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Articles

The fragmentation of the writing self: Using dialogic reflection to explore the writing process of an autobiographical novel

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Abstract
In this article, the author-researcher presents three intertwined texts: excerpts from an autobiographical novel, extracts from a reflexive journal written during the writing of that novel, as well as a theorized account and analysis of the overarching creative process. These texts talk to each other as a form of intertextuality in the similar way that the three generations of a Chinese Indonesian family depicted in the novel interact with one another and present differing perspectives and fresh insights. The issues of the writer’s inner voices and multiplicity of the self feature prominently in this work, the result of a deep and critical engagement with the author-researcher’s creative writing and reflective thinking processes. Together, these three interrelated texts capture and explore multiple perspectives interacting during the writing process while at the same time present how the self and sites of meaning-making can be constructed through writing.

Keywords
dialogic reflection
autobiographical novel
critical reflection
dialogic self
multiple perspectives
internal voices
I-positions

Pathways to dialogic reflection
Each time before putting my thoughts on paper, I have to grapple with loud internal voices that accumulate and magnify depending on the sensitivity of the topic. To write autobiographically, I had to engage myself in what Brown and Sawyer have identified as
the dialogic reflection, which is ‘a form of embodied reflection’ where the participant engages himself or herself in a process ‘in which he or she disrupts and reconceptualizes their views in relation to their narrative’ (2016: 4). Inspired by Bakhtin’s (1981) famous dictum the ‘dialogic imagination’, dialogic reflection ‘promotes self-critique and change in practice’ that facilitates practitioners to develop ‘new relationships with themselves and their patterns of perception – or even imagination – to specific topics and situations’ (Brown and Sawyer 2016: 4, 5).

This intertextuality correlates with Hermans’s idea of ‘the dialogical self’, a concept that is ‘based on the assumption that there are many I-positions that can be occupied by the same person’ (2001: 249). In further exploring the dialogical self, Hermans asserts that the I in one position ‘can agree, disagree, understand, misunderstand, oppose, contradict, question, challenge and even ridicule the I in another position’ (2001: 249). Yet, Hermans argues that the dialogical self is always located at a specific position of time and space, which when connected to my own process of writing family history, my dialogical self constantly situates and resituates itself according to my ability to construe or imagine another person or being ‘as a position that I can occupy and as a position that creates an alternative perspective on the world and myself’ (2001: 249–50).

In my process of writing, the dialogic reflection occurred and materialized in the form of inner dialogues, sporadic writings, wandering thoughts and resurfacing memories that often arose as I was re-reading an earlier draft of my novel or when I was searching for relevant literature. It is about engaging myself tremendously in the interaction between multiple inner voices that emerged in my mind, trying to find the answer to questions about the best way to weave historical facts with everyday stories, and fill the gaps with imagination. Bakhtin refers these internal voices to the author’s polyphonic psychological condition that involves more than his/her own consciousness as he/she extends it ‘to accommodate the autonomous consciousness of others’, which are actualized in the form of voices of different characters with different perspectives (1984: 68). In order to trace this, I need to delve deeper into the reflection process experienced while working on my novel, provisionally entitled ‘The Longing’, as well as into the underlying frameworks that encourage this multiplicity of selves in the field of creative writing.

This article investigates my experimental creative writing process provoked by intergenerational family dynamics and marginalization occurring to a family of Chinese Indonesians living in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia. These cultural issues have stemmed from the long history of conflict-induced relationships between the Chinese Indonesians and the pribumi (‘Native Indonesians’), which has remained intact since the Dutch colonial times in the eighteenth until the twenty-first century (Ang 2001; Turner 2003; Sai and Hoon 2013; Heryanto 2005). I treated both my narrative writing and reflective journal as an opportunity to engage in a self-examination journey, to enhance my novel writing skills and to document the far-ranging lived experiences of three generations of women in my family. In letting the narrative making to guide the research as well as embedding critical reflection into an action research methodology, I acknowledge how writing an autobiographical novel has presented me with a reflective lens through which
to disseminate the experiences of prejudice and intergenerational relationship I encountered in my environment.

