Exploring Trans-Modal and Trans-cultural Communication in Mogahed's (2016) Self- Representation and Life Narratives in her TED Talk: A Single Case Study Design

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Abstract

TED speakers' self- representation and life narratives are an understudied media genre that provides excellent data for investigating (trans)modal and (trans)cultural communication. The aim of this article is to explore how the memoir feature in TED Talks allows a second- generation Muslim immigrant of Arab origin to negotiate her mixed cultural identity and effectively resist social and political forms of dominance and subjugation via multiple semiotic means. Drawing on Baker and Ishikawa's (2021) notion of (trans)modal/cultural communication and Norris' (2004, 2019) multimodal interaction model, I argue that using the mediated action as the unit of analysis will give a deeper insight about how Mogahed's (2016) identity construction, life narrative and cultural orientations are semiotically negotiated, and reconstructed in her TED Talk "What it is like to be a Muslim in America?" The study adopts a single case study design and a multimodal analysis approach to closely examine how Mogahed manipulated various semiotic resources to redefine her cultural identity, and address global issues of Islamophobia and cultural stigmas around Muslim communities in the West. Based on the trans-cultural semiotic analysis, Mogahed's life narrative managed to challenge the Western mainstream media representation of Islam and the notion of Islamophobia after 9/11through the effective manipulation of multiple semiotic resources.

Keywords: *first TED Talks, (trans)cultural communication, trans-modality, mediated discourse analysis, mediated action, identity construction, life narratives, memoir.*

1. Introduction

The emergence of new media genres like TED speakers' life narratives have provided unprecedented opportunities for trans-modal/cultural communication. The widespread of TED Talks on TED.com site and YouTube have certainly facilitated cultural encounters between the East and the West, the elite and culturally stigmatized communities. This has led to the rise of multiple "trans' terms in applied linguistics such as "trans-cultural", "trans-modal", "trans-lingual and "trans-languaging" which specifically look into how the widespread of digital communication has significantly affected intercultural communication, gender discourse, social practices and power structures (see Baker & Ishikawa, 2021). Hawkins & Mori (2018, p.1) define the added prefix as follows,

'Trans- 'can be understood to mean crossing borders or boundaries, and this move toward a 'trans"- disposition signals the need to transcend the named and bounded categories that have historically shaped our thinking about the world and its inhabitants, the nature of knowledge, and communicative resources.

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Baker and Sangiamchit (2019, p. 472) define (trans)cultural communications as "communication where interactants move through and across, rather than in-between, cultural and linguistic boundaries, thus, 'named' languages and cultures can no longer be taken for granted and in the process, borders become blurred, transgressed and transcended" (as cited in Baker and Ishikawa, 2021, p. 174). Central to this trans-turn is the investigation of how new digital media genres like TED speakers' life narratives open up new venues for (trans)cultural communication and provide TED speakers with opportunities to transform prevailing Discourses and cultural practices. Within the (trans)cultural/ (trans)modal communication approach, culture is not strictly viewed as a system of shared products symbols, discourses, practices, ideologies and groupings of people but the main focus is on how these dynamic systems are in constant flow; i.e., how they keep evolving and transforming through day- to- day interaction between digital citizens as social actors. These cultural encounters mediated by digital technology allow human rights activists and unprivileged groups to speak up and perform acts of resistance through language and Discourse (see McConnell- Ginet, 2011, p.5-6)

However, language is not the only or most fundamental carrier of culture but one key notion in (trans)cultural communication theory is how social actors strategically draw upon various semiotic resources in interaction. These semiotic resources- including linguistic repertoires- are laden with cultural and ideological meanings. For this reason, adopting a multimodal analysis approach in exploring TED speakers' (trans)modal/ cultural communication will provide invaluable insighst about how these acts of resistance are semiotically performed. I also argue that using Norris' (2004, 2019) multimodal interaction model helps to incorporate higher-level discourse units; e.g., Mogahed's (2016) self- representations and life narratives as well as provides rigorous analytical tools for exploring lower-level mediational means in the analysis of her trans- cultural communication. Although I adopt a a single case study design, the adopted theoretical framework and analytical methodologies can be further applied to larger data sets and tested on other digital media genres.

So far, multimodal studies of TED Talks have mainly explored TED speakers' rhetorical manipulation of various semiotic resources to achieve their communicative ends. Previous studies have consistently shown that TED presenters often use multiple semiotic resources; e.g., images, hand gestures, gaze shifts, body postures to engage the audience in their talks and achieve maximum rhetorical effects particularly in explaining academic concepts (see Harrison, 2021; Massi, 2020, Nadeem, 2020, 2021,2023; Ruiz-Madrid, 2021; Valeiras-Jurado, 2016, Valeiras-Jurado et al., 2018; Valeiras-Jurado & Morell, 2020; Wu & Qu, 2018; Xia & Hanfer, 2021). However, very little attention is given to how these semiotic resources form an integral part of delivering TED speakers' (trans)cultural messages particularly while constructing their life narratives. Therefore, in the present study, I look into how Mogahed (2016) engaged the audience in the semiotic construction of her (trans)cultural identity and life narrative and how in the process she effectively managed to resist the ideological construct of Islamophobia in the West. The article specifically aims to answer the following research questions:

Q1: How does TED Talks' memoir feature facilitate (trans)cultural and (trans)modal communication?

Q2: How does Mogahed display her (trans)cultural identity while performing her life narratives; i.e., what (trans-cultural) identity aspects are foregrounded in the narrated episodes and to what effect?

Q3: How do the selected life narrative episodes address cultural and ideological issues of Islamophobia, social stereotyping and social stigma?

Q4: How (a & b) are mediated through a multiplicity of semiotic resources and how these mediational means contribute to the meaning- making process?

