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**RESEARCH PAPER**

# Decolonial Affect and the Politics of Feeling Otherwise: Emotional Sovereignty in Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends*

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**ABSTRACT**

This research examines the politics of emotion in Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends*, adopting a decolonial affective approach showing how postcolonial individual inherit, internalize and navigate emotional codes influenced by colonial legacies. The work focuses on a friendship bond between Zahra and Maryam, analyzing the impact of colonial and patriarchal legacies on emotional expression and interpersonal relationships, highlighting the unequal distribution of feelings through inherited systems of power. This study introduces the concept of emotional sovereignty to shed light on the postcolonial subject's struggle to negotiate for survival through various affective strategies, particularly engaging with Frantz Fanon's decolonial psychology and Sara Ahmed's theory of affective economies. The research demonstrates how friendship emerges as a crucial affective site in the reproduction and subversion of colonial power through an intimate textual analysis. Asserting that to "feel otherwise" is a decolonial practice and reclamation of emotional agency, the study concludes that *Best of Friends* provides a sustained critique of emotional regulation under postcolonial conditions.

**KEYWORDS** Decolonial Affect, Emotional Sovereignty, Affective Economy, Affective Lactification, Feeling Otherwise

## Introduction

There is no pure emotion in the postcolonial world, all of them are coded archives that were passed down and noted by centuries of domination. Some novels speak, and some novels feel. Put most certainly to the latter, Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends* challenges the reader to explore the conflict between intimacy and empire, affection and power without compelling them to focus on the narrative. It goes further exploring the ethical textures of the environment where colonial hierarchies still feel the impact. It was published in 2022, towards the close of what seems to be a major transformation of post-colonial literature concerning territory to emotions. In addition to its mere simplicity, it is a story of an emotional displacement and realignment between two Pakistani women, Zahra and Maryam whose life, though, begins in their adolescence in Karachi and concludes in their adulthood in London. Zahra employs moral sense as her compass in the morally unexplored land of human rights politics. Maryam turns cold-blooded efficiency of monetary success into the emotional detachment. Both are products and victims of colonial emotional inheritance, where affect is unevenly distributed, empathy becomes a privilege and detachment becomes a mode of survival. Their friendship maintained over decades and continents turns into a battlefield of emotions in which each believes her feelings are justified.

This research reads *Best of Friends* through the convergent lenses of Sara Ahmed's affect theory and Frantz Fanon's decolonial psychology, proposing that emotion itself functions as an extension of colonial control and a site of potential liberation. While the notion that emotion is political is familiar, this study advances the claim that emotion is also colonial. Sara Ahmed (2014), in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* argues that emotions "stick"

to bodies, creating economies of belonging and exclusion (p. 4). In this sense, affect becomes the very mechanism through which colonial and patriarchal power persist and controlling not only land and labor but the circuits of empathy itself. Fanon's analysis of the colonized psyche deepens this reading by revealing how emotional restraint, shame and self-surveillance persist as internalized forms of imperial discipline. Together, Ahmed and Fanon enable a reading of *Best of Friends* not as a story of difference but as a study in the afterlife of feeling that how empire survives as civility, how patriarchy disguises itself as composure and why friendship becomes the most complex terrain of decolonization.

Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends* opens not with politics but with adolescence, yet beneath its surface of youthful intimacy lies a subtle geography of power. Zahra and Maryam, growing up in 1980s Karachi, inhabit a space where the public world of dictatorship, censorship and moral codes infiltrates the private realm of girlhood. Their feelings are not innocent, they are colonized much earlier than they are expressed.

