



## A derridean critique of *the forty rules of love*

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### Abstract

The researcher takes *The Forty Rules of Love* by ElifShafak to find out the binaries in order to deconstruct them to find the ideological project of the author. This research explores the binaries in Shafak's novel *The Forty Rules of Love*. In order to study the binaries in Shafak's novel, the researcher draws on Jacques Derrida's theory of Deconstruction. Derrida presents his theory in his seminal book *Of Grammatology*. The novel *The Forty Rules of Love* stands on the different binaries like; the binary of time, place, person and concept. In the binary of time, there is a binary of present/past. In the binary of place, Shafak gives the binary between east/west. In the binary of person, we see binary between Ella and Rumi/Shams and Aziz. Binary of Materialism/ Spiritualism falls in binary of concept. The one part of binary is always considered as a center and other as margin. One part of the pair is privileged over the other. The researcher deconstructs the binaries and explores the structure of the novel. The study finds that the author privileges spiritualism over materialism, past over the present, east over west, and love over mundane realities. In this way, ElifShafak propagated and promoted the rhetoric of Sufism. It is explored that the binaries are based on uncertain ground. There is no stability in the binaries of time, place, person and concepts in the text.

**Keywords:** materialism, spiritualism, binary, instability, deconstruction

### 1. Introduction

Structuralism is developed in Europe in the early 1900s, in the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure. According to Simon Blackburn, structuralism is "the belief that phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations. These relations constitute a structure, and behind local variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract culture". The origin of structuralism is connected with the work of Ferdinand de Saussure on linguistics. Saussure's structural linguistics advocated three related concepts. One is Saussure argues that there is a distinction between *langue* and *parole*. He argues that the "sign" is composed of both signified and signifier. Secondly, the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary. Third is that signs gain their meaning from their relationships and contrasts with other signs. As he wrote, "in language, there are only differences 'without positive terms.'" Post-structuralism rejects the idea of the dominant relationship in the hierarchy, choosing rather expose these relations and the dependency of the dominant term on its apparently subservient counterpart. The only way to properly understand these meanings is to deconstruct the assumptions and knowledge systems that produce multiplicity, hence the illusion of singular meaning.

Jacques Derrida is a French philosopher best known for developing a form of semiotic analysis known as deconstruction. He is one of the major figures associated with post-structuralism and postmodern philosophy. He was born on 15 July 1930. Derrida has published more than 40 books, hundreds of essays and public presentations. He has a significant influence on the humanities and social sciences, including in addition to philosophy and literature, law, anthropology, historiography, applied linguistics,

sociolinguistics, psychoanalysis, political theory, religious studies, feminism, and gay and lesbian studies. He also influences architecture, music, art, and art criticism. In his later writings, Derrida addresses ethical and political themes in his work. *Speech and Phenomena*, *Of Grammatology*, *Writing, and Difference*, and *Margins of Philosophy* are his major works. He died on October 9, 2004.

The researcher takes *The Forty Rules of Love*, a novel written by ElifShafak to apply the concepts of Derrida. ElifShafak was born in Strasbourg, France, in 1971. She is an award-winning novelist and the most widely read woman writer in Turkey. Her books have been translated into more than 40 languages. Shafak has published thirteen books, nine of which are novels. She writes fiction in both Turkish and English. Shafak's first novel is *Pinhan* (The Mystic). Her second novel is *Şehrin Aynaları*, 3rd *Mahrem*, 4th *Bit Palas*. Shafak wrote her next novel in English *The Saint of Incipient Insanities*. Her second novel written in English is *The Bastard of Istanbul*. Shafak's next novel focused on Love and love –East & West, past & present, spiritual & mundane, *The Forty Rules of Love*. Her most recent novel is *Ustamve, Ben*. Besides writing fiction, Shafak is an active political commentator, columnist, and public speaker. She is a regular contributor to major newspapers in Turkey and has been featured in major newspapers and periodicals, including *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Independent*, and *The World Post/Huffington Post*. She has taught at various universities in Turkey, UK, and the USA. Having graduated from the program in International Relations at Middle East Technical University, she holds a Master's degree in Gender and Women's Studies and a Ph.D. in Politic. She is living in England.