Q5: What are the advantages of using the mediated action as the basic unit of analysis and how does it help to reveal the intricacies and the fluidity of identity display and social action in cases of (trans)cultural communication?

In the next section, I will offer a brief review on the memoir feature in TED Talks, then I will explain the rationale behind using Norris' (2004, 2019) multimodal interactional model as a methodological framework, then give some background information about the selected TED Talk. Section four and five include the (trans)cultural semiotic analysis and a discussion of the implications of the study findings.

1.1. Literature review

How TED Talks' memoir feature facilitates (trans)cultural Communication and social activism

TED Talks have recently received a lot of academic attention due to their unique genre features; the variety of topics TED speakers address and the huge global audience they attract (see Filip, 2021; Ludewig, 2017; Mestre- Mestre, 2022). Memoir is one of the main characteristics of TED Talks. Ludewig (2017, p. 7) argues that "TED talks resemble memoirs in that they often relate a life-story, familiarize the audience with a speaker's personality, and do so with a near-literary form". She (2017, p. 4) defines memoirs as "life accounts written from a first-person point of view highlighting those moments, which exerted a formative influence on the writer's personality". However, there is very little investigation of how these life narratives are semiotically constructed and how TED speakers- as social actors- draw upon a multiplicity of semiotic resources -including their language repertoires- to construct their cultural identity and perform acts of resistance that defy ideological constructs; e.g., Islamophobia in the West (see Mamalipurath, 2022). There is a need for research into how TED speakers' life narratives function as contact zones, through which they manage to create counter narratives and resist prevailing ideologies. Pratt (2008, p. 7) defines "contact zones" as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination". TED speakers' published memoirs thus, allow them to voice their own version of the story; i.e., how they are personally affected by these cultural prejudices and stereotypical stigmatization. These personal narratives allow human rights activists to "appeal to dispersed audiences and garner support for their causes because of (their) emotional currency" (García, 2018, p. 489). More importantly, there is a need to explore how these cultural messages are conveyed through the strategic use of various semiotic resources which essentially carry cultural implications. García (2018: 488) maintains that TED speakers' published life narratives help them to "present their activist selves visually and verbally in texts that may be read online and offline to create an identity with which many can empathise" (emphasis mine).

Adopting a trans-modal approach to the study of TED speakers' life narratives simply aims to further enhance the description of social semiotic processes in intercultural communication. It mainly puts more emphasis on how these semiotic resources that are essentially socially shaped and culturally embedded- contribute to the meaning- making process in instances of (trans)cultural communication as in the case investigated in the present study. For example, in Mogahed's (2016) TED Talk, she recounted episodes from her personal life, strategically drew upon her language repertoire (using English and Arabic terms) and multiple semiotic systems to resist prevailing ideologies about Muslims in the West. Thus, it is essential to explore how TED speakers as social agents manipulate these semiotic systems in their (trans)cultural communication and how the meanings of these semiotic ensembles may emphasize, reinforce or challenge cultural constructs and ideologies. Since trans-cultural theory allows for the adoption of various methodological tools including multimodal discourse analysis, I propose that using Norris' (2004, 2019) multimodal interactional model as a methodological framework provides a rigorous framework for the analysis of the semiotic construction of Mogahed's

life narratives and (trans)cultural communication in her TED Talk "What it is like to be a Muslim in America?".

1.2. Norris' (2004, 2019) multimodal interactional model: using the mediated action as the unit of Analysis

Multimodality refers to the interplay and orchestration of multiple modes in the meaning-making process. It departs from the view of language as the primary mode and considers other embodied (e.g., language, eye-gaze, body posture) and disembodied modes (e.g., materials and objects) as key aspects in the meaning- making process (Jewitt et al, 2016). According to Jewitt et al. (2016), there are three main approaches to the investigation of multimodality in various discourse genres; namely, Halliday's (1987) systemic-functional multimodal discourse analysis (MM-DA), Kress & van Leeuwen's (1998/ 2006) social semiotics and Goodwin's (2000) and Mondada's (2011) multimodal interaction analysis (MM-DA). The third approach particularly focuses on how social (inter)action and how social actors perform these actions through the strategic use of a multiplicity of semiotic means. Norris' (2004, 2019) multimodal interactional model combines insights from social semiotics (Kress, 2000, Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006), interactional sociolinguistics, intercultural communication (Gumperz, 1982) critical discourse analysis (Schiffrin, 1987; Tannen, 1984; Wodak, 1989) and Scollon's (2001) mediated discourse analysis (2001). It specifically looks into how social actors manipulate different semiotic signs and their affordances in different interactional contexts. In other words, the model particularly looks into the agency of social actors in manipulating various semiotic resources, cultural tools and digital technologies (e.g., language, eye gaze, hand gestures, body postures, material objects, and media genres) as they perform social action. The model takes the mediated action as the fundamental unit of analysis, and specifically focuses on two aspects: the social agent and the mediational means (Jones and Norris, 2005: 17). Norris (2016, p. 143) writes,

Using the mediated action as the basic unit of analysis, Norris' (2004, 2019) multimodal interaction model provides systematic analytical tools to explore the hierarchical structure of interaction. The model identifies three levels of mediated actions: the higher-level actions, the lower- level actions and frozen actions. Higher -level actions represent the macro-discourse units of analysis that typically have ritualized openings and closings. For example, Mogahed can perform different higher- level actions; e.g., she could be narrating a personal experience, performing self- introduction, or addressing a specific topic during the talk. These higher-level actions typically incorporate a fluid chain of interconnected lower- level actions (e.g., utterances, shifts in head movements, hand gestures, eye-gaze and body posture). A lower- level action, on the other hand, is defined as the smallest pragmatic unit of meaning (Norris, 2004). For example, an utterance is the smallest mode of spoken language which is produced by a social actor and mediated by multiple sociocultural, psychological, embodied (the larynx, tongue, teeth, breath, lips), language system..etc. In the present study, Mogahed's self- introduction and episodes from her life narratives are considered higher- level action while the lower- level actions are all the semiotic means/ cultural tools contributing to its semiotic production.