'The Longing', narrated in the third-person voice, depicts the details of the character traits, episodes and contexts in a three-part narrative framework. Beckman-Long asserts that the third-person narration provides ‘the extradiegetic narrator’ that ‘has full access’ to a protagonist’s ‘consciousness and to knowledge of the fictional world’ (1999: 74). Beckman-Long further addresses that using the third-person narration has become ‘a rhetorical strategy to convince the reader of the accuracy of the fictional representation’ since the genre uses ‘the gender-specific pronoun “she” instead of “I”’ to indicate the generalizing potentials of one’s gendered experience, making it a particularly effective strategy ‘in a gendered confession’ (1999: 74). 'The Longing' belongs to the autobiographical genre and portrays the lives of three Chinese Indonesian female protagonists: Ah Lam who lived through the 1950s to 2000s, her daughter Ming Zhu who lived from 1968 and onwards and Ming Zhu’s daughter Tilda who was born in 1993 and lived through the 2010s. The novel explores themes of intergenerational relationship that occurs in the family and how they deal with ethnic marginalization from their interaction with the pribumi or Native Indonesians in Surabaya, East Java. The first part of the novel tells about Ah Lam, the matriarch, who becomes the family's backbone by running a small bakwan ('meatball') restaurant once her narcissistic and abusive husband refuses to work simple jobs to make ends meet.

During her struggles in raising her family, Ah Lam has to endure conflicts with her children at home and her helpers at her restaurant as well as witnessing Indonesian Communism under Sukarno (1959–65) and the Indonesian coup and mass killings (1965–67). The second part narrates Ming Zhu’s life, who grows up in a busy household and spends much of her childhood and adolescent years living under Suharto's authoritarian New Order (1966–98) while becoming a homemaker to two young daughters and a wife of a busy academic. The third part tells about Tilda, who spends her formative years during the Reformasi era (1998–2014) and grapples with discrimination and uncertainties during the post-Reformasi era (2014–ongoing).

By writing this reflective article in order to capture its dynamics, as a dialogic self I engaged myself in both practices of reflect-in-action and reflect-on-action (Schön 1983) by actualizing my stream of thoughts and experiments into a critical essay, where I presented the traces of my reflection and writing by analysing my journal entries. Through applying critical dialogic reflection in the reflective article, subconscious impulses were unravelled and put to work.

Understanding the self before writing
Before the writing takes place, a writer, consciously or unconsciously, always starts from the point of departure, from the centre of his/her dominating focus: his/her consciousness as an operating human being, which exists in his/her own realm. This consciousness first stems and then is continually cultivated through his/her encounters and exposure to other human beings, from which distinctive categories emerge and become the benchmark in determining how he/she is different from others. In the Bakhtinian, the self is not given to anyone, but instead one must forge to create the self,
and that one must do so from outside (Holquist 1990: 28). Thus, the act of writing is key to the construction of the self.

As a human entity, I first identified myself as ‘different’ from others through my gender and ethnicity as a Chinese Indonesian young woman, who was born and raised in the Muslim-populated Indonesia. Through my intense interaction and exposure to the culture of my peers and counterparts, the Javanese Muslims, I learned that their categorizations of identity differ from mine. Thus, to put it bluntly, my self, my entity, all traits of my identity have always been provided by the other. These conditions have been my primary outset for thinking, contemplating, deciding, writing and eventually, reflecting my ever-changing position. Hence, my condition of authoring. And in the process of authoring myself, I have engaged myself in what Holquist identifies as the ‘construction of ratios’, the act of arranging and constructing the parts with respect to each other (1990: 28).

