Université de Montréal

The Anatomy of Silence: Decolonizing the Female Body in Rape Narratives

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Cette thèse intitulée

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Résumé

La langue est en partie responsable de la perpétuation de la violence sexuelle. Alors que la théorie féministe semble l'alliée naturelle de cette étude, la relation binaire mise au premier plan dans la théorie féministe du traumatisme - en renommant la victime de viol en survivante de viol, par exemple - a gardé son oppression plus ou moins intacte. Mon approche est de m'éloigner du cadre strict de la théorie féministe pour comprendre pleinement la violence sexuelle et sa place dans l'histoire ainsi que son impact sur une femme qui a vécu le crime. En m'appuyant sur les théories de la (dé)colonisation pour analyser les récits de viol, je trouve des parallèles dans les deux actes d'oppression ainsi que dans les modes d'émancipation. Le potentiel ici est d'établir une nouvelle méthodologie qui permettra de recadrer l'analyse littéraire et de décoloniser la politique, la langue et la pédagogie du «monde réel» du viol, c'est-à-dire de montrer l'impact de la suppression, de l'ignorance ou de la négligence du viol comme problème sociopolitique central et structurel. Le corpus de cette thèse se compose de quatre récits littéraires, dont deux sont (semi)-autobiographiques: *Cereus Blooms at Night*, par Shani Mootoo; *Memories of the Future*, par Siri Hustvedt; *The Apology*, par Eve Ensler; et, *In My Own Moccasins: A Memoir of Resilience*, par Helen Knott.

Mots clés: violence sexuelle, décolonisation, colonialité du pouvoir, études de genre, théorie féministe

Abstract

Language is partially to blame for the perpetuation of sexual violence. While feminist theory would seem the natural ally to this study, the binary relationship foregrounded in feminist trauma theory—in renaming the rape victim as rape survivor, for example—has been kept her oppression more or less intact. My approach is to move away from the strict framework of feminist theory so as to fully understand sexual violence and its place in history as well as its impact on a woman who has experience the crime. In drawing upon theories of (de)colonization to analyze rape narratives, I find parallels in both oppressive acts as well is in modes of emancipation. The potential here is to establish a new methodology that will enable to reframe literary analysis, and to decolonize the "real-world" politics, language, and pedagogy of rape, that is, to show the impact of deleting, overlooking or neglecting rape as a central, structural sociopolitical problem. The Corpus of this dissertation consists of four literary narratives, two of which are (semi)-autobiographical: *Cereus Blooms at Night*, by Shani Mootoo; *Memories of the Future*, by Siri Hustvedt; *The Apology*, by Eve Ensler; and, *In My Own Moccasins: A Memoir of Resilience*, by Helen Knott.

Keywords: sexual violence, rape, decolonization, coloniality of power, gender studies, feminist theory

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When the silence isn't quiet
And it feels like it's getting hard to breathe
And I know you feel like dying
But I promise we'll take the world to its feet
And move mountains
We'll take it to its feet
And move mountains
And I'll rise up
I'll rise like the day
I'll rise up
I'll rise unafraid
I'll rise up
And I'll do it a thousand times again

- Andra Day

INTRODUCTION

Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds – Bob Marley

Rape, sexual abuse, molestation, pedophilia, incest, intimate partner sexual violence, drug-facilitated sexual violence, sexual harassment, gang rape, rape at gunpoint, non-consensual sex on a soft plush bed… Can you put these crimes in order of bad to not that bad? Society does. The established structural hierarchy about sexual violence is a practice that categorizes pain on a comparative level, blurring the lines between what is criminally wrong or illegal and what is socially ignored, tolerated or even, culturally accepted. Additionally, by establishing a hierarchy, people who have experienced sexual violence are forced to deliberate upon whether what they have experienced is worthy of seeking justice or if disclosing the crime would put them on the receiving end of more harm, as Nancy Venable Raine says "to speak publicly about one's atrocities is to invite the stigma that attaches to victims" (63). The harm of a hierarchical structure is that it categorizes pain on a comparative scale whereby one form of sexual violence is deemed worse, or more criminal, than another. By creating such a hierarchy within rape culture, it turns the question back on the woman, forcing her to discern if her memory/feelings/experiences are reliable, if the events truly occurred as she remembers and feels them, and begs her to consider what constitutes a valid violence; will people believe her, will they care, will they listen to her story and boomerang shame right back at her? But, should any of that matter?