The novel *The Forty Rules of Love* by ElifShafak opens with the character of Ella Rubenstein. She is forty years old and

unhappily married lady. She takes a job as a reader for a literary agent. Her first assignment is to read and report on *Sweet Blasphemy*, a novel written by a man named Aziz Zahra. *Sweet Blasphemy* has a story of Shams and Rumi. The writer Aziz presents the whole life of the Rumi. In this novel the writer, Aziz presents how Shams transforms Rumi. Rumi In the love of Shams became a poet. Ella who is living in 2008 gets inspiration from the life of Shams and Rumi. Ella is fascinated by the memoir of Shams and Rumi. She also takes Shams' lesson that the presence of love in each and every human being. As she reads the whole story of Shams and Rumi, She realizes that Rumi's story mirrors her own and that Zahara-like Shams-has come to set her free. At the end of the novel, she falls in love with Aziz. He sets her free from a boredom life. Aziz transforms Ella like Shams transform Rumi in the 13th century in Konya.

### Research questions

Q1. How the text of Forty Rules of Love does is constructed on the binaries of time, place, person and concept?

Q2. How do the binaries function as a tool to give meaning and structure to the narrative built by ElifShafak in her novel, Forty Rules of Love?

Q3. How the narrative of the *Forty Rules of Love* is based on unstable ground?

### Literature Review

*The 'Rumi Phenomenon' Between Orientalism and Cosmopolitanism, The Case of ElifShafak's The Forty Rules of Love* by Elena Furlanetto. In this article, Elena Furlanetto focuses on ElifShafak's novel, *The Forty Rules of Love*, as one of the best known and most remarkable contributions to the Rumi phenomenon. The author points out that Turkish author not only accedes to the oversimplification and decontextualization of Rumi's work perpetrated by the American initiators of the Rumi phenomenon but also employs Orientalist strategies in the ways in which she positions the East as being instrumental to the West. "*The Forty Rules of Love as a Bildungsroman*." This article explores that the novel is a perfect Bildungsroman as also a complete study in opposites discipline versus spontaneity, reason versus love, perspective versus acceptance, wisdom versus youth, foundation versus risk and brain versus heart. While the novel argues strongly in favors of heart, love, acceptance, and spontaneity, it also favors a balance between the two extremes and that is what matters the most. The novel clearly gives a frank treatment of the dangers of the spiritual path. The novel displays an elegant language to intercept the effect that these parallel soul mates -Rumi and Shams, Ella and Aziz--had on each other and that is what forms the essence of this novel. An Exploratory Study of The Sufi Metaphysical Concept "WahdatalWujud" I ElifShafak's Novel "*The Forty Rules of Love*" by a group of Ms. Zaib-un-Nisa Ahmed1, Ms. Mehwish Malghani, Ms. Ayesha Ahmed and Ms. Durdana Khosa. This group of researchers examines the validity of the assertion of the Sufi metaphysical concept of Wahdatal Wujud which is present in the novel *The Forty Rules of Love* by ElifShafak. This study focuses on those aspects of the novel which are related to the specific concept which is given by Ibn 'Arabi WahdatalWujud. This research aims to discover the spiritual aspect of the novel and also attempts to explore every point where the Sufi metaphysical concept is reflected

in the text of the novel. "*Structure and Narrative Technique in 'The Forty Rules of Love'*". RashaDayekh in this paper underlines the structure and the narrative technique in ElifShafak's *The Forty Rules of Love*. This research shows that how Shafak uses the two embedded narratives and various techniques in this novel. Shafak's thematic concerns and underscores a cry out for a humanistic worldwide unity through the essential human ingredient i.e. Love. The paper shows the dialectical relation between the basic parts of the framework of the novel and also shows a variety of techniques. *The Sufi Phenomenon: The Case of ElifShafak's 'The Forty Rules of Love'*. Fatima Anjum & Muhammad Ramzan This paper studies the delineation of the Sufi Phenomenon in ElifShafak's novel "*The Forty Rules of Love*". The novel presents a correlation between the 13th century and that of the 21st century through the parallel narratives of the friendship of a famous scholar Rumi and wandering dervish Shams, and between Aziz, the writer of *Sweet Blasphemy* and Ella. This paper also examines that Shafak depicts Universal Spirituality a mutual platform of communion and relation for mankind, Weather a man from East or West. In this novel, Love is a centripetal force that can bind them together. Unity of all man Kind realized through love.