Norris (2004, p.13) also distinguishes between "embodied and disembodied" modes depending on whether an action is bodily performed or bodily mediated (e.g., language, body posture, hand gestures, head movements and gaze) whereas disembodied modes refer to the material elements that participants use (e.g., paintings on the wall, music, print, layout and furniture items). Thus, higher- level and lower- level mediated actions constitute each other and are communicatively inseparable. Norris (2016, p. 149) states, Lower-level mediated actions are methodological tools that allow researchers to delineate micro actions that are (almost) never delineated by social actors in their everyday lives".

The third unit of analysis is the frozen action which allows for the analysis of actions performed at earlier time and become frozen in objects or the environment. For example,

Mogahed's Islamic outfit could be considered both an embodied action and a frozen action; i.e., as a read off action that the outfit has been worn some time earlier in the interaction. In other words, when interactant perceive a physical object, they don't simply perceive the object itself, but quite readily assign mediated actions to the object as frozen within (Norris, 2019). As social actors engage in these mediated actions, some mediational means may also take on higher level of significance and become more foregrounded in the interactants' awareness- what Norris (2004) calls modal density. The more significance social agents assign to a particular higher-level action, the more complex its modal make-up gets. The strength of a higher-level action's modal make-up is represented through the concept of modal density which is subdivided into: a) modal intensity; i.e., the overuse of one or more modes and b) modal complexity; i.e., the use of intricately intertwined communicative modes. Norris (2016, p. 151) maintains, "The more focused upon a higher-level action a social actor is, the stronger is the higher-level action's modal make-up".

The rationale behind using Norris' (2004, 2019) multimodal interactional model as a methodological tool in the analysis of (trans)modal/ cultural communication in Mogahed's self-representation and life narratives is as follows. According to the model, the theoretical concept of the mediated action essentially incorporates a psychological, physical, socio-cultural and with it a historical dimension to multimodality in interaction. This understanding is essential in (trans)cultural communication because modes- as mediated actions- typically carry socio-cultural and historical meanings that determine their meaning and level of significance in specific communicative settings. Norris (2019, p. 34) argues,

. whatever social actions we perform, they all communicate and they all have some kind of history. Our actions have a history. In fact, they cannot not have a history. Even if you are doing something completely new, it will not be new to everyone in the world. It will have some kind of antecedent; it will have some kind of origin in some other action; it will be taken up because of, or in opposition to, some other action.

Thus, modes as mediated actions typically carry cultural significance and thus, might be manipulated to reinforce specific social practices and social norms or help to defy and reconstruct them in everyday interaction. Moreover, Norris' (2004, 2019) classification of mediated actions helps in providing detailed analyses of their dynamic and interconnected functions during social interaction. In other words, viewing modes as complex systems of mediated actions highlights how these modes are strategically manipulated by social actors to deliver intercultural messages and how this strategic manipulation could help in creating new cultural meanings during intercultural communication. In Mogahed's (2016) TED Talk; e.g., the head scarf and her conservative outfit are typically perceived as cultural/ Islamic symbols. Initially, they are perceived as frozen mediated actions since they were worn at an earlier time before Mogahed got on TED stage. However, when Mogahed drew the audience's attention to her Islamic outfit asking "What do you think when you look at me?", the dress code as an embodied mediated action suddenly took on a higher level of significance as it got foregrounded in the interaction. This demonstrates how mediated actions could become not just strategic tools for identity construction but also help to transform cultural stereotypes and ideologies.

2. Method

2.1.   Criteria for data selection

The data used in the (trans)cultural semiotic analysis is a TED Talk delivered by Dalia Mogahed a second- generation American immigrant of Arab/ Muslim origin. Mogahed is an American-Egyptian researcher and renowned social activist who fights for equal rights for minority social groups particularly Muslims in the United States and she is also a

consultant specializing in issues related to Muslim communities and the Middle East. The rationale behind selecting Mogahed's TED Talk as case study is as follows: first, her TED Talk "What is like to be a Muslim in America?" was released in 2016 and has been viewed over 13.5 million times on TED.com and YouTube combined. Apart from receiving millions of views, her TED Talk is structured around a storyline in which she (2016) effectively addressed ideological and cultural issues pertaining to the Islamic community in the West. Her self-introduction and the selected life narratives represent a unique media genre that involves a dynamic orchestration of multiple semiotic resources that specifcally help to deliver the (trans)cultural messages. The selected excerpts will only cover two aspects: a) Mogahed' s self- introduction in the first two minutes of the talk and b) selected episodes from her life narratives. Finally, no special permission was required for the use of the written transcript and the reproduction of the still images in this analysis since TED.com grants permission of use as long as it is strictly used for educational and research purposes.

2.2.   Analytical tools and transcription procedure

In the semiotic analysis of Mogahed's (2016) self- representation and life narratives, I will use Norris' (2004, 2019) multimodal interactional model as the analytical tool. Having explained the rationale behind choosing the data and analytical tools, the transcription and analysis will be done as follows: a) the written transcript and the video of Mogahed's (2016) TED Talk will be retrieved from TED website. Following Norris' (2004) classification of mediated actions, Mogahed's introductory self-representation and personal narrative episodes will be considered the higher-level actions whereas the interplay of multiple semiotic resources that were used in their construction will be considered the lower-level mediated actions. To do the transcription, still images will be taken from Mogahed's (2016) TED Talk video to show how these mediated actions dynamically and (equally) contribute to the meaning-making process and the delivery of the trans-cultural message (see Norris, 2004, 2019).