In our society, these prevailing heteronormative discourses inform our political structures, they determine our language, social norms, gendered roles, and so much more. If we consider what is established, then we can read what can easily be erased: her story. Her story reveals a universal moral truth about pain and how it is an experience that defies codification.

Try as one might to invalidate a person's pain or tell her what she ought to feel, pain will manifest as it chooses, finding a deep pocket in her body to nestle and grow, consume and destroy. She might swallow the pain to hide it and quell those around her, but it will grow, it will affect, it will impact her mind, body and spirit. Another truth about pain is that until it is acknowledged, validated, heard (even if only to herself), it cannot be healed.

There are many factors that contribute to whether or not a woman who experiences sexual violence chooses to speak up. Coming forward, speaking out, breaking the silence, these actions all require that the person use her voice and find the language to accurately depict the horror of her experience. This language I refer to does not exist in our world. Language was and continues to be developed by heteronormative, phallocentric hegemony. Language has a masculine register. Therefore, if and when a woman chooses to speak of her experience with sexual violence, she will be confined to patriarchally dominant discourse. One such example is read in the fact that there is no active sentence about rape where *she* is the subject. In the grammatical sentence where she is in the object position, we read: "John raped <u>Jane</u>." Jane, the person who experiences the rape, is rendered a linguistic object, but also transformed into a non-human entity that is objectified by both the action of rape as well as the raping itself. In newspapers or other forms of reporting, we read: "Jane was raped by John," which often gets shortened to: "Jane was raped." Two options: be the object of John's brutal ways or be the subject of an atrocious action whereby John magically disappears from this linguistic equation, a passive event where the only participant is Jane, no perpetrator in (legible) sight. By removing the rapist from the action, language makes it impossible for John to take responsibility; he is linguistically acquitted. Jane brought the rape onto herself, she was the only one present. Without consciousness, society blames the person who experiences sexual violence, the onus is all on her,

and that is true even in the simplest grammatical construction. How will Jane speak of her experience in a grammatical structure that places her in subject position? How will her story maintain some form of agency? Her language is forced into the narrative of confessional as empowering language that reflects her reality is unavailable to her. Linguistically, it would seem impossible for her retain her subjecthood. Consciously or not, this is part of why *she* (our Jane) remains silent.

This brings the theme of silence to the surface. Choosing to be silent and being silenced are two very different things. Being silent protects the person with a cloak of anonymity and staves off the shame and stigma that society invites. To be silenced stems from society's inability to comprehend or treat with adequate manner, the act of sexual violence. As Venable Raine explains, "If I don't tell them, it makes it a secret, like something to be ashamed of. When I do tell them, they make it worse. They never ask me about it. It's a part of me, part of who I am now, but they don't want to know about it. It's no-win," (63). In Rape and Resistance, Linda Martín Alcoff states that:

> sexual violations pose special obstacles here, since one may well want to resist the relational self one becomes when recounting such experiences: the self who is pitied, disbelieved, or simply the one who has been raped and is known as such by another, to be potentially interpreted forever after through that one event. A dialogic space in which one's rape experience is the topic of discussion painfully pulls one into this identity. In this case, acknowledgment – recognition – can be experienced not as helpful but as a kind of existential horror. (211)

Staying quiet is fraught with one's inability to express the inexpressible as articulating an experience that defies the laws of representation presents not only as a linguistic challenge but is part and parcel with the original trauma and forecasts retraumatization.