Before writing, I familiarized myself with the ‘alienated stance of the artist’, which is the idea that an author ‘views things doubtfully, both as experience and as material’, and perceives the outside world as ‘a drama that the inner world comments on’ (Day 2002: 133). During the narrative-making process, I exposed myself to various character voices that were dialogic, rhizomatic and responsive to modified versions of the story world. While writing, I felt I could discern the characters and their responses to their situations with deeper understanding and objectivity since ‘values come into view more clearly when events are narrated in writing from different points of view’ (Bolton 2009: 20). As Bakhtin puts it, characters are ‘speaking consciousness’, and the writer’s roles are to get to know them as he/she writes and provide a space in which these consciousnesses can partake in a dialogue with each other on equal terms, thus creating the ‘polyphony’ of voices (1984: 47–77). In this context, Bakhtin means that dialogue is actually a metaphor to understand the workings of the mind where inner voices within one’s mind intersect and disagree, then one grows stronger to solve the conflict but in its process still takes account of external voices – those of the culture and environment (e.g. my living place, my parents, my friends). Hofstadter (1986) and Minsky (1985) disclose that the brain is a host of agents or an assembly of voices that, if functioning at higher levels, enables a situation where many and varied voices emerge to pass the author’s aspirations. This is where one voice usually becomes more dominant or active than other voices and gets selected as the author decides this particular voice is to be communicated on the page.

Thus, as an author, I situated myself inside the writing as a performing agent who constructed stories and imagined characters while at the same time expanding, deepening and arranging my own consciousness ‘in order to accommodate the autonomous consciousness of others’ (Bakhtin 1984: 68). In this context, the consciousness of others is what Barthes highlights as ‘a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture’ (1977: 146), the presence of people that we have encountered along the way, whose opinions, actions and images have imparted us with some knowledge about the world. The act of imagining people and events, and then choosing, arranging, emphasizing and inspecting my own consciousness and that of others for their meaning and relevance in the novel-writing process allowed the
multiple voices in my mind to choreograph, navigate and process the multi-layered memories before weaving them into the narrative.

I was striving to write how dialogic reflection took place during the process of narrative making to encapsulate how writing autobiographically could ‘enact ecologies of the self and speak in the multiple tongues of their own worlds’ (Madison 2006: 320). How I could be filled with some sense of certainty to keep going despite still having nagging doubts. How I allowed myself to be guided by my creative impulse and internal voices during the process of writing. In the midst of producing a personal narrative, my consciousness became ‘a composite of interpenetrating and polyvocal experiences, intents, and desires within itself and with Others’ (Madison 2006: 320). As I dealt with materials that I wanted to write about, I had to stand outside myself and everyday reality, thus entering ‘a fluid and less rigidly limited dimension’ of consciousness (Kosinski 1992: 201). With each growing passage, a new path was forged with a new insight and understanding. The inquiry employed went on and depended on my response to my medium while I had to sustain insecurity, vulnerability and clashing values to reach a new standpoint. Brown and Sawyer suggest this transaction between the practitioner’s patterns of viewpoint and himself as ‘an intertextual construction of meaning’ (2016: 5).

Family relations and its opportunities
Intergenerational relationship is not just about dealing with cultural disparities existing between generations in a family; it is about three generations of women who adapt to local cultures, live through difficult times and constantly negotiate their place and perspectives as minorities. I portrayed my family’s lived experiences of intergenerational relationship and ethnic marginalization by setting the narrative within both a family and academic environment where intergenerational and intercultural interactions occur, regardless of their roles and hierarchies. The family situations function within a dynamic, intercultural and competitive forces, with challenges arising due to conflicting interests, values and pursuits. Most of the characters and events were inspired by observations of real people and situations. The themes supporting each part drew influence from constant reflection and research into patterns of Chinese Indonesian family relationship and dynamics of Indonesian politics as well as democratization. The dialogue was informed by my memory, imagination as well as internal contemplation towards difficult life periods and situations, which I could not react to at the time but always replayed in my mind. I used the characters’ conversations as a tool to rationalize and disseminate the entanglements of family relationships and history by making some characters like Ah Lam and her son-in-law Arya as informative figures and Ming Zhu and Tilda’s traits to embody the child-like perspectives. Yet, the unprecedented opportunity was the insight into the details of the political dynamics and lived experiences, both from scholarly and fictional works, which enriched the novel.