Decolonial affect is visible throughout the novel as Maryam and Zahra build their personal efforts to recover the power of their emotional lives. Zahra cannot self-examine and resist complete detachment which show decolonial refusal and the right to feel alive even though the world requires her to be numb. Maryam, on the contrary, is depersonalized to emphasize the price of emotional assimilation because the more she adapts to the capitalist code of restraint, the more human she becomes. They embody opposite ends of a postcolonial affective spectrum, ranging from detachment as complicity to empathy as defiance. Therefore, to feel differently is to live differently. Maryam's anestheticism and Zahra's moral crisis are historical symptoms rather than personal characteristics. The postcolonial woman bears two burdens, she must not only survive but also feel responsible in the aftermath of empire. Shamsie transforms the friendship into a philosophical stage where emotions are negotiated through betrayal, agency and belonging. Therefore, the novel needs to be interpreted emotionally as a serious political act rather than as sentimental realism. The *Best of Friends* novels dramatize the struggle for emotional self-determination in a world where histories of dominance haunt both politics and intimacy. This study argues that to "feel otherwise" is not a sentimental practice but rather a decolonial practice and the reclamation of affect by the structures that have always dictated who may feel, and how.

Thus, *Best of Friends* is not only a narrative of two women, but also a philosophical reflection on the politics of feeling. To feel otherwise, Shamsie suggests, is to undo centuries of emotional colonization and to claim the right to joy, sorrow, love and rage as one's own. Eventually, it speaks to the ethics of being human in a fractured moral order. It does not ask its readers to resolve its tensions but to feel them truthfully. Because after all, as this paper will propose, the most radical act of decolonial freedom is the reclaiming of feeling, the choice to feel, to love and to suffer.

## Literature Review

Earlier scholarship emphasizes that emotions are not private innocent feelings but socially structured phenomena. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed argues that emotions circulate in "affective economies" sticking to certain bodies or symbols and shaping collective belonging. Ahmed explains that some objects or people become "sticky" with particular emotions, racialized or gendered groups may be collectively associated with fear, disgust or pity, so that these feelings are not individual but distributed by power relations (Ahmed, 2014, pp. 11–15). Love, fear and disgust function as social technologies that reinforce historical hierarchies. For instance, Ahmed shows how the slur "Paki" in British discourse acquires connotations of "immigrant, outsider, and dirty" as part of an affective chain (Ahmed, 2014, p. 92). Ahmed's work lays a foundation for reading *Best of Friends* because it suggests that Zahra's empathy and Maryam's detachment are not merely personal traits but are linked to the legacies of colonialism and patriarchy that allocate

feeling unevenly. In short, feeling in Shamsie's world is political and circulates through inherited networks of power.

Fanon deepens this perspective by showing the impact of colonialism on the emotional life of the oppressed. Fanon describes colonial society as a "manichean" world in which the colonizer is positioned as fully human and the colonized as subhuman, a view internalized by the colonized (Fanon, 2008, p. 14). When a critic points out that Fanon shows how the colonized subject internalizes anti-black racism, creating what he so notoriously calls an "inferiority complex" (Fanon, 2008, p. 9). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon argues that the colonized subject often pursues assimilation into "whiteness" through language and customs as a supposed escape from this imposed shame, only to deepen their alienation (Fanon, 2008, p. 11). This psychic burden of persistent shame and emotional self-surveillance reveals how colonial power enters the intimate sphere. Fanon even suggests that decolonization may require radical cleansing violence which becomes a cleansing force that frees the native from "his inferiority complex" . In *Best of Friends*, Zahra's constant moral self-examination and Maryam's polished restraint can thus be read as contrasting responses to this colonial education of feeling.

This focus on decolonizing emotion is gaining traction in postcolonial scholarship. Recent work in the affective turn shows that embodied feeling is historically conditioned. For example, Bede Scott's *Affective Disorders: Emotion in Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* traces how emotions such as grief, shame and hope circulate in colonial and postcolonial contexts (Scott, 2019, pp. 7–9). Similarly, Leela Gandhi highlight how friendship and intimate bonds can become forms of anticolonial affect. Gandhi's theory of "affective communities" is especially relevant because she argues that small cross-cultural alliances can form a "politics of friendship" resisting the rigid "axes of filiation" imposed by empire. As she writes that friendship becomes "the most comprehensive philosophical signifier" of "invisible affective gestures" that resist belonging to a single national or racial community (Gandhi, 2006, p. 10). In this sense, Zahra and Maryam's lifelong bond forms an affective community, as a relational space where alternative loyalties and modes of caring arise beyond patriarchal and nationalist expectations.