Where it all began…

My personal story has been tightly woven into my own rape narrative. Complete with silences and symbolism that no one could untangle, not even the most adept reader could deconstruct the silent practices I had employed throughout my lifetime. If you listened closely, you could hear the sound of my silence, the message it communicated, the gaps and breaks in my story that proved the presence of something rather than the absence thereof. Silence became a space that, although was devoid of language, had its own internal logic. At one point my silence felt oppressive, but the more I listened to its echo, it was powerful; it was an inaudible roar.

I was a modern dancer, and in my teenage years my danced was an expression of my pain, I spoke through my body in ways that language could not express. Like Roxane Gay in her memoir *Hunger*, who ate her way through the pain, Sondra from "Rape Fantasies" who keeps quiet at the bridge table, Mala from *Cereus Blooms at Night*, who isolated herself from society and disavowed language altogether, or Helen Knott who had manifested her silence into substance abuse, I too had started writing metaphors into my life story. I never wore skirts, pants only. I slept with lights on and doors open. I abstained from watching television for fear of what might come on. I bit the inside of my cheeks when topics came up that made me uncomfortable, and I bruised myself with scrapes and scratches, self-mutilating for years when I was alone so that the pain my body felt would distract my mind if only for a minute. I had amalgamated several other literary tropes in my own waking life that would silently tell my story, except no one knew how to read them.

My first foray with sexual abuse started young. I was probably about 7. I say probably because honestly, I can't remember when it started. I was young, my grandparents were still alive and well, that marks an approximate in terms of age. It's hard to pinpoint when the first time was that I was touched against my will, because it often happened in my sleep. The first

time I woke up is what I can officially say is the first time it happened, but who knows, right? It went on for years. I've clumped the ages 7 to 13 together in my memory, because everything that happened to me in those years, all the experiences I lived are second to the memories I've repressed in trying to forget his touch. My growth was stunted both emotionally and physically, and my memories were stuck behind the fear; fear of remembering playing with dolls only to uncover the unwanted probing, fear of recalling a family dinner only to be thrust back into a memory of poking and prodding. Always a monster lurking nearby, never a safe space.

I had no idea what was going on in my life, let alone what was happening to my body. I didn't know that that wasn't what was supposed to happen; I thought this is what childhood is. Isn't this what happens to everyone? Inadvertently, I had unconsciously, and intuitively, severed the connection between my mind and body, yet I still had this aching feeling inside of me telling me that this wasn't supposed to be happening. This is wrong. My body felt tense and seized up every time we were off to my grandparents' house. My body felt triggered at the mere mention of his name. My young mind couldn't articulate what my body already knew was so cataclysmically wrong. The scars were beginning to take shape on my body, burrowing deep within me, yet invisible to the eye. My wounds were indiscernible, hidden, and I would unfortunately learn that wounds that do not bleed for everyone to see, are wounds that are open to debate, scrutiny and judgment. I would have to prove my pain lest I was bleeding out to confirm suffering.

I was fifteen when I came forward. I chose to tell my first boyfriend. I didn't even have a chance to finish my sentence before he broke up with me. Until that point, my trauma had instilled fear, immense sadness and a feeling of constant danger in me. But his reaction left the

trace of a new iteration of trauma: shame. I had wanted to tell someone that something bad had happened to me, but it felt more like a confession than anything else.

One year later, I told a cousin who was also a close friend. He didn't know what to say to me. He was uncomfortable. He felt overwhelmed. He promised he wouldn't tell a soul. He lied. That night, my parents called me into the living room and asked me if it was true. My cousin had told his parents. They told my parents. They told my other cousin's parents. My parents told me. Questioned me. He denied it. My version of the story was fragmented at best, so I must be lying. My family went to war. Everyone screamed, one louder than the other. I retreated. Silenced.

The abuse was ugly. However, it is not simply the sexual violence that haunts me to this day, but rather everything that followed that broke me and perpetuated that feeling of brokenness inside. It took me many years to process that what had happened was wrong. It took many years for my young, immature body to understand that my body was mine and that it should never have been touched. It took me many years to muster the courage to locate my voice that he muffled so that I could *break* my silence. Like most rape narratives, when I finally did tell someone, I was immediately hushed back into silence. I realize now that my story *was* unbelievable. It was too much for people to bear. It made people uncomfortable. I made people uncomfortable. But, was that reason enough to accuse me of lying? Easier to lower my eyes and move on. So, I shut up.