Research into intergenerational relationship provided insight into the creative choices of undertaking autobiographical fiction and graphic novels. The idea of producing texts of autobiographical fiction appeals to post-traumatic writers since they see this ‘as a form of life-story telling that allows them to express feelings without being
forced to attribute meaning to them and also engages the “dilemma of representation” that mimics their psychic state’ (Jensen 2014: 8). In my case, embracing chaos meant that I presented ‘dispersed’ narrative passages with incoherent family stories following after one another, and characters with no clear hierarchy in narrating their multi-layered perspectives. Gilmore states that providing troubling truths in works of autobiographical fiction presents ‘an alternative jurisdiction for self-representation in which writers relocate the grounds of judgement, install there a knowing subject rather than a sovereign or representative self, and produce an alternative jurisprudence about trauma [and] identity’ (2001: 143). This ‘sovereignty’ of self needs to be contradicted and deconstructed into a ‘divided “subject” […] established progressively, laboriously, nevertheless imperfectly’ since it is ‘not natural, forever and essentially unstable’ (Derrida and Roudinesco 2004: 236). The capacity for autobiographical fiction to accommodate wide-ranging forms of truth and existence implies it can support perspective transformation.

Facets of reflection
For Adams, when one is truly engaged in a task, one rarely reflects on the task, and ‘this mode of ready-to-hand engagement is the basic, experiential ground which makes reflection possible’ (2008: 39). Thus, when reflecting, we need to return to ‘the lived world of our experience prior to that reflection’ (Adams 2008: 39). This lived world of my experience was the time when I brainstormed, took notes, read relevant literature, reflected on which family or political events to include, created conversations between characters, used research into life writing genre, wrote journal entries and so forth. Myerhoff explains that reflexive knowledge is different from reflective knowledge, since ‘reflective’ is a term that refers to ‘a kind of thinking about ourselves, showing ourselves to ourselves, but without the requirement of explicit awareness of the implications of our display […] Merely holding up a single mirror is not adequate to achieve this [reflexive] attitude’ (1981: 3).

Consequently, reflection can be many things; there is reflection during practice and reflection after practice. It can also take on various forms with different methods and techniques, such as poetry, dialogue, dance and the like, depending on its purposes (Hickson 2011). Meierdirk, taking on Schön’s two notable reflective practices, states that:

Schön’s reflection-in-action is the conscious reflection that is undertaken ‘on the spot’; it is a reaction to what is occurring at the time, rather than an instant reaction using tacit knowledge. Reflection-on-action occurs after the event and is a continual process of review and improvement.

(2016: 370)

Heteroglossia, which is the nature of reflection (Hallman 2011), means that we could have multiple reflections about a particular event, but we will usually choose the one most suited to the social context. While the suppression of heteroglossia and conformity by an institutionally sanctioned reflection is commonplace, it has to be challenged.
Instead of presenting the ‘conventional, clichéd, and alienated expression of the Symbolic Other’s desire’ (Bracher 1999: 126), I need to voice my own aspirations. If the authenticity of my reflection depends on this multi-voice characteristic, then this is how authentic reflection looks like.

Compared to other forms of reflection, Brown and Sawyer acknowledge that dialogic reflection is very much ‘a form of embodied reflection’ where ‘the participant involves himself or herself in a process in which he or she disrupts and reconceptualizes their views in relation to their narrative’ with the aim of ‘self-critique and change in practice’ (2016: 4). Holquist asserts that there are three kinds of dialogue that can occur in this embodied reflective approach: ‘external (between two different people) or internal (between an earlier and a later self), as well as spatial (A to B) or temporal (A to A)’ (1981: 427). Being a writer and reflective researcher means situating myself constantly in an internal and temporal dialogue between my earlier and later self in support of self-criticism and meaning-making in my writing process. Performing embodied reflection means involving myself in the dialectical situation – which is fluid, dynamic and layered – to allow the ‘intertextual construction of meaning’ triggered by my interpretation of various artefacts, media and art objects to keep on occurring (Brown and Sawyer 2016). I involve myself in the transaction between myself as the viewer and my novel as the artwork, in which an intertextual construction of meaning is created. Thus, I support Sullivan’s statement that:

Meaning is not within a form itself, say a person, painting, or a poem, but exists within a network of social relations and discourse. This interpretive landscape of ‘intertextuality’ serves as the means by which meanings become distributed and debated.