*A Deconstructive Reading of W.B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" and William Blake's "London" by Dr. BasselAlmasalmeh*". This paper examines W.B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" (1927) and William Blake's "London" (1794) from a deconstructive critical perspective. The author of this article shows how W. B Yeats and William Blake negate their own ideas. In *The Name of the Father: A Lacanian and Derridean Analysis of Kafka's "THE JUDGMENT"* by Samantha Goldasich and Toming Jun Liu. They study Kafka with combined insights from Lacan (those related to the Name of the Father and the analysis of psychosis) and from Derrida (regarding the logocentric structure), the authors examine one specific story "The Judgment," to understand how Kafka exposes conditions of unfreedom. Why such an exposition, in fact, reflects Kafka's passionate desire for freedom which has been restricted or denied under certain modern conditions. Deconstruction Theory, Rumi's Discourse and Their Application in Design Process. This article has been written by Zohre MOHAMMADI and Prof. Saied FARASI. In this article, they examine the similarities of Derrida's 'Deconstruction' theory with Rumi's philosophy of unity of existence. They use semiotic as a ground to study the philosophy of Rumi and Derrida's theory. The objective of this research is to analyze or decode a text in order to collect necessary visual vocabulary and materials for the creative process. This research studies the characteristics of Rumi's poetry in relation to Derrida's theory of Deconstruction. In another research article "*Orientalism and Intelligence Analysis: Deconstructing Anglo-American Notions of the 'Arab'*" Dina Rezk brings to light to recently declassified documents of a different nature to usual assessments produced by Anglo-American analytic bodies: those focuses primarily on the issue of 'national character'. Using and critiquing Said's thesis of Western 'Orientalism' it reveals some critical and enduring conceptualizations articulated by the diplomatic and intelligence community about Arab cultures such as the role of Islam, rhetoric, political motivation, and notions of 'honor'. Such a critical approach demonstrates how diplomatic and intelligence history can

also be a history of culture, ideas, and institutional mentalities. In *A Feminist Poststructuralist Analysis Of Discursive Practices In The Classroom And Playground* Bronwyn Davies using transcripts, videotaped classrooms, and playgrounds, including those in preschools, the discursive practices through which maleness and femaleness are constituted in classrooms are analyzed. This is done with a particular focus on gender. The way in which the concepts "male" and "female" are themselves created and sustained as opposite and antithetical categories and are constituted as a property of persons will be the central focus of the analysis. He argues that sex and gender are discursive constructions but that they are taken on as if they were incorrigible properties of persons. The discursive and textual practices through which this incorrigibility is achieved are illustrated through excerpts from videotaped and audiotaped conversations with children.

The present research examines the novel *The Forty Rules of Love* from Derridean perspective. This research exposes and uncovers the instability of culturally and historically constructed binaries. This research also highlights that the meanings are unstable and never universal. The study explores the binaries to deconstruct them. She presents different binaries like binary of time, place, person and concept. The present study deconstructs all the binaries and shows the possibility to reconstruct them again. This research also proves that Shafak through her construction of binaries promoted of love and spirituality of Sufism. A deep study shows that the text finally does not conclude certainly anything but confusion.

### Research methodology

This research is qualitative in nature. Anybody could agree or disagree with the conclusion and the findings of the researcher. All the pieces of evidence have been taken from the novel *The Forty Rules of Love* by Elif Shafak. Ferdinand De Saussure is the base of all the structuralist school of thoughts. He says that "language is a system of signs." He proposed a sign theory. According to his sign theory, there is a binary of signifier and signified. A signifier is the mental impression of sound in physical form. On the other hand, signified is the concept and it is present on an abstract level. Saussure claims that there is no logical relation between signifier and signified. The relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary. He also claims in his book "Course in general linguistics" 'Language is a system of differences without positive terms.' According to Saussure signifying systems operate according to the binary opposition, for example, Day/night, culture/nature, good/evil and male/female, etc. He gives the binary of signifier/signified.

Claude Levi-Strauss on the other hand also claims that "All stories propelled forward by the conflict that is caused by characters and events opposing each other, that oppositions are important." From this quote, we can interpret that Levi-Strauss in favor of binary opposition. According to him, the opposition of binaries gives the meaning to the word and language.