Needless to say, my sense of being in the world was abruptly shaken. My views on what was safe, what was true, what family meant, justice, respect, authority, boundaries, my body, my autonomy, my privacy… everything was up for grabs. Nothing made sense. I couldn't even rely on my own sense of intuition, my own barometer of right and wrong, because everything kept spilling out, nothing fit anywhere. I wasn't your conventional child with your conventional

childhood. Where would I learn about myself? Most people who experience what I had experienced don't spontaneously enter conversation about sexual violence. No, that subject matter is swept neatly under each and every rug.

My sense of trying to figure out what happened to me was stifled by trying to understand what family meant. The only fact I knew for certain was that I tore my family apart. People stopped talking to each other and it was all my fault. There were ruptures that were never mended, and one further break was that I no longer felt as though I was part of my family, my childhood was way too dissimilar from my siblings'. The witch hunt to determine whether my sisters had been preyed upon revealed them safe and unharmed. I was the chosen one. Special. However, now I had little in common with them as the only identifying factor I thought people could see when they looked at me was scarlet letter: raped. I had more in common with the isolated members of my new community: a culture of people whose sole inextricable link was that we had all been sexually violated, and then shoved into deep dark closets so no one had to deal with us. I felt numb and indifferent. I felt as though there were scattered fragments of me all over the place. And as any psychology textbook would accurately predict: I became depressed.

I cried all the time. I cried from relief, I cried because it was over, I cried because it would finally stop. I cried because no one believed me. I cried because everyone knew. I cried because everyone thought they knew me. I cried because I was pitied. I cried because I was ashamed. I cried because I was in pain. I cried because people could imagine what had happened and that made me, my body, and my integrity felt compromised. I cried because even though it was over, it still hurt, I could still feel it. All. The. Time. The abuse, and the traces it left on my body, ran deep. I cried and cried, and time passed. Time afforded me the distance I needed to understand what had been happening to me. Yet, the tears flowed. I cried loudly and frequently. I

remember crying alone in my room at night when everyone was sleeping. It was the only time I knew I could cry safely without interruption. I cried alone when no one would see me for fear of being caught. That's how I thought of it, caught. I cried with my whole body; I heaved, and I wailed. I kept crying for years and years. I cried myself to sleep every night until there were no more tears left to cry. Then came the numbness.

How do you know something is broken? How could I know I was broken inside if I never knew what it felt like to be whole? I knew I was broken. I felt it deep down inside. I was different than everyone. I was strange. I was dark. I was a version of what I could have been. I was a performance, a bad one at best, but I had everyone fooled. I was fine. But, I knew the truth. My identity was stolen. Malformed due to circumstance. I was incomplete; fragments scattered left everywhere. Scraps along the way. I understood that until I took the time to unearth it all, I would irrevocably be tied to my traumas. My identity would be inextricably linked to these violent experiences and I would never know where *they* ended and where *I* began. As I grew, I started to grasp the deep epistemic rupture I would never be able to mend. I might come to understand what had happened in intellectual terms, but the emotional grasp, the visceral hold, it had on me, I didn't think I'll ever fully comprehend its reach.

I'd like to think that I am more than an amalgamation of my stories; that there is more to me than the experiences I've lived. "Your past does not define you" and all that. I've heard this age-old adage time and again, always said in an empowering context to relinquish the stronghold one's past has on them. But, aren't we all just a sum of our parts? Sometimes, or in my case, just one part does truly represent the whole. A veritable, real-life synecdoche. In so many ways, my past does define me in the sense that every experience I've lived has informed my character in some form or another.

I've grown and along the way I reclaimed my voice and I've armed myself with forgiveness. I've chosen to revisit my past; witness my childhood from a place of resistance. Today, I can say I am not my past. I am no longer oppressed by it. I am more than the sum of my parts. My past does not define me. I define my past.