In the analysis of higher-level actions, the written transcripts and duration of the selected excerpts will be included. Transcription conventions for verbal utterances include using capital letters for Arabic words, emphasis in italics and description between round brackets. Moreover, plates of subsequent images will be created to show the strategic shifts in hand gestures, body posture, head movements and eye-gaze as evidence of the dynamic orchestration of these modes while delivering the personal narratives. The analysis will focus not just on describing Mogahed's strategic language shifts, use of multiple semiotic resources in her interaction with the audience, but also the trans-cultural significance behind these shifts. Describing, analysing and interpreting this dynamic interplay of semiotic resources will also include how they are foregrounded to catch the audience's attention- what Norris' (2004) calls modal density foreground-background continuum.

3.   Analysis

3.1.   Mogahed's (trans)modal / (trans)cultural self- introduction and identity display (Part 1)

TED speakers often start off their talk with introducing themselves to the audience. This self- introduction is not just an essential component in the talk but a rhetorical tool through which presenters establish rapport with the audience. In Mogahed's self-introduction, she started off with challenging cultural misconceptions about Muslims particularly the mainstream media representations of Muslim women. As shown in Figure 1 below, Mogahed's (2016) focused interaction with the audience is mediated through utterance sequences that explain the prejudices attached to Muslims. She used her head scarf and Muslim outfit as cultural symbols to address these cultural stereotypical

allegations against Muslims. This segment of Mogahed's self- representation lasted for twenty seconds (see transcript 1 in the Appendix)

Here, Mogahed's act of resistance to these cultural misconceptions about Muslims particularly Muslim women is done through the higher- level action (the self-introduction segment) and multiple lower-level mediational means. For example, her use of English as a lingua franca, her dress code, her head scarf, her body posture and her direct eye-contact with the audience helped to defy news media representations of Muslim (particularly veiled) women as oppressed or at best brainwashed (LL.1-8). Starting the talk with a rhetorical question "what do you think when you look at me?" (L.1) got the audience immediately engaged in considering these allegations. In her interaction with the audience, her direct gaze at the audience, smiling face together with the emphatic deictic pronouns she used in the rhetorical question "you .. you .. me?" forced the audience to think of answers to the posed question and even question these allegations made against Muslim women. Her closed upper body posture was slightly slanting towards the audience. Moreover, her closed fists and distant proximity from the audience helped to temporarily set her apart from the audience. These embodied actions semiotically signalled her cultural distance from the audience, unlike when TED speakers choose closer proximity, open up their chest and have their arms stretched wide apart (see Masi, 2020, p. 161).

Still, Mogahed and the audience are highly engaged in her self- introduction and this is revealed in the high modal intensity in this segment of the talk. As Mogahed enlisted all the deep-seated media ideologies about Islam and Muslims in the West; i.e., how they are often described as "terrorists", "brainwashed", "oppressed" or simply a "mis-convenience" (an airport security line delay), she strategically made shifts in her interactive gestures. For example, she suddenly had her hands half- stretched with open palms face down then set them apart while saying "or just an airport security line delay". As she uttered this statement, she looked directly at the audience and pointed with her index finger at their direction while saying "this one is actually true" (images 1-4). These intricately intertwined lower- level mediated actions not only contribute to the construction of the higher -level action of Mogahed's (trans)modal self- representation but also demand the audience's full attention and awareness of these foregrounded meditational means (see Norris, 2004). Image 5 shows the audience's laugher at her joke as a sign of full engagement in the talk and acknowledgment of all the social stigmas and security restrictions imposed upon Muslims.

Figure 1. Mogahed's (2016) (trans)modal interaction with the audience during her self-introduction (images 1-5)

Image 1 (0:13)   Image 2 (0:16)

Image 3 (0:21)   Image 4 (0:28)

Image 5 (0:32)   Image 6 (0:34-35)

3.2.   Mogahed's (trans)modal and (trans)cultural self- introduction and identity display (Part 2)

Having said this, she proceeded to reintroduce herself while foregrounding her Muslim American identity (see transcript 2 in the appendix). In this segment, Mogahed is standing upright, directly looking at the audience with her hands slightly moving up and down and her open palms also shifting up and down as she said "for those who never met a Muslim". Her half- stretched arms using palms beat movements, her fixed eye- gaze and facial expressions particularly showed her confidence and her wish to establish intimacy with the audience at this point. Then, she drew her hands back to her chest as she said "it is great to meet you" (see Figure 2- images 1 & 2). Beat hand gestures were excessively used as she was saying "Let me tell you who I am" pointing at herself (image 3). Then, she enlisted her American identity aspects- those that she deemed to be shared with the audience. The foregrounded identity aspects in this segment showed Mogahed as a typical Western woman – a typical American She is a "mum", "a coffee lover", "an introvert", "a wannabe fitness fanatic", "an engineer" and in addition to all that, a practicing spiritual Muslim (LL.11 &12).