The explicit scholarly treatment of *Best of Friends* is still in its infancy. Zoha Maryam and colleagues (2024) use postcolonial theory to analyze Shamsie's novel, highlighting themes of hybrid identities and cross-cultural belonging in Karachi and London. Their research points out how female homosociality "evokes emotional bonds, solidarity and empowerment" among Pakistani women who manage to negotiate constraining social demands. They posit that Shamsie portrays the friendship between Maryam and Zahra as "a haven where they may freely discuss their hopes, anxieties and weaknesses," thus building "real, empowering bonds among women" (Maryam, Zoha, et al., 2024, p. 402). The different interpretations demonstrate how *Best of Friends* shows the conflicting aspects which exist between female friendships throughout various social environments. What remains missing is a critical engagement of the affective afterlife of Zahra's moral pitch and Maryam's calculated impassiveness as developed under the weight of colonial and patriarchal pressures.

The affective elements of the novel receive no attention from mainstream reviewers. In *The Guardian*, Abhrajyoti Chakraborty commends Shamsie's depiction of adolescence and female friendship, noting the girl's increased sense of "self-consciousness" at age fourteen and the pervasive "girlfear" of predatory male attention. He references the fear of Zahra that "just because the man standing next to her is a friend of a friend... doesn't mean he won't make a pass," indicating how patriarchal expectations influence internalized fear in teenage girls. Chakraborty further explains the adult friendship as an "alliance of opposites," whose superficial harmony masks underlying tensions created by the unequal social positioning (Chakraborty, 2022). Although such reviews do not explicitly frame the novel within

decolonial affect theory, they reinforce the notion that Shamsie treats emotions such as fear, loyalty, detachment and regret as highly cultural and historically charged.

First, Ahmed's contemporary affect theory offers critical tools for interpreting emotion as socially and politically constructed rather than personal or universal. Second, Fanon reveals in his work that emotionalization of life by colonial power produce shame, restraint and internalized hierarchies. Third, feminist affect and friendship studies by Gandhi and Maryam et al. demonstrate that close relationships provide the grounds of resistance to colonial and patriarchal practices. Together, these sources imply that *Best of Friends*, through the intertwined emotional lives of two Pakistani women, exemplifies a broader shift in postcolonial fiction, an inward turn toward the politics of feeling. This research extends that conversation by interpreting Zahra's ethical sensitivity and Maryam's emotional detachment as responses to colonial "emotional training" and by arguing that reclaiming feeling is not merely personal but a decolonial practice.

**Theoretical Framework**

This research departs from the traditional psychoanalytic reading of literary characters as autonomous individuals with private interior lives. Instead, it locates Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends* within a materialist history of emotion, asserting that feelings in the postcolonial novel are not biological reflexes but historical consequences. To understand the diverging paths of Zahra toward ethical anxiety and Maryam toward capitalist detachment, this study constructs a theoretical apparatus that integrates Sara Ahmed's *Cultural Politics of Emotion* with Frantz Fanon's concept of Decolonial Psychology.

While Fanon provides the vertical historical structure explaining how the colonial condition fractures the psyche and necessitates "masks" of composure, Ahmed provides the horizontal mechanism explaining how emotions circulate between bodies and accumulate value and "stick" to specific subjects such as women, the colonized and the migrant. By triangulating these two theorists, this framework establishes the concept of "Decolonial Affect." This concept posits that the "politics of feeling otherwise" is not a sentimental retreat into interiority, but a radical disruption of the colonial distribution of affect. In this view, Zahra's refusal to be comfortable and Maryam's refusal to be vulnerable are not personality traits but they are geopolitical strategies in a world where emotional sovereignty is the ultimate contested territory.