(2005: 43)

As I immersed myself in the narrative-making process, I found that my previously proposed approach, narrative therapy and autoethnography, no longer suited the direction of my process of writing. I found that both of my novel and reflective journal writing processes were mostly driven by constant reflection between reciprocal voices that called to memories. Through questioning preconceived ideas, this dialogic reflective approach grounded me into embracing the belief that doing cannot be separated from thinking, since ‘reflection was not the product but rather the generator of further reflection and new ways to perceive and imagine practice’ (Brown and Sawyer 2016: 3). This reflective journal could extend ‘as forms of dialogic reflection’ and result in ‘an embodied change that creates sites of cyclical meaning making – sites of re/generation’ (Brown and Sawyer 2016: 5).

**On writing fiction and doing critical reflection**

Reflecting on the role of fiction – with regards to writing about marginalized experience – calls for a deeper understanding that it operates as ‘an artistic form’ with ‘the imaginary world’ that is ‘created by the words of narrators with a point of view’ (Doyle 1998: 32). Saunders asserts that the genre of autobiographical novel is critical ‘to
protect the privacy of those still living’ – including that of the author – which eventually ‘seems to pull the work away from autobiography and towards novel’ (2014: 108). In this way, the mode allows the author’s lived experiences to be ‘narrated in the third person as if they happened to someone else’ and ‘the persona of the narrator’ to be ‘fictionalised’ (Saunders 2014: 108).

‘The Longing’ embodies the nature of my multiple voices narratorial omniscience of the third-person voice, with my primary characters (the three female protagonists) consecutively switching their role with the supporting characters in narrating the novel as the central consciousness. This phenomenon supports Beckman-Long’s statement that the third-person narration voice authoritatively characterizes ‘the split subjectivity’ that emerges from gender roles, which is most common in women narrators (1999: 74). Each chapter of ‘The Longing’ contains aspects of intergenerational trauma, misused authority or modern-day atrocities, either imposed by one of the family members, strangers or the state apparatuses. In the third chapter entitled ‘1968’, the family matriarch Ah Lam attempts to elevate her family’s struggling financial situations by experimenting and producing meatballs and fishballs to serve at her restaurant. While she manages to bring in a small number of steady customers to support her family, she still has to give up more of her limited allowance to pay for her relative’s weddings, her helpers and occasional local interlopers who ask for some spare cash. Meanwhile, her husband Cheng Lei keeps getting in her way by being verbally and physically abusive as well as arbitrarily taking charge of the household. Responding to such tension, Ah Lam’s eldest children, in turn, become rebellious and act up in a way that demands Ah Lam’s attention and energy. Despite being conscious of framing and using ‘The Longing’ to challenge the gender power structures within a family, the interaction of creative and reflective engagements triggered self-awareness that led to further investigation of my rumination over my consciousness as the author-researcher.

This is what I wrote in my journal entry:

While writing the first part of the novel, I tried to narrate everything from the perspective of the grandmother’s character, but the voices of these supporting characters did emerge, and they refused to be outside the spotlight. I told myself that this occasional point of view shift among the characters was due to my unchronological family memories, with me recalling different people doing this and that. But, at the same time I was aware that this was the result of my internal dialogue.

(Adji 2019)

With multiple voices collaborating without a clear hierarchy to build a collage or a patchwork of family narrative, I incorporated multiple I-positions through the third-person narratorial perspective. This was particularly vivid in the way the conversations emerged between characters, and how the central perspective shifted from one character to the other. Lengelle asserts that these I-positions, or these writing ‘I’s, may be ‘roles (e.g. I-as-widow, I-as-writer)’, ‘particular identifications (e.g. I-as-creator of my
own recipe for bereavement’) or even as ‘internalised others (I-as-the-voice of Frans who still speaks to me)’ (2020: 108).

In the first part of the novel where Ah Lam becomes the central protagonist, her story is often peppered by actions, conversations or arguments by supporting characters like her pedantic husband, her rebellious eldest daughter or her petulant younger sister with Ah Lam being a non-acting entity. Thus, the novel is mostly led by different but dialogical positionings of characters’ perspectives. In the storymaking process, this ‘dialogical self’ (Hermans 2001: 243) became the lens that framed the reflection of my author-researcher self:

The I fluctuates among different and even opposed positions, and has the capacity imaginatively to endow each position with a voice so that dialogical relations between positions can be established. The voices function like interacting characters in a story, involved in a process of question and answer, agreement and disagreement. Each of them has a story to tell about his or her own experiences from his or her own stance. As different voices, these characters exchange information about their respective Me’s, resulting in a complex, narratively structured self.