The Anatomy of Silence

When faced with the threat of sexual violence, whether it is a gun in your face, a blade at your neck, or a pillow covering you mouth, the person being threatened is imminently aware that there are not many options for survival: shut up, submit, so you can live. Resisting might encourage more danger. I used to believe that my submission was my cooperation, but in the face of sexual violence, I've come to understand that submission is the only active way to maintain one's agency. Although being submissive might be confounded with being weak or powerless, in actual reality, staying silent and playing dead is the best way to safeguard your personhood, show strength and stay empowered. As Peter Levine explains in *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*, there is more than just fight or flight, and in the case of imminent threat, many will simply freeze.

In western conception, the spoken word is privileged over silence. The person who can rationalize, communicate, and articulate is superior to the person who is quiet, mute, and wordless. This is where trauma theory comes in and the idea that talking through trauma can *cure* someone of their past. The notion that talking with words would in some way absolve me of my pain made healing an impossible feat. I had been talking, through my whispers, through my writing, through my dance. Like Mala, my silence was expressing my pain, like S.H., I would vindicate myself in my sleep and through imaginary situations, like Eve Ensler I cut all my hair

off in an act of resistance, and like Helen Knott, I put myself in comprising, if not threatening situations allowing me relive moments so as to live out alternate endings and, ultimately, exercise choice. But, mostly, like all of these women, I was speaking through my silence. Each of us wrote our story, complete with metaphor, symbolism, and tropes. We wrote, and as we did, we created meaning. We reclaimed our past; reclaimed ourselves. We reclaimed what was, what could have been, what will be.

There is a discursive importance to silence and it carries a powerful message: it signifies the inability to capture the physical horror of rape through language while simultaneously underscoring the importance of opening a public dialogue about sexual violence so people will have the language necessary to speak of the (under)represented experience. It marks the power of abstention and the message silence communicates through alternate modes of expression. I healed through the empowered practice of silence, because it told the extent of my experience in a way that conventional, heteronormative, phallocentric, Western-centric language could never fully tell it.

Our system is broken. People are not prepared with a script with which to talk about sexual violence, and so, it is a topic that has been etched out into the margin—underrepresented and misrepresented—as much in lived reality as in the media. We focus all of our attention in the wrong places: as the hashtag #BelieveSurvivors connotes, we often displace the discomfort and fear we feel as listeners and put the person who experienced the sexual violence on trial. We blame society, we blame TV, we blame poor upbringing, we blame class, race, geography, we even blame clothing, but what we don't do is believe. We don't provide a safe place to listen and we don't know what to say or do once we have finished hearing.

In Canada, 1 out of 3 women experience some form of sexual violence in her lifetime. 82% of the time, the perpetrator is known to the victim. (SACHA.CA). In the States, every 98 seconds, an American is sexually assaulted. Every 8 minutes that victim is a child. Only 6 out of 1000 perpetrators end up in prison (RAINN.ORG). According to a Canadian statistic, over 95% of the time, the crime goes unreported. Why?

Decolonizing Rape Narratives

In 2008, I completed my Master's in Hispanic Literature where I learned about the European "conquest," and of course, I learned it mostly from the colonizer's point of view, but there were pointed moments, incredible punctuations of literature from the colonized's point of view. The Indigenous story. It was the first time I felt connected to a body of work, a vocabulary, a people, but I couldn't pinpoint why. I graduated, and I didn't think twice about it.