The primary lens for analyzing the circulation of emotion in Shamsie's Karachi and London is Sara Ahmed's theory of Affective Economies. Contrary to the hydraulic model of emotion where feelings exist inside and press out, Ahmed argues that emotions exist between bodies and shaped by contact with objects, histories and power structures. Central to this research is Ahmed's concept of stickiness where she writes that an object or a body becomes sticky with affect through repeated historical associations. In the context of *Best of Friends*, fear does not just happen to the teenage girls in Karachi but fear sticks to the female body because the dictatorship and patriarchal surveillance have saturated the environment with the threat of violation. This framework will use Ahmed to analyze how the history of the 1980s dictatorship has sedimented onto Zahra and Maryam. When Ahmed argues that "feelings are not in the object… but constitute the very surface of bodies," it allows this research to read the "Girlfear" described in the novel not as paranoia, but as a somatic archive. The girls bodies are the sites where the history of the nation is impressed.

Crucially, this framework reads Zahra's refusal of emotional compliance as a form of affective resistance. In line with Sara Ahmed's work on affective economies, such resistance disrupts the circulation of happiness that legitimizes unequal power structures. When Zahra questions the ethics of power or refuses to be charmed by the elite circles Maryam inhabits in London, she is disrupting the "affective smooth space" of neoliberal success. Ahmed's theory suggests that maintaining social harmony often requires the oppressed to suppress

their discomfort. Zahra's moral anxiety which creates tension in the friendship is reframed here as a form of affective labor. She becomes the problem because she exposes the problem. This lens allows us to read the friction between the two women not as a petty grievance but as a structural collision between one who refuses to flow and one who has perfectly aligned herself with the flow of power.

While Ahmed explains how emotions circulate socially, Frantz Fanon provides the psycho-existential depth required to understand the internal cost of this circulation. This research relies on Fanon's critique of Colonial Psychopathology from *Black Skin, White Masks*, specifically focusing on the transition from colonial shame to neoliberal detachment. Fanon rejects the idea that neuroses in the colonized are purely individual and he argues for a sociogenic understanding of psychology. The inferiority complex is the result of a double process of the economic epidermalization of misery and the internalization of the colonizer's gaze. This framework applies Fanon's theory of the "Mask" to Maryam. In Fanon's analysis, the colonized subject often adopts the language, mannerisms and values of the colonizer to escape the "Zone of Non-Being." In the contemporary setting of Shamsie's novel, the "White Mask" is replaced by the "Neoliberal Mask," representing a facade of cold efficiency, tech-capitalist rationality and emotional invulnerability. Maryam's evolution from a terrified girl in Karachi to a venture capitalist in London is not a triumph of empowerment but a Fanonian tragedy of assimilation. She achieves safety by excising her vulnerability and effectively becomes the very thing that once terrified her.

Fanon speaks of "lactification," which is the desire to be whitened. This framework extends this to "Affective Lactification," the process by which the postcolonial subject attempts to cleanse themselves of messy, primitive or emotional traits associated with the Global South and adopt the civilized stoicism of the Global North. Maryam's inability to feel deeply is the scar tissue of the empire. She has learned the colonial lesson well, to be powerful is to be unfeeling. Thus, Fanon allows us to read the absence of emotion in the novel as just as political as the presence of it.

The true theoretical innovation of this research lies in the synthesis of these two perspectives. By bringing Ahmed and Fanon into dialogue, this framework constructs a model of "Emotional Sovereignty." The framework posits that Ahmed and Fanon describe a "loop" of control. Ahmed describes the input of how society pushes fear and shame onto the brown female body. Fanon describes the output that how the subject contorts their psyche to survive that pressure. Zahra represents the rupture of this loop. She feels the weight described by Ahmed and refuses to wear the mask critiqued by Fanon, resulting in a life of moral difficulty but emotional authenticity. Maryam represents the closure of this loop. She accepts the weight by hardening herself against it, perfecting the mask until it eats into her own face.

This research defines Decolonial Affect as the capacity to reclaim the right to feel in a way that contradicts the demands of the state and the market. If the Dictatorship in Karachi demands fear, courage is a decolonial feeling. If the Neoliberal Empire in London demands detachment and efficiency, grief and vulnerability are decolonial feelings. Therefore, "Feeling Otherwise" is the operational term for this study. It signifies the moment a character feels something that the structure did not intend for them to feel. This is where Shamsie's novel performs its most radical work by suggesting that preserving friendship in all its messy, painful and historical dimensions constitutes a resistance to the clean, sterile and detached logic of modern power.