With every identity aspect, Mogahed shifted her hands movement between pointing at the audience and herself to show her connection with the audience. This was accompanied by shifts in eye-gaze and head tilt with each life choice (see Figure 2 image 6). She then set her hands apart with her palms face down as she said "But not as Laday Gaga said, "because baby, I wasn't born this way". Then with her closed palm pointing at the audience, she emphatically said "it was a choice". Her hand gestures, firm look at the audience showed the decisiveness in making her life style choices. She also emphasized that it wasn't an easy choice because she had to stand out, willingly choose to wear the HIJAB (head cover) and start practicing Islamic prayers. For her, choosing to wear HIJAB was ironically described as her "feminist declaration of independence" from fitting into the American ideal of reaching a "perfect and unattainable standard of beauty" (l. 16). Her knowledge of Arabic also gave her the unique opportunity to experience reading the Quran untranslated, to understand its message and to be deeply touched by "its rhythmics beauty" (see transcript 3 in the appendix)

In Mogahed' self- representation, she provided an excellent example of cultural hybridity- what Baker (2011) describes as "third-place identities" where people are typically

mediating between different cultures or social groupings. As an American, she represents the American culture not just in using English as a lingua franca, but in promoting particular ideals such as individuality, personal freedom (in making life choices), respect for the family system, specific life style preferences (coffee, sports), and knowledge of hybrid cultural practices (e.g., Lady Gaga's song and Quran). For example, the deictic hand gesture accompanying her utterance "double espresso, cream on the side" helped to engage the audience in a familiar social practice of ordering coffee. In this excerpt, she is also mostly standing in closer proximity and directly facing the audience as shown in images 1-4 in Figure 2. Being of Arab/ Muslim origin, she also represents the Islamic culture in her dress code, head cover, use of Arabic words and life style choices (being a practicing Muslim). These semiotic choices not simply denote aspects of identity but constitute acts of resistance to prevailing media ideologies. Jones et al. (2021, p. 19-20) maintains,

style as a semiotic repertoire can signal belonging to a particular group or community, which, in turn, might be associated with a particular lifestyle or particular social practices … People speak in a particular way because they want to be identified with a particular social group or to be recognized as a member of that group. …. From this it should be clear that identity is not necessarily something that we possess, but something that we 'do' using language and other semiotic resources (emphasis mine).

Figure 2. Mogahed's (2016) foregrounding her (trans)cultural identity as an American Muslim woman

Image 1 (0:59)   Image 2 (1:02)

Image 3 (1:05)   Image 4 (1:08)

Image 5 (1:11)   Image 6 (1:16)

Image 7 (1:18)   Image 8 (1:28)

And I'm a practicing, spiritual Muslim.

It was a choice.

3.3.   Mogahed's life narrative after the 9/11 attack

Mogahed's extended 9/11 life narrative took around four minutes (from 3.11 to 7.22). The narrative gave a personal account of how life was like for Muslim Americans after 9/11. Being given from the perspective of an American Muslim, it stood as a counter- narrative to the Western/ American mainstream news media narrative at the time. Mogahed's intro to the narrative stands as a paradoxical statement because just before 9/11, she described her life as "I was living essentially the Egyptian-American dream". Then, the narrative started with "And then that terrible morning of September, 2001" came. The narrative is full of vivid details of the event - which help to bring the events more alive to the audience (see transcript 4 in the appendix).

The 9/11 narrative started with a familiar family scene while having breakfast in the kitchen and watching the news. Then, her life turned into a nightmare. Her state of bewilderment and confusion showed in her repeated questions, "What is this? An accident? A malfunction" (LL.22-6). Mixed feelings of fear, shock and curiosity started to arise and showed on Mogahed's facial expressions (Figure 2 image 3). The breaking news part was mimicked through Mogahed's beat hand gestures as she raised her head and hand up to mimic looking up at the screen, closing her fists then open them like a flashlight to mimic the breaking news. As she was narrating the events, her hand gestures were also depicting the "flying planes", "people jumping out of buildings" ..etc. At this point, the camera angle showed Mogahed on the flat screen. The zoom out of the camera helped to give a full view of TED stage and the audience's full engagement in the narrative as she angrily and genuinely asked "who would do this?" (Figure 3 images 4 & 5). As she was telling the audience about the news media coverage of the events, she also mimicked the click of the remote-control button as if she was shifting between TV channels, and with every click there was a different accusation and a call for an attack against Muslims (image 6). She gave a long list of unfounded accusations to the Muslim community saying, "Muslim terrorists, In the name of Islam, Middles eastern descent, Jihad" (LL.27-32). She ended up saying that "In just an instant, her life turned upside down and she herself turned from a respected American citizen to a Muslim suspect" (L.33).

In the next narrative segment, Mogahed proceeded to give a detailed account of how her life was dramatically affected by the events and particularly how she and her family lost all sense of safety (see transcript 5 in the appendix). She explained how they had to drive to Middle America to move to a new city and start grad school. She said, "we drove in silence, crouched as low as I could go in my seat, for the first time in my life, afraid for anyone to know I was a Muslim" (LL35-6). Her beat hand gestures metaphorically resemble the crouching movement in the car while her facial expressions showed her sadness at the thought (images 7 & 8). Then, Mogahed moved in close proximity to the audience saying "We moved into our apartment that night in a new town in what felt like a completely different world" (image 9). Although the camera angle showed Mogahed's back while she was giving this narrative segment, the audience's mutual eye-gaze and full engagement in the narrative was so evident as shown in image 8.

Then, emotions of fear and uncertainty came through the successive warnings to stay home and the repetition of utterances like "be alert", "be aware", "stay in well-lit areas" and "don't congregate" (L.37). These warnings were the actual manifestations of the loss of peace and safety in the lives of American Muslims after 9/11. More details were given about multiple incidents of violence against Muslims; e.g., how Muslims were attacked and how they were being pulled out and beaten in the street and how mosques were actually firebombed" L.42) (see transcript 6 in the appendix).

Here, Mogahed used not just language but her hand gestures, body postures and facial expressions to express the dilemma of mediating between the two worlds. For example, she shared the same anger at the perpetuators saying "I get it that people were angry at the terrorists. Guess what? So was I". When she emphatically repeated, "those people attacked our country" (LL.46-8), she stood facing the audience upfront with stretched out hands. She also folded her hands as if she was embracing the audience. The interconnectedness between these semiotic resources showed that her emotions as an American were not in any way different from anyone of the audience.