I reestablished my connection with colonial theory through my doctoral work. As I read more and more about theories of colonization, and then by extension, decolonization, I realized that despite my best efforts to heal my trauma with conventional modes of therapy, there was a limit to the possibilities of recovering my old identity (who was I at 7 years old anyway?) and talking (out loud of course) about my experiences. That's when María Lugones' theory of the fractured locus put things in focus for me. I saw a bridge between sexual violence and (de)colonial theory. In "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," Lugones states: "And thus I want to think of the colonized neither as simply imagined and constructed by the colonizer and coloniality in accordance with the colonial imagination and the strictures of the capitalist colonial venture, but as a being who begins to inhabit a fractured locus constructed doubly, who perceives doubly, related doubly, where the 'sides' of the locus are in tension, and the conflict itself actively inform the subjectivity of the colonized self in multiple relation," (748). I read this

passage and understood immediately what trauma therapy would forever fail to elucidate. Since the age of 7, my life was informed by sexual abuse. I am the product of the violence; however, this body and this mind is the only one I know. To go back to my "traumatic origin" would be to undergo again a violent erasure of myself. Instead, I had become someone that occupied a space in-between, a fractured locus, someone who lived in a body where the conflict informs my being, the being I inhabit with multiple sides all in tension and in relation to one another in simultaneity. I am my trauma as I inhabit its locus; I live within it as multiple beings and mirror myself through its fragments. She goes on to say, "Thus to see the coloniality is to reveal the very degradation that gives us two renditions of life and a being rendered by them. The sole possibility of such a being lies in its full inhabitation of this fracture, of this wound, where sense is contradictory and from such a contradiction new sense is made anew," (748). I am a product of the violence, rendered by it, but from this wound, I find myself, and make myself anew. My intention in therapy was to erase my past, but in erasing my past, I would erase myself. With decolonial practices, I could begin to understand myself, revisit my past and go through a process of recreating myself, endowing myself with agency, reclaiming my story, and ultimately liberating myself from that which kept me bound. As Linda Tuwahi Smith explains in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, "reclaiming history is a critical and essential aspect of decolonization […] It can be argued that the centre can be shifted ideologically through imagination and that this shifting can recreate history," (203). Breaking open heteronormative notions of what is understood as the oppressive nature of silence can decolonize a people and dismantle a deeply rooted way of thinking and doing that has been violently imposed through dominant and oppressive forces for centuries. The decolonization of a people can be achieved through various means, such as resistance, transformation and reclamation. That transformative

nature of decolonization provides opportunity for the being in question to achieve personhood and have the subjective, agentic power to create his or her own identity in the process.

Decolonization provides a space for new possibilities. Showing the multiple self as a new identity, seeing fragments as multiple rather than a division like S.H, Mala, Knott and Ensler all do in their narratives. Renouncing the colonizer's language, reinterpreting time so that iterations won't continuously bring the past into the present, but rather offer new ways of conceptualizing time, rethinking the sound of silence, and showcasing the infinite possibilities of metamorphosis pending the expansiveness of one's imagination. Giving voice to my silence, theories of decolonization have proven to be the unhinging tool I needed to emancipate myself. I shifted away from trauma theory and moved toward recreating and rewriting my story. It's a powerful thing to know that as the author of my story I could exercise that sort of agency over my life, find my voice. Like the authors and characters from my corpus, I too, have now contributed my story to the world.

Punctuating each step with prevailing silence, we can choose to strategically ignore the quiet or listen to its whisper; through decolonial theory, people who have experienced sexual violence can relearn and thus find new ways of thinking, doing and being. I can now understand that my silence was one of resilience. My dissertation argues that rape in literary narratives is at once an act of violence and a process of colonization of the female body, and that silence is a powerful rhetorical instrument serving this process. In order to decolonize and liberate the violated female body, the various modalities of (literary) silence oppressing the woman who has experienced rape and perpetuating her colonization have to be uncovered and explored.

There are various types of silence addressed throughout this project. The first is being silenced: a perpetrator's – and society's – weapon against a woman who experiences sexual

violence. The next form is her silence: being silent, silence as fear, silence due to shame, silence and submission, silence as the absence of sound, and silence as underrepresentation. But, the loudest silence of them all is silence as a tool of empowerment, which is the third form of silence: silence as resistance. Each of these pervading silences will be dismantled so that we can better understand that to be silent is a not a synonym for weakness, powerlessness, or an inability to speak (as though that were a privileged form of communication). To choose silence is our third mode of silence: silence as resilience. If you listen carefully, her silence is not inaudible. Her silence roars. Let us be still so that her cavernous echoes may be heard.