In applying this framework to *Best of Friends*, this research will focus on three specific textual dimensions. First, it draws on Ahmed to analyze moments when bodies shrink, turn away or freeze. These responses are read as traces of histories that continue to stick to the characters.Second, it employs Fanon to study Maryam's dialogue and inner life, tracing the points at which she suppresses empathy in favour of logic and showing how this

reflects colonial trauma and practices of self-surveillance rather than clear reasoning. Finally, it takes the friendship to be an affective zone of contact, a place where the disruptive sensitivity of Zahra encounters the elegant restraint of Maryam. Shamsie identifies the actual triumph of postcolonial subjects as their ability to experience emotions without external control.

## Material and Methods

The research design of this study follows qualitative methods which uses Critical Theory and Textual Analysis to study Kamila Shamsie's *Best of Friends* as an encoded emotional archive instead of a typical narrative structure. The research design uses a two-stage analytical framework to analyze the data which was collected.

The first analytical stage requires affective mapping to apply Ahmed's "stickiness" and "affective economies" framework for conducting a detailed textual analysis which identifies emotional connections between two protagonists. The second analytical tier moves to decolonial psychology, using Fanonian principles to examine the characterological development of the subjects as responses to identified trauma. The research involve analyzing Maryam's spoken words and mental processes because these elements demonstrate her development of self-control during British colonial and capitalist rule in London. Her language of cold efficiency and investor-speak are marked up as "affective lactification" which denotes the intentional effacement of the racialized, vulnerable self in order to become assimilated to the Global North. The study investigates Zahra's moral distress and her righteous anger through Sara Ahmed's affect theory which demonstrates her use of affective refusal to fight against assimilation and achieve emotional sovereignty and decolonial refusal.

By juxtaposing these two different ways of surviving the postcolonial condition, the research reveals the ways in which empire survives under the logics of civility and how patriarchy dresses up as composure. Ultimately, the study combines close textual analysis with symptomatic reading seeking out the fissures, and contradictions of the narrative that reveals suppressed histories of colonialism. While there is secondary scholarship and historical references, such as the policies of General Zia, have been used to validate findings, the originality of this approach lies in the fact that theory is made explicit and mapped onto text in order to show that "feeling otherwise" is a radical political act. By strictly interrogating affect and taking every silenced feeling or unexpected outburst as an act of strategic data collection, this methodology makes the reclaiming of joy, sorrow and rage the foundational act of decolonial freedom.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis follows the affective trajectories of Zahra and Maryam in *Best of Friends* and shows that their affective states represent historical, societal and postcolonial dynamics rather than their individual emotional reactions. Zahra's shaking hands, restless movements and random outbursts of anger are contrasted to Maryam's calculated investor rhetoric and composure. Together they elucidate Ahmed's idea of stickiness and the affective economy while simultaneously finding Fanon's colonial mask as well as the process of affective lactification. These cases show the appropriation of friendship as a site of resistance in which "feeling otherwise" performs for epistemic sovereignty and decolonial praxis, including intimations of affect, which becomes interlinked to vast political and theoretical perspectives.

Shamsie's novel circulate around a single childhood trauma. On the way back from a late-summer gathering, where an older male friend named Hammad has inexplicably lured the girls into the vehicle of a stranger, Zahra imagines corporeal fear. Her hands tremble when the vehicle's doors close, symbolizing that "nothing is normal" in the presence of these

men, despite their polite veneer. This trembling is not simply panic but patriarchal threat, the violence of patriarchy is stuck to Zahra's body as well as her memory, it is like a clinging residue. In Ahmed's terms, negative affect can become "sticky" to particular bodies as if Velcro, slowing and weighing them down. For Zahra, this means the terror of the ride becomes irrevocable, it cannot simply wash away. Maryam responds by refusing all silence. Later, alone in a Karachi cafe, Maryam insists that they speak the truth of the experience. "Do you ever feel that something isn't really properly true until we tell each other about it?" she asks Zahra. Insisting on this confession redistributes their fear into solidarity because Maryam is deliberately enacting an affective economy, not letting the pain vanish but circulating it into shared testimony. By demanding honesty rather than silence, Maryam preserves Zahra's emotional sovereignty and refuses to let shame or blame overtake her. In this way the girls commit to "feeling otherwise," to refusing the story that patriarchal fear would impose. In this way, the girls commit to "feeling otherwise" and refuse the story that patriarchal fear would impose.