At the same time, Mogahed's narrative also defied the mainstream media "othering" discourse of American Muslims. She described how Muslim Americans were suspected and publicly denounced as "a problem that needed to be solved" or even a "tumor that needed to be extracted". While describing Muslim Americans "as a malignant tumor that needed to be extracted", she not only used sad facial expressions but she simultaneously pulled back her hand as if she were pulling all Muslims out from the community (image 14). When she described them as a benign tumor that needed to be kept under surveillance, she metaphorically moved her hand in front of her body to depict the act of surveillance (image 15). In fact, acts of cultural extraction and/ or surveillance are both tools of oppression that classify, disqualify, differentiate, judge and punish the Muslim community. Jones et al. (2021, p. 20) states that

Mainstream media, as institutions with a wider reach, are often complicit in 'recycling' and reinforcing stereotypical associations between certain ways of speaking and certain ways of behaving…. The linguistic anthropologists Judith Irvine and Susan Gal (2000) describe this process as iconization, whereby certain elements of speech are foregrounded and linked with non-linguistic features.

As Mogahed sets out to defy the mainstream media iconization of Muslim Americans, her discourse including her use of embodied mediated actions help to show the absurdity of the "we, them" differentiation. As she said, "Muslims like all other Americans, aren't a tumour in the body of America", "we're a vital organ". They aren't an ethnic threat to the American ideals of democracy, and freedom. On the contrary, these very ideals are threatened by the "othering" of American Muslims and denying them their rights to belong, to feel safe and to practice their religion without having to face unbased and unfounded accusations.

Figure 3. Mogahed's semiotic construction of the extended 9/11 narrative
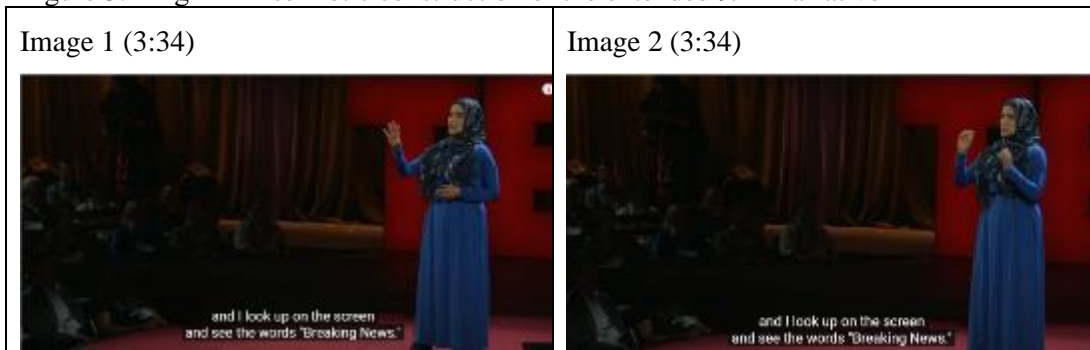

Image 1 (3:34)   Image 2 (3:34)

Image 3 (3:39)	Image 4 (3: 47)
There was smoke, airplanes flying into buildings,	An accident?
Image 5 (3: 56)	Image 6 (4:06)
Who would do this?	"... Middle-Eastern descent ..."
Image 7 (4: 41)	Image 8 (4: 44)
crouched as low as I could go in my seat,	for the first time in my life, afraid for anyone to know I was a Muslim.
Image 9 (4: 54)	Image 10 (5:14)
in what felt like a completely different world.	And then it was Friday that same week,
Image 11 (5: 51)	Image 12 (6:26)
attacked our country.	They talk about my community kind of like we're a tumor

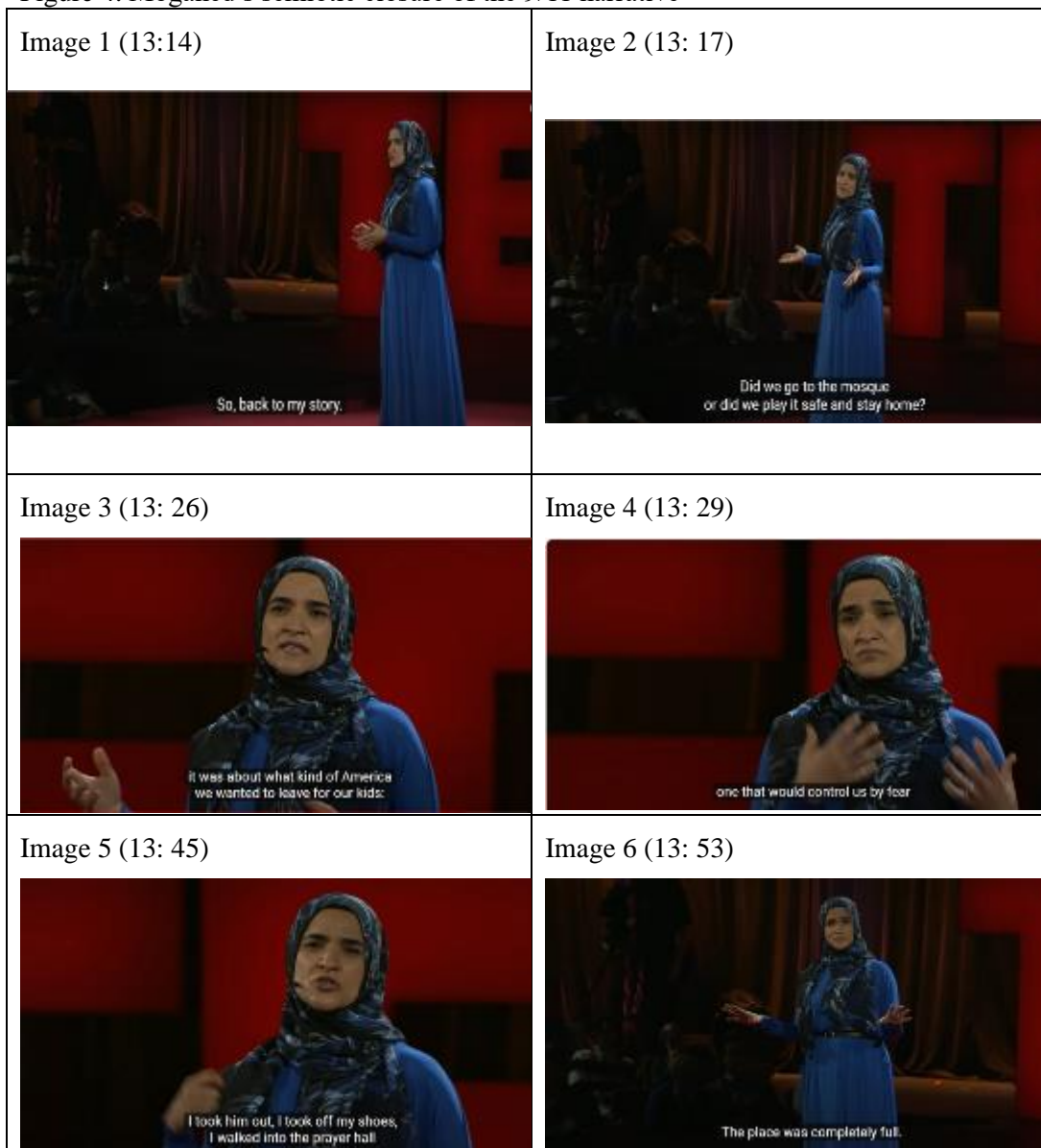| Image 13 (6:33)	Image 14 (6:37)
And the only question is, are we malignant or benign?	You know, a malignant tumor you extract altogether,
Image 15 (6: 40)	**Image 16 (6:55)**
and a benign tumor you just keep under surveillance	we're a vital organ.