Jacque Derrida in his book "*Of Grammatology*" goes further and he focuses that in a binary opposition one part is more privileged over the other. One part is at the center and other on margin. Derrida in his theory of deconstruction takes Saussure's concept of arbitrary relation between signifier and signified and Levi-Strauss's concept that

binary opposition gives meaning to the language, as the base of his theory. He says that when there is no logical relation between signifier and signified then how one binary can give the meaning to the other binary. He proposed that there is stability in the meanings. Meanings are always uncertain and never universal. He also claims that one part of the binary has no privilege over the other. It can be reversed and it can be changed.

### Data Analysis

*The Forty Rules of Love* is written by Elif Shafak. In her novel, the researcher explores different binaries; the binary of time, place, person and concept. The present study deconstructs the socially, historically and culturally existing binaries in the narrative of *The Forty Rules of Love*. The paper is an attempt to deconstruct the traditional binaries found in the text of the novel. As Derrida, a post-structural theorist highlight the hierarchy in binary opposition. One part of binary always privileges over the other. His theory also claims that there is no stability in the meanings of the words. The meanings are always uncertain and never final.

In the novel, there is a binary between the present and the past. The novel presents both period of time. Ella and Aziz belong to the 21st century and on the other hand, Rumi and Shams belong to the past time of the 13th century in Aziz's novel *Sweet Blasphemy*. As Derrida says one part of binary is always privileged over the other. In the binary of present and past, past is privileged over the present time which lacks love and freedom. Shafak starts her novel with the present time: "Northampton, May 17, 2008" (P.5). The novel starts with the story of Ella. She is a housewife and she has three children. Twenty years have passed to her marriage. Ella's life is centered around her family. After twenty years of her marriage, she decides to do a job. The whole family of Ella is sitting on the table. Her husband asks from Aunt Esther: "Esther, did Ella give you the good news? David asked suddenly. "She found a great job" (P.5). She got a job in a literary agency based in Boston. Ella is going to write a report on the novel *Sweet Blasphemy* by A.Z Aziz another character from the present time. Both Ella and Aziz are presenting the present time. As Ella reads his introduction from Aziz's novel.

"A.Z Zahara lives in Amsterdam with his books, cats, and turtle when he is not traveling around the world. *Sweet Blasphemy* is his first novel and most probably his last" (P.15).

He is a past time novelist. He has written just one novel. His novel describes the past time story. The story of his novel starts in the 13th century. He tells the whole life story of Rumi and Shams in his novel. Shams and Rumi in Aziz's novel present the past time. He starts his novel with past time. "An Inn Outside Samarkand, March 1242" (P.28).

He starts his novel with the description of Shams a wandering dervish of the 13th century. He gives the description of the Shams life before his meeting with Rumi. Shams meets with Rumi in Konya and transforms him. The great scholar Rumi transforms from scholar to poet. From the life of Rumi and Shams Ella and Aziz, both get the inspiration. Ella and Aziz both transform due to Rumi and Shams. Ella when reading *Sweet Blasphemy* she realizes her lack of love. The researcher finds the traditional binary in the novel. She presents the strong impact of the past over the

present. The narrative constructs the binary and shows that the past is privileged than the present because it is full of love and freedom which Ella lacks. Life of Rumi and Shams changes the life of Ella and Aziz, the characters from the present. Through the deep look the researcher finds that the life of Rumi and Shams and influence of Shams over Rumi is not same which happened between Aziz and Ella, it is found that the present could be a privileged part of the binary. Both have equal status. Moreover Shams and Rumi both are male members of the society, and on the other hand Aziz is male and Ella is female. Both pairs have different realities that are relative to them.