The family's response is immediate, Maryam is exiled to England to preserve honor, completely vanishing her from Karachi's story. This removal functions as a Fanonian rupture, teaching her to dissociate from her "brown" vulnerability by mastering the white mask. In the discipline of an English boarding school, she undergoes what I call affective lactification, she deliberately dilutes her rage, fear and grief to blend into a Western norm. Over years she becomes adept at hiding her authentic affect behind a sanitized corporate demeanor. By the time Shamsie resumes the story, Zahra's career as a civil-rights barrister contrasts with Maryam's status as a venture capitalist. Maryam's ascent into venture finance exemplifies the neoliberal mask, she now performs the global capitalist identity, sanitizing her past under suits and startup jargon. However, Maryam has a solid outer strength behind her mask, Zahra is left with the unanswerable burden of their shared ordeal.

When the two friends meet again decades later in London, the deferred truths reappear. As prominent women, they fit neatly into their self-sufficient narratives at first. Zahra plays the role of the principled lawyer, while Maryam plays the role of the sophisticated investor, dressed up in a well-rehearsed neoliberal garb of success. In an interview, Maryam repeats the liberal maxim they used to share, "You can't let politics get in the way of friendship." However, Zahra performs an act of affective refusal when he rejects this depoliticized narrative and insists on leaving the official story open to ethical and political inquiry. In a self-published magazine Q&A she puts herself in the shoes of Maryam's investor not to praise her, but to interrogate her. In one pointed moment, Zahra wonders, "We all make up our neat narrative arcs, don't we?" This is a question which disrupts Maryam's self-aggrandizement and insinuates the affective economy in their friendship. Maryam's well-constructed success story has been built up by covering the messier reality of their past. Zahra thereby begins the establishment of a moral dissonance by not wanting the stickiness of their history to be smoothened out for the sake of comfort. In Ahmedian terms, Zahra works in the position of affective refusal, becoming "the one who gets in the way" of socially endorsed happiness having refused emotional smoothing and made visible the violence such ease depends on. In refusing to believe Maryam's story, Zahra reclaims her voice, and forces Maryam to admit the cracks in her story. This is Zahra feeling otherwise than loyalty demands. She asserts her emotional sovereignty by refusing to hand her feelings over for sanitization. Zahra insists that the price of friendship is not silence because justice and feeling must be heard, even if they make others uncomfortable. Thus Zahra demands that Maryam confront not only the state's abuses but the injustice of their own past.

The novel's final act turns on Maryam's deployment of the technology Zahra hates most, facial-recognition surveillance. When Hammad resurfaces in London as a frustrated older man, Maryam chooses to eliminate the problem rather than confront it. Using her influence in the start-up she funded, Maryam orchestrates Hammad's rapid disappearance, treating the predator as an itch to be scratched rather than a subject of justice. By contrast,

Zahra cannot abide this disregard for due process. She reminds Maryam that even criminals have a claim to a fair trial, her emotional sovereignty will not allow blind vengeance to pass. In this confrontation, Maryam continues to wear her neat neoliberal mask as she speaks only of public security and personal retribution. Zahra, unwavering in her ethical resistance, calls out Maryam's language as chillingly instrumental and treating violence as a transaction within her private affective economy. Because Maryam's solution was ostensibly protective, their friendship fractures irreparably. Zahra cannot relinquish the moral weight of anger so completely. She refuses to accept Maryam's sanitized narrative, insisting that their experience be judged by justice rather than by power. In this way, Zahra again practices feeling otherwise as she prioritizes principle over personal loyalty. She is the embodiment of critical affective resistance, refusing to smile while a wrong remains unwoken. Zahra demands that Maryam see violence for what it is, not as data or capital. Maryam by now has fully lactified her affect to survive, all that remains is the metallic taste of power. Zahra rejects this last detour into fixing trauma through force, reclaiming the stickiness of their shared pain. Thus the final conflict confirms that Maryam's path was assimilation into neoliberal power, while Zahra retains emotional sovereignty through refusal.