(Hermans 2001: 248)

Indeed, Hermans suggests that the dialogical self may be best understood ‘in terms of a dynamic multiplicity of voiced positions in the landscape of the mind, intertwined as this mind is with the minds of other people’ (2003: 90). In developing the narrative, subconscious influences coming from memories of interacting with other family members, friends and acquaintances intertwined and took shape in narrative inquiry. Employing narratorial omniscience in autobiographical fiction enabled me to experiment on the interchangeability of narrative levels (hierarchy), which blurred the boundary between outside and inside, narrating subject and narrated object. To address this issue, I agree with Hermans and Kempen’s statement on the dialogical self, which best exemplifies the essence of multivoicedness in an author-researcher self:

The self is multi-voiced, and the different voices may enter into dialogical relationships with one another. It is in the dialogical relation that the possibility of coherence is given. The different positions cohere as they are dialogically related; they are separate as far as one and the same person is like ‘different characters’, resisting any final unification.

(1993: 59)

The interrelated idea of ‘multi-voiced’ and ‘dialogical relationships’ resonated with my own treatment of narrative techniques. These multiple knowledges of the self embodied in writing, in reverse, aligned with the notion that ‘narrative making and fictional writing are not only forces for self-examination and discovery, but also vehicles for the dissemination of experience, skills and knowledge to colleagues, and the sharing of anxieties, fears and frustrations’ (Bolton 1994: 56). Using alternating narration to
illustrate Chinese Indonesian culture facilitated me to delve into personal experiences of intergenerational relationship and ethnic marginalization I was withheld from expressing in that environment. 'The Longing', as the multi-layered narrative overflowing with multivoicedness, became the dialogic expression of my family’s and my inner battle from wandering between 'here and there, past and present, homeland and hostland, self and other' which were 'constantly being negotiated with each other' (Bhatia and Ram 2001: 15) during the ever-going process of acculturation to a host country’s culture. In a dialogic sense, such work served as a 'historical mediation in and for the present' through 'proposing a textual and cultural model for present and future communities’ (Davis et al. 2007: 19).

In my reflective journal, I recounted:

I have tried to re-focus my writing by narrating the events through Ah Lam’s sole perspective, but immersing myself in one character was hard. After one or two passages, I got fidgety, drifted and began to look for new perspectives to sustain the narrative thread. That’s when the voices of Cheng Lei, Mei Lan, or Xiu Ying appeared. Now when I think about it, these supporting characters’ competing voices came up because I included other people’s perspectives and my own inner arguments over one particular event that I made as a plot theme.

(Adji 2020)

This shows that as a dialogical self that occupied multiple I-positions, this was reflected in the way I drafted the plot, thus making the critical reflection to be already integrated into the narrative-making process. Indeed, my dialogic reflection informed me that a familiar writing routine produced what Schön called as 'an unexpected result; an error stubbornly resists correction' with 'an element of surprise' since 'we find something odd about them’, but then ‘we have begun to look at them in a new way' (1987: 26). Through undertaking narratorial omniscience, at the same time I realized that my emplotment served as a dialogical strategy (Hermans and Kempen 1993) that organized pieces into a coherent composition, in which important constructions were established and elaborated.

Emplotment as a construction of part-whole configurations allows, moreover, for the simultaneous existence of coherence and separateness. The different characters in a story retain, as parts of a whole, their position of relative autonomy. As dialogically related, they form new combinations that function as coherent wholes. An implication of this view is that the characters do not give up their separateness. However, this separateness keeps the characters from dissolving into fragmentation, since the notion of dialogue is a guarantee for their coherence as parts of an organized whole. (Hermans and Kempen 1993: 59)