The narrative also contains the binary of East and west. Through the binary of east and west Shafak opposed the traditional concept of the western world and promoted east over the west... The western writers often present eastern people as barbaric and uncivilized. Eastern people are always marginalized in western writings. However, it is not the case in the novel *The Forty Rules of Love*. In this particular novel, the eastern is not barbaric or primitive. Rumi and Shams both present east and Ella on the hand belong from the west. Ella gets light of spirituality and love from the life of eastern figures. Ella's life at the start is empty from love. At the start, the narrator describes that her whole life is revolving around her family. At the start, the narrator says "Building her whole life around her husband and, Ella lacked any survival techniques to help her cope with life's hardships" (P.3). Her whole life revolves around her family. She uses to cook different kinds of dishes for their family. Her husband is not loyal to her but still she spends her life for her family. She has no desire. She lives for her family. There is no love in her life. Her husband has extramarital relations. After reading the story of eastern figures she realizes her lack of love. After 20 years of her marriage, she decides to set herself free from the tiresome marriage life. "She filed for divorce in the fall of 2008 after twenty years of marriage" (P.3). Through the conversion of the binary of east and west Shafak wants to show that east has values, as has the love and spirituality which is lacked by western world. Eastern figure set free Ella and gives her a direction towards spirituality. The following line shows how love enters her life "Love came to Ella as suddenly and brusquely as if a stone had been hurled from out of nowhere into the tranquil pond of her life" (P.3). it also shows that she is dragged towards a new world view which shatters her calm, ordered family world. So *The Forty Rules of Love* is also a well-constructed text. The researcher constructs the binaries structured *The Forty Rules of Love*. The social, historical and cultural binary of east and west. The researcher finds that both east and west have privilege over each other. If the west is the center of civilization then east is the center of love and spirituality. The text also contains the binary of person. The researcher explores antitheses of the pair of Rumi and Shams with the pair of Ella and Aziz. the pair of Rumi and Shams is mirrored by the pair of Ella and Aziz. In the 13th century, Rumi and Shams are present as a mystical model but in the 21st century Ella and Aziz both are the models of spirituality in materialistic America. In the modern world, Shafak presents a modern Rumi in the form of Ella. Like Rumi, Ella also has family, kids, husband, and status. Rumi has two sons Aladdin and Sultan Wald. Ella has three kids Avi, Orly, and Jeannette. Ella prefers materialism over spiritualism. Rumi also gives more importance to his status and worldly pursuits. Aziz, on the

other hand, is a mirror image of Shams. Like Shams Aziz also has family and home. Shams and Aziz both come to their companions. Shams comes to Konya to transform Rumi "Although I was eager to listen to the sermon and dying to meet Rumi, I wanted to spend some time in the city first and learn what the town people thought about the great preacher" (P. 103). He comes to Konya to meet Rumi. He is excited to meet his new companion. He meets Rumi in the front of a mosque when comes to delivering his sermon. Shams ask some question from Rumi to check his knowledge. Aziz also comes to Boston and he meets with Ella. He sends a message on her cell phone. "Hi, Ella, I'm in Boston on an assignment for Smithsonian magazine. I just got off the plane. Would you like to meet? I'm staying at the Onyx and would love to see you, Aziz" (P.279). Ella meets with Aziz in Boston. After meeting with Aziz, Ella gets a divorce from Devid. She leaves her home and children and her luxuries of life. She starts to live with Aziz in Konya. And Rumi starts to live with Shams in a room. Aziz and Shams both have died at the end of the novel. Aziz dies in Konya when Ella starts to live with her. "When she walked back half an hour later, she found a doctor and a young, head-scarved nurse in the room and the bedsheet pulled over Aziz's head. He had passed away" (P. 348). In *Sweet Blasphemy* Shams also died at the end of the novel. He is killed by a killer on the order of Rumi's son Aladdin. After the death of Shams Rumi becomes a poet. "For every Shams of Tabriz who has passed away, there will emerge a new one in a different age, under a different name, Names change, they came and go, but the essence remains the same" (P. 344). Shafak here reproduces Shams and Rumi in the modern world in the form of Aziz and Ella.

Materialism and spiritualism is also a binary in the novel. In materialism, a man prefers material things like money, property and otherworldly pursuits over spirituality. In both novels in *The Forty Rules of Love* and *Sweet Blasphemy* materialism is present in the life of Ella and Rumi respectively. In *The Forty Rules of Love*, Shafak's character Ella prefers worldly pursuits over the spirituality. Her whole life revolves around her family. She is a good house and a good mother. In the life of Ella, in America materialism is dominant. Ella in her life prefers world over spiritualism. But the influence of Aziz gradually transformed her. Before that she was living a mechanical life of American society.