Across these scenes, Shamsie quietly stages a Fanonian drama of colonial mimicry and rebellion. Maryam's trajectory from Karachi to Oxford to venture capitalism illustrates the classic Fanonian pathology of the colonized desire to adopt the colonial mask. Her embrace of neoliberal success is literally an act of affective lactification as she "whitens" her experience to enter Western economies. Conversely, Zahra's refusal to let the past slip away exemplifies Ahmed's call to feel otherwise. Zahra consistently chooses her own affective path, based on a radically different affective economy than Maryam's, from trembling in Karachi to speaking truth in London, she never fully sheds the reality of their shared trauma. Each time Maryam tries to apply the neoliberal mask whether by professional jargon or technological solutions, Zahra tears it off by re-centering feeling. Zahra's loyalty to feeling is an exercise in emotional sovereignty, she will not outsource her emotions to Maryam's cleansed narrative. In effect Zahra becomes the site where colonizer and colonized upset each other's scripts. She refuses the easy equilibrium of reconciliation because her very anger and grief accumulate even when that accumulation is inconvenient. Ahmed's term for this is feeling otherwise, Zahra disrupts the comfort of Maryam's plot by insisting on the unresolved affects. It is precisely the stickiness of her affective insistence in conversation that becomes the decolonial force where nothing can be sanitized. Zahra's path, however fraught, is the only way to salvage their friendship from the loss of exile or power. Ultimately, *Best of Friends* shows the relationship of personal histories and colonial structures in the affective realm. Tightly focusing on the emotional lives of Zahra and Maryam, the novel dramatises concepts that are derived from Fanon and Ahmed without being polemic. Maryam's narrative can be read as textbook mimicry, where she tries to win the game by replicating the rules of the colonizer, speaking out only her investor jargon and corporate euphemisms. Zahra, on the other hand, is denied the option of settling in privilege or indifference, as she retains the raw sensation that power demands remain hidden. In this sense the novel vindicates theoretical framework, the old wounds stickiness is never erased and refusing to accept the neoliberal mask becomes an act of resistance. Each pivotal scene underlines that adherence to affect, such as anger, pain and love is what truly unsettles the status quo. By yielding to her pain rather than side-stepping it, Zahra enacts the very practice of feeling otherwise that decolonial theory heralds. She and Maryam are thus oriented differently as Zahra orients towards justice and emotions and Maryam towards expediency and capital. Shamsie suggests that the only viable friendship between them is one that acknowledges difference by foregoing that ease. If friendship is possible, it will be because one or both women allows vulnerability, not because they maintain the status quo. In this way, *Best of Friends* dramatizes Ahmed's idea that refusal of the expected emotion can itself be a political act. Zahra's final refusal to cozy up to Maryam's narrative is not mere stubbornness but an assertion that freedom lies in acknowledging and honoring one's own feelings. In a sense Zahra 'settles her debt to herself' by feeling fully the anger and grief that others and even friends want her to forget.

Shamsie's novel makes the affective stakes explicit, how we feel in the face of injustice determines how we act upon it. When Maryam seeks only the soothing cure, she easily adopts the neoliberal mask of positivism.By distancing himself from comfort, Zahra shows an alternative path. She conceptualize emotions as a form of moral currency, a leftover from experience that cannot easily be excused. The current stage of their friendship is an affective economy where Zahra deposits her pain as a way to demonstrate injustice, while Maryam tries to produce her guilt by creating pragmatic solutions. Zahra's insistence on keeping the past from evaporating gives new currency to the grief and anger, It gains value. In the process, she deconstructs easy narratives. Zahra simply does not wish to fit the paradigm of the silently recuperating figure but rather, she interrogates trauma while arguing that empathy without truth is meaningless.