3.4. Closure of Mogahed's 9/11 narrative

Having thus, exposed the Western media "othering" representation of Muslim Americans, Mogahed resumed her 9/11 narrative (see transcript 7 in the appendix). She explained how the family had to make the tough decision about whether to go to the mosque the first Friday after 9/11 or stay safely at home. The whole excerpt (LL.49-66) constitutes a new higher-level action that functions as a continuation of the 9/11 narrative and at the time a closure to the whole talk. It also highlighted the emotional support and solidarity American Muslims received from the American community after 9/11. To signal the shift into the new higher- level action, Mogahed drew her palms together in a clap like gesture as she said "Now back to my story" (Figure 4– image 1). She then stretched her full arms with her palms face up aligned with a head tilt as she asked "Did we go to the mosque or did we play it safe and stay home?" (L.69- image 2). The answer to the question introduced another sequence of detailed narrative about how they came to the decision about going to the mosque the first Friday after 9/11 in spite of all the warnings. She said that it wasn't merely a family decision because it could determine the kind of America they wanted to live in and leave for their kids": "one that is controlled by fear" "or one where people could practice their religion freely" (LL71-.73). Simultaneously, she still held her stretched hands up and juggled them to engage the audience in the decision-making process. She also used beat hand gestures as she kept raising and dropping her closed fist to depict the details of the family journey to the mosque at the time; how she put her son in the car, buckled him in, drove to the mosque, then took him out, took off her shoes and went to the mosque hall. With every action, Mogahed used beat hand gestures to show the intensity of doing these actions at the time as emotions of fear and uncertainty prevailed (Figure 4 images 1-5).

Then, the climax was that the mosque "was completely full" with supporters from all religions. Her hands were stretched out with her palms face down to show her bewilderment at the sight. The IMAM- the man who gives the Friday sermon - was thanking the attendees for their courage and support and Mogahed said that she completely broke down (L.62). Her facial expressions showed the intensity of her feelings and how she was deeply touched by the supporters' courage and moral support (image 6). While uttering "people of faith and no faith had come not to attack us, but to stand in solidarity with us" (L.61), her raised fist accompanied with her tilted head helped

to mimic the act of the expected attack (image 7). Then, turning to the audience, she raised her hands with her palms up as she directly asked them "what will you choose? Will you play it safe? Or will you join those who say we are better than that?" (LL.64-6). Uttering these words at the end of her talk, Mogahed presented the audience with an ethical dilemma and obliged them to act in favour of the marginalized and misrepresented sect of the community (Figure 4 image 8). In fact, the cited example of American supporters in the mosque almost dictated the expected and recommended behaviour. Thus, the narrative ended with an implicit direction to choose "a free America"; one that allows all American citizens to practice their religion freely without fear or cultural stigma. She presented it as the "ideal" America that everyone hopes for without distinction.

Figure 4. Mogahed's semiotic closure of the 9/11 narrative

Image 1 (13:14)	Image 2 (13: 17)
So, back to my story.	Did we go to the mosque or did we play it safe and stay home?
Image 3 (13: 26)	Image 4 (13: 29)
it was about what kind of America we wanted to leave for our kids:	one that would control us by fear
Image 5 (13: 45)	Image 6 (13: 53)
I took him out, I took off my shoes, I walked into the prayer hall	The place was completely full.