"There was a time when she'd aspired to become a prominent book critic, but then she simply accepted the fact that life had carried her elsewhere, turning her into an industrious housewife with three kids and endless domestic responsibilities" (P.6).

Even she prefers her family on her own desires. She follows a socially constructed structure. She follows a structure of society and she tries to become a good mother and a loyal wife. She has a spiritual lack but she prefers to live in a materialistic world with her family.

"For Forty years Ella Rubinstein's had consisted of still waters\_\_ a predictable sequence of habits, needs, and preferences" (P.1).

Ella has a spiritual lack. She is not happy with her married life. She finds herself trapped in the structure of society. She finds change when Ella contacts with the Aziz. She chats with Aziz on Email. She gets inspired by him and realizes her lack after encounters with Aziz. When Aziz meets with Ella he transforms her into a spiritual world from a materialistic world. Ella decides to leave her house, family and husband. She starts to live in Konya with Aziz in another place:

“By his bed, she was sleeping on a plastic chair when she suddenly opened her eyes and listened to an unexpected sound. Somebody was saying unknown words in the dark. She realized it was the call to prayer coming from outside”(P.346).

These lines illustrate that now Ella prefers spirituality over materialism. She is living with Aziz in Konya according to her desire. She is living in a spiritual world. Similarly, Rumi was a materialistic figure initially. Rumi was a scholar and he had a high status in society. He was a famous scholar of Konya. He was used to preaching at the mosque to the masses of people. He wore a long gown and he rode a white horse. Hassan, the Beggar gives the description of Rumi's appearance:

“Sure enough, there was Rumi, riding a horse as white as milk, wearing exquisite amber caftan embroidered with golden leaves and baby pearls, erect and proud, wise and noble, followed by a throng of admirers. Radiating an air of charisma and confidence, he looked less like a scholar than a ruler---the sultan of the wind, the fire, the water, and the earth. Even his horse stood tall and firm, as if aware of the distinction of the man he carried” (P.106).

Rumi like Ella also prefers the material world. His description of appearance reflects how much he prefers the material world over the spiritual world. People from different places come to sermons of Rumi. The mosque is packed with people when he gives a sermon. He has everything status, respect, family, followers. Rumi is not satisfied with his all material possession. He also has a lack. Shams come in his life to fill the lack of his life. Shams appears as a spiritual figure for him. When Rumi meets with Shams he lost his all worldly glory and respect. Even he doesn't care to go to the tavern. Once Shams asked him to go in the tavern and bring two bottles of alcohol. He goes into the tavern without care of people. As Suleiman the Drunk tells that: “Beguiled by wine, I have had many crazy delusions when drunk, but seeing the great Rumi enter the tavern door was really wild, even for me” (P.239). The presence of Rumi in the tavern illustrates the mindset of him. He prefers the order of his spiritual father over worldly respect. He does not care what his followers will think about him. He obeys his master's order and goes into the tavern and brings the bottles of wine to Shams. Similarly Aziz takes Ella towards spirituality. Shams transforms Rumi and Aziz transforms Ella. Here researcher finds that the author gives a message of spirituality and love through preference of spiritualism over materialism. Freedom and liberty over confinements and mundane rules. Here the text of *The*

*Forty Rules of Love* promotes the ideological project of Sufism.

### Conclusion

This research has exposed that there is no stability in the ground where binaries are constructed. They can be changed. Derrida claims that there is no universality in the meanings. He also claims that one part of the pair does not have any privilege over the other. The researcher explores the binaries of time, place, person and concept in *The Forty Rules of Love*. The narrative contains the binary of past and present, binary of east and west, the binary of modern-day pair of Ella and Aziz and binary of Materialism and spiritualism. The researcher has found that both parts of binaries are formed to convey a particular world view. One part is privileged over others. This researcher concludes that the meanings are unstable. They are never universal. Elif Shafak through the skillful construction of the binaries promoted her ideology of preference of Sufism over materialism. She gives alternative rhetoric to the western society where nowadays materialism, money, calculations are more important for one's life. *Forty Rules of Love* is structured on binary oppositions of time, place, person and concepts. However final conclusion is unstable because it rests on uncertain binaries. So the uncertainty and instability is the final thing the researcher finds.

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