In Ahmed's terminology, Zahra takes the position of the disruptive conscience, resisting the deviation of Maryam's optimistic resolutions from the substantive at stake. She gains back her emotional sovereignty by demanding accountability, even in the event that the friendship falls short. Zahra's position creates its own affective economy, in which guilt and shame commonly ignored by other people are currency. Maryam's liberal humanitarianism falls apart under Zahra's critical gaze. By refusing the neoliberal facade, Zahra demands to fully feel the experience, destabilising the power structures thus created.

Zahra's path is a perfect example of the very act of feeling differently. She uses her experience of fear and betrayal and turns it into a modality of freedom. Within her sphere emotion is not the sign of weakness, but the foundation of justice. This align directly with Ahmed's vision in which a refusal to participate in the prevailing affective economy is reoriented towards equity. The ending of the novel makes evident that remaining in the upset state or refusing forgiveness is not a sign of a failure in friendship but of sovereignty. Zahra's allegiance is with justice, not comfort and status. By keeping the stickiness of the collective memory, she disallows colonial violence to retrieve it from the archival oblivion. The story *Best of Friends* shows that people need to give up their friendship dedication when moral understanding requires it. People must understand their emotions as genuine truths when they want to establish the most intense form of solidarity which fights against colonial rule.

Through his narrative, Shamsie demonstrates that people need to abandon their comfortable lives to successfully fight against colonial rule. Zahra demonstrates her dedication to justice because she chooses to confront all instances of injustice which benefit influential individuals while others remain silent about these occurrences. On the other side, Maryam's attempts to neuter the trauma through professional and technological lenses reveals how easy it can be for elites to disappear affect. The novel teaches that colonial legacies are sticky and cling to our bodies and narratives which others want to simplify. Shamsie maintains that people who have absorbed their hidden suffering must stop following conventional social stories which present a false sense of order through an alternative emotional approach that reveals injustice and active resistance to oppression. Zahra thus stands in solidarity with Ahmed's affective insurgents that she is more than a friend and she is a witness to injustice. People need to transform their daily lives through active participation and emotional expression and demands for responsible actions. Even if that means the dissolution of a friendship, Zahra recognises that the complete feeling is sustaining justice.

Zahra's example shows how, even in isolation, one gains the power to fight oppression. Shamsie's freedom comes from being true in one's emotions in the face of injustice. Zahra shows that such a refusal is the most extreme form of power given to the powerless. By staying emotionally sovereign in friendship and refusing to have comfort win in the relationship, Zahra puts a decolonial practice into action. Through her touch she demonstrates that experiencing things in a unique way serves as the foundation which enables people to build authentic connections with each other. Zahra shows bravery in *Best*

*of Friends* because she fights to preserve injustice which maintains its emotional power despite all the costs she must endure.

## Conclusion

This decolonial affect theory and emotional sovereignty analysis of *Best of Friends* reveals how colonialism continues to impact affect, especially for women who experience various political environments in their own lives. Through a combination of Ahmed's work on affective economies and Fanon's decolonial psychology, this article presents a case for how *Best of Friends* is not only a novel about female friendship, but a philosophical work on the right to feel differently. Every gesture, silence and rupture in Zahra and Maryam's relationship is a place for a contentious negotiation of the vestige of power of empire, show how friendship may become such a paradoxical place of constraint and liberation at the same time. Moments of shared vulnerability, ethical confrontation and emotional conflicts demonstrate that the reclaiming of affect is a deliberate, radical practice, as a form of resistance against the normative impositions of the emotional hierarchies.

Furthermore, setting up this study in historical and sociopolitical contexts of 1980s Karachi and contemporary London illustrates the continuity of affective inheritance in terms of temporal and spatial flow. The idea of public oppression, neoliberal pressures and private ethical labour illustrate how emotion experiences are intensely relational as well as being historically specific. Consequently, the novel questions the traditional interpretations of empathy, loyalty and detachment as it reveals that other forms of affect are not wholly upbeat sentimental indulgence but critical and decolonial activities that undecided power relations that are inherited with power.

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