Image 7 (14:11)	Image 8 (14: 36)

4.   Discussion

Based on the above analysis, TED speakers' memoirs as a new media genre could offer unprecedented opportunities for (trans)cultural communication where discourses about marginalized and stigmatized cultural groups can be challenged and existing power structures can be defied as in Mogahed's case. As Zhu (2019) points out there may be tensions between our self- orientation (i.e., the cultural identity we wish to construct and those that others (e.g., new media representations) impose on us due to belonging to certain ethnicity, nation or race. As an instance of (trans)cultural communication, the data analysis has also provided evidence of how Mogahed' semiotic construction of the 9/11 narrative and her self- introduction helped in transcending cultural, political and geographical boundaries between the West and East, the culturally privileged and the culturally stigmatized. Her semiotic identity construction not just represents a case of cultural hybridity but allows Mogahed to semiotically break the cultural and ideological barriers between two distant cultures and languages: West and East, Arabic and English.

In her self-representation, she strategically selected the cultural practices that are part and parcel of the American culture and life style; so, she talked about herself as "being a mum, a wanna be sports fanatic" and a coffee lover" (L.12). She established common ground with the audience when she referred to Lady Gaga's famous song "cause you were born this way baby" and depicted familiar scenes of everyday life social practices; e.g., the scene of the American family having breakfast in the kitchen while watching the news. She consistently made reference to the American ideals of liberty and equality as she called for a free America, "where everyone could practice their religion freely" (L.55). At the same time, her Muslim identity aspects were foregrounded by her outfit, head cover and constant identification with the Muslim community. She talked about the Muslim community saying "my community" (L.52) and defended Muslim Americans saying that they form an integral part of the American society. At the same time, being of an Arab origin, Mogahed's knowledge of Arabic helped her to explain how she understood the message of Quran and why she was deeply touched by the Quran' rhythmic beauty. Out of this deep understanding, she chose to be a practicing Muslim and wear her hijab. She also provided a detailed description of Islamic social practices like attending the Friday prayers in the Mosque. Throughout Mogahed's identity display and life narrative, these distant cultural practices were integrated and displayed as one whole. Clifford (1992, p. 101) described this phenomenon as "travelling cultures"; i.e., cultures travelling with people and people travelling to cultures. He (1992) maintained that with constant travelling and displacement, cultures are getting more and more "transnational"; so, they can be both local and global, intercultural and native at the same time.

Language is also seen an essential ingredient in (trans)modal/cultural communication. As a semiotic resource, TED speakers often adapt and strategically manipulate their linguistic repertoire to achieve their communicative ends. As observed in the data analysis, Mogahed's shift from one code to another signalled her cultural inclusion (e.g., in-group solidarity/ outgroup affiliation). In fact, language shifts were key elements in

Mogahed's (trans)modal/cultural construction of her self- identity and life narrative. Using English as the medium of communication in her TED talk allowed her to reach a much wider global audience. As a global lingua franca, using English along with other semiotic resources is not just an effective tool for self- expression but also a rhetorical tool that gets the audience to believe in her cause and be prompted to take action as she suggested at the end of her talk. Mogahed strategically assimilated many Islamic terms (e.g., Hijab, and Imam) into her talk and described many Islamic cultural practices. For example, she described in great detail the Muslim cultural practices of attending the Friday prayers in the mosque. Within the talk, she also used Arabic terms; e.g., "hijab", "Imam" to explain Islamic practices and assimilated these terms into the English language. Such language shift strategically helped to further integrate the two cultures and also introduce the audience to a new world with new social practices. Blommaert (2010) called this phenomenon the "dynamic multilingual repertoires" that social actors strategically drew upon to achieve their communicative goals. As these terms got assimilated into the English language, they are no longer "foreign". As Rampton (2018, p. 299) argues, linguistic and cultural identities are dynamic, multi-layered (related to the different groups we orientate towards and consider part of our sense of self) and interactive rather than fixed. As shown in the analysis, linguistic and cultural identities are dynamic entities that Mogahed strategically manipulated to serve her own communicative purposes rather than "a set of reified ethnic units" that are fixed (see Rampton, 2018, p. 299).

Moreover, the analysis has also provided evidence of the importance of viewing multimodality as a form of social action. In this regard, Norris' (2004, 2019) multimodal interaction model and the hierarchical structure of higher and lower- level actions provided rigorous analytical tools to investigate how Mogahed- as a social actor- built up her narrative, segued into new topics, constructed her (trans)cultural identity through the effective interplay of a multiplicity of semiotic resources. One of the advantages of using Norris' (2004, 2019) model is its primary concern with interaction and how interaction unfolds through the utilization of semiotic resources. In Mogahed's life narrative, her acts of resistance were mediated through a chain of higher -level actions. For example, she strategically shifted from her self- introduction to the 9/11 narrative. On a micro-level, there were also strategic shifts in her hand gestures, head movements, eye gaze and body posture to fully engage the audience in her (trans)cultural message. The foregrounding of these lower- level actions helped the audience to stayed focused during the interaction and even respond to Mogahed's messages through laughter and applause. The analysis has been clearly shown that simultaneously performed higher- level actions (whether constructing her self- identity, performing life narrative, or providing counter arguments) were closely interconnected and had an impact on one another. They were also semiotically constructed through performing chains of lower-level actions. In fact, Norris' (2004, 2019) model primarily focuses on social (inter)action and how social actors semiotically engage in the construction, negotiation and even resistance of particular social practices by employing high modal intensity or high modal complexity. These semiotic signs were intricately combined and foregrounded so the audience were highly aware of them. To fully interpret Mogahed's (trans)cultural message, it is essential to pay close attention to the complex combination of sign systems and how they equally contribute to the meaning- making process.

5. Conclusions, limitations and suggestions for future research

Although the semiotic analysis was limited to a single case study, it still showed the importance of including the analysis of all semiotic resources in such cases of (trans)cultural communication. If the analysis focused on language shifts alone, the full meaning of Mogahed's (trans)cultural messages will be lost. Finally, there needs to be more research on how new media genres facilitate (trans)cultural communication as well

as more exploration is needed to explore how instances of intercultural communication are mediated via multiple semiotic resources.

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