In the context of this research, emplotment ran depending on the flow dynamics of the alternating perspectives in 'The Longing'. For instance, in the second part of the novel, 'The pink Azalea', Ming Zhu’s perspective as the centre of the story suddenly shifts to her elder sister Mei Lan’s (a supporting character), who finds herself falling for a much older man who occasionally dines at their family restaurant with his wife and
son. While Ming Zhu’s interest in her sister’s secret affair makes her a narrating agent for her sister’s actions, Mei Lan’s sudden lead in the narrative also makes her both a narrating object and later a narrating subject as the drama intensifies. Synchronously, Mei Lan’s presence and choices serve as a point of change that directs Ming Zhu’s narrative course. This occurs several times in each part of the novel, establishing a certain pattern to the bigger narrative picture. In this way, emplotment provided me with the time, space and capacity to engage in both reflective journal and novel-writing processes that exposed intergenerational relationships, which might otherwise be hard to grasp and resolve.

The synergy between creative writing and reflective processes revealed feelings of anxiety, distress and powerlessness that were articulated by the characters within the novel. Through the medium of pen, paper and computer, my inner self came through in words and on the page. The character of Ah Lam, for instance, exemplifies this multi-voiced individuality, and it extends to the other two protagonists, Ming Zhu and Tilda, as well as other supporting characters. The plurality of voices in my head about a single event materialized into a fictional manner that incorporated the reflection process. DuPlessis critiqued Joanna Russ’ feminist novel The Female Man (1975), which portrays four female protagonists coming from different parallel worlds, since it embodies the essence of multivoicedness in contemporary narratives:

> The multiple protagonist is a major feature of this work because it bears the intellectual weight – the analysis of the various ways one can be a female man – and because it is a way of building conflicting perspectives into the work to express women’s social identity as critic and inheritor. In Russ the cluster protagonist represents the divided consciousness of contemporary women. (1985: 182)

Her claim of ‘the divided consciousness’ that present-day women have – which is embedded with trauma, anxiety, stress, addiction and emotion regulation – is the psychological condition that extends the meaning of contemporary women’s work, including that of my own. The novel has transformed into an intuitive and facet-encompassing text that facilitated the interaction among colliding voices, embodied in the form of the multiple protagonists. In examining the draft of ‘The Longing’, I recognized the occasional replacement of the dominant protagonist’s perspective with that of a supporting character was arguably motivated by the desire to show all sides of the family picture, within its ‘complete’ sociocultural and historical context, to prevent any misinterpretations from outsiders. Correspondingly, I managed to take more creative risks to elevate my narrative to a point that could make readers to relate and empathize with my characters. The critical lenses of dialogic reflection have equipped me with the increased capacity to imagine and change my viewpoints on the overall processes of my writing and reflection practices.
Conclusion
Connected to Schön’s (1983) concepts of critical reflection, the amplification of my internal dialogue did not just provoke new insights to my reflective journal, but also to understand that the practice remained susceptible to other possible modes of reflective approach. My approach of addressing reflection-in-action through writing this reflective article also suggested that my writing self and inner speech are ever-dialogical as they form ‘a centreless webs of beliefs, desires and values’ that always interweave or intermingle to ‘adopt and reveal different (even contradictory) aspects [...] to meet the different demands of different writing texts and genres’ (Badley 2008: 372). This reflective article has indeed become the extension of my channelling process of spiritual connection with my inner self, which consists of internal and external voices. In its flexibility, doing dialogic reflection has helped me connect with my deep-seated sense of identity and improve emotional regulation while at the same time holding onto that dominant voice as the truth or story that I would like to communicate on the page.

The implementation of dialogic reflection has displayed that, in connection with reflection-on-action, identifying and examining undertaken writing processes have helped discover the relationality and reciprocality of self in developing a long narrative consisting of autobiographical materials. In my writing process, dialogic reflection has served as an adequate practice to sort out the precarious voices that emerged and gain clarity of truth, to respond to both internal and external influences from inside the space that is perceived as ‘mine’. Connected with the themes of intergenerational relations and fragmentation of the writing voice, dialogic reflection has operated as a pathway to manoeuvre and lean into the deep-seated darkness within my consciousness as a modern woman, which is embedded with struggles, problems of the psyche and the complexities of the fast-growing world. The fragmentation of my writing voice on the page thus occurred as the after-effect of this multiplicity of collective voices or the multivoicedness condition of the mind, which is the result of constant exposure to the complexities of intergenerational relations and uncertainty.

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