bodd i Norge i tjue eller tretti år, hadde de ingen planer om å få rotfeste i ny jord" [I experienced the Indian society in Kristiansand as a colony of fruit trees with plastic bags around their roots. Even though many of them had lived in Norway for twenty or thirty years, they had no plans to root in new soil] (Brenna 146). Though they live in Norway their hearts are still in India, which impedes their ability to thrive in Norway and complicates the lives of their children who do not have a plastic bag around their roots. The plastic bag must be removed, but well tilled soil is also required for a successful transplant. She notes that,

Noen av dem opplevde at det blåste kalde vinder rundt dem, og at det var tele i jorden. Holdningene og rasismen de møtte i nabolaget, på arbeidsplassen og i samfunnet generelt, gjorde det umulig for dem å ta av plastposen. Jo mer krenkelser og diskriminering de opplevde, jo vanskeligere ble det for dem å finne sin plass i samfunnet, i den nye hagen.
(Brenna 146)

[Some of them felt that cold winds blew around them and that the soil was frozen. The attitudes and racism that they encountered in their neighbourhood, at work, and in society generally, made it impossible for them to take off the plastic bag. The more violations and discrimination they experienced, the more difficult it became for them to find their place in society, in the new garden.]

Balancing all of these factors, Loveleen decides to discard her own plastic bag and take root in Norway for the sake of her children's wellbeing. However, she feels a responsibility to combat minority discrimination in Norwegian society and to use her knowledge of the migration process to assist Norwegians to cultivate soil fertile enough to accept those who dare to take off the plastic bag. She noticed "at enkeltpersoner som uttalte seg om minoritetsmiljøer, ofte manglet teorigrunnlaget og tyngden de trengte for å få gehør i fagmiljøene" [that individuals who spoke about minority communities often lacked theoretical competency and the weight needed for gaining acceptance in professional circles] (Brenna 148), so she decided that she, "måtte kombinere mine egne erfaringer med fagkunnskap" [must combine [her] own experiences with disciplinary knowledge] (Brenna 148).

Loveleen sidesteps being criticized for having an assimilatory attitude because she places the integration burden upon both native Norwegians and immigrant Indians. The story she tells in *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* is one of diasporic opportunity and success. As an Indian woman in Norway, Loveleen is able to "write beyond the ending" and self-actualize within and outside of the domestic sphere. Though she appropriates a notion of modernism and modern literary narratives, she is careful not to equate modernity as synonymous with civilized, which is a profound misunderstanding found in crevasses of Norwegian society, for example in HRS's report. *Min annerledeshet, min styrke* approaches this question differently than both the images discussed above and the conclusions drawn in HRS's report, which place culture on a hierarchy where modern Norway ("West") is privileged over Eastern immigrant cultures ("the rest"). As she said in a recent interview, "Jeg tror det er Camilla Collett som sier at du må ta et oppgjør med dine egne fordommer før du kan ta et oppgjør med andres" [I believe it was Camilla Collett who said that you must confront your own prejudices before you can deal with others'] (Uri). In *Min annerledeshet, min styrke*, Loveleen advocates for finding strength in difference, and she believes that learning to view *sammensmeltet* (fused) identities as a positive attribute as opposed to a threat is a good task for Norwegian schools, Norwegian families, and Norwegian society.

NOTES

1. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

2. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" in 1989 in her analysis of women of colour in the American judiciary system. She concluded that women of colour are marginalized as "the outsider within" in a system that favours white heterosexual Christian males. Scandinavian feminist scholars have since accepted the term as both a political and analytical concept (Berg, Flemmen, and Gullikstad 14).
3. I want to clarify my use of the author's first name, Loveleen. She has published using three different last names. To avoid confusion, her first name is used in the media, and she also uses her first name in her own blog. I have therefore decided to use her first name as well.
4. In the fields of literary history and literary criticism, *Bildungsroman* is a German term used to describe a genre of literature that describes a character's "coming-of-age" or "formation." Johann Wolfgang Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-96) [*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*] is credited as the birth of the genre. Since Goethe, the genre has been applied to a variety of lived experiences, creating sub-genres. Blau DuPlessis's innovative text engages with the female experience as depicted in, and the breaking away from, the *Bildungsroman* genre.
5. In her memoir, Loveleen refers to Daljeet as "Tito."
6. FUG is the Norwegian equivalent to the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in the United States.
7. SEEMA is an acronym that has a dual meaning. The company is named in Loveleen's deceased sister's (Sima Rihel) honour. Seema stands for *Selvtendighet* [Independence], *Empowerment* [Empowerment], *Endring* [Change], *Mestring* [Mastering], and *Ambisjon* [Ambition].
8. The Alta river protests, also known as the Alta Controversy, was a popular movement (coordinated by Sámi/indigenous and environmentalist activists) against the development of the Alta-Kautokeino waterway on the Alta river in Finnmark, Northern Norway.
9. Norway acknowledged (in the 1980s) that it is a state founded on two peoples: Norwegian and Sámi; the Sámi (*Sámidiggi*) parliament was established in 1989; Norway is a signatory of DRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples); the Sámi language is recognized as an official language of Norway (ETS-148: European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages).
10. *Pakkis* is a derogatory Norwegian word for people of Pakistani descent.
11. *Izzat* is the Urdu word for "honour."
12. One example being "10 undersøkelser: Migranten" [10 Studies: Migrant] an ongoing arts-based research project funded by Office for Transnational Arts Production (TrAP).
13. Greek *diaspeirein* "disperse" from *dia* "across" + *speirein* "scatter." The term originates from Deuteronomy 28:25, "*esē diaspora en pasais basileias tēs gēs*" [thou shalt be a dispersion in all kingdoms of the earth.]
14. Circular migration refers to the family's frequent trips back and forth, from India to Norway—a practice that typifies modern migration's flexible conception of "home."
15. Chapter 16: "Jeg tar ordet" (quotes from Anne Karin Elstad's *Julie* (131-32)); Chapter 17: "Mine nærmeste fiender" (cites Henrik Ibsen, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Camilla Collett,

Sigrud Undset); Chapter 19: "Utstøtt"; Chapter 24: "Gandhi og ledelse" (references David Pollock and Thorvald Stoltenberg).

16. TV2 is a Norwegian commercialized television channel.
17. "Mamma, jeg er glad i alle i USA, men de snakker ikke slik som du gjør. Det er andre regler der. Vi er norske. Det er ikke de" [Mommy, I love all of them in the US, but they don't talk the way you do. There are other rules there. We are Norwegians. They are not] (Brenna 197).

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