Thank you

Working so closely on something so personal, especially something I've been unsuccessfully avoiding dealing with my whole life, has proven to be a lonely and tiring battle. I hit some serious lows while working on this paper, as the violent rape scenes, the graphic words and details catapulted me back to a scary place. I shake as I type; the haptic sensation of transcribing accounts of violence feel as though they are alive again inside of me. I have a tension in my stomach that keeps me from taking a full breath. I barely sleep at night as the memories of my past are evermore present in my mind. This project took a huge toll on me, mentally, emotionally, physically. I push past my pain, because I know it's bigger than me now. My whole life, my character, the very essence of my being has been irrevocably informed by that first act of sexual violence. Every decision from that point on was a reaction to those experiences. None of those decisions ever felt like choices really. They were escape, fear, struggle, hiding, but they weren't decisions. My first real decision, conscious and pointed, was the decision to pursue my doctoral studies. This project is my active choosing to free myself from my past. This project was my therapy. This project is the undoing of 30 years of anxiety, sadness, pain, and silence. I

cried a lot throughout the research and writing of this project, but these tears are not muffled by my pillow, alone in my dark room. These tears are different. These tears are cleansing. I think it goes without saying that by writing my dissertation I am not only theorizing silence, sexual violence, and (de)colonization, I am putting my theory to practice as I decolonize my own body from my rape narrative.

Key terms used throughout this project

RAPE:

The dictionary defines rape as a crime, typically committed by a man, forcing another person to have sexual intercourse with him.

It is important to note here that there is no nuance made. Rape here is defined as involuntary sexual intercourse. Penetration.

Throughout this project I will refer to rape as the many things that it is: sexual violence, sexual abuse, molestation, unwanted touching, and so on. These terms include this limited definition of rape, but also arch further to include all forms of forced, involuntary, unwanted, unsolicited experiences of a sexual nature.

I will share here a few more robust definitions of rape, to show the crime in all of its malevolence.

In *Sharing Our Stories of Survival: Native Women Surviving Violence*, rape is:

> using *sexual assault* as a tactic of power and control includes sexual violence and coercion. Some of these actions are not obvious, such as language that is sexually offensive to her, forcing her to watch pornography, and threatening to have sex with one of their daughters if she does not have sex with him. The batterer might also make his victim feel that she is an inadequate sexual partner. (53)

In that same book of essays, one author states that, "One of the ways to define sexual violence is to develop an understanding of what it is *not*," (182).

In, *Rethinking Rape*, rape is defined as:

> Rape is thus a 'deliberate, hostile, violent act of degradation and possession on the part of a would-be-conqueror, designed to intimidate and inspire fear.' By raping a woman, the rapist degrades and denies her being and her autonomy and in doing so (thinks he) elevates his own. The act therefore becomes an echo and an imposition of a social structure by which the full personhood of women is not recognized. (19)

In *Believe Me*, rape is defined as: "an act that takes your power from you, and in many ways the criminal justice system doubles down on that violation." (152).

Each definition includes rape as a form of power. Rape as sexual in nature. Rape as woven into the very fabric of our toxic patriarchal system.

COLONIZED:

When the term is not being employed to represent the Indigenous people who were "discovered" on the European expeditions to the Americas (or in the context of European colonies in Africa and Asia), the term colonized will be used to signify a being whose identity precedes the act of colonization (in this case sexual violence) and whom, upon experiencing sexual violence, ceases to be that person as her identity faces erasure by the colonizer (i.e. assailant/perpetrator). She, as well as her body[1], are colonized.

COLONIZER/CONQUEROR:

When the term is not being employed to represent the Europeans, who ventured to the now-known Latin America on their discovery mission, the term colonizer or conqueror[2] will be used

[1] The distinction between a person and her body will be made in chapter two.
[2] Although conqueror has conventional connotations of bravery and strength, it is important to note here that those qualities of grandeur and superiority hold no space here.

interchangeably to signify an *unfortunate group of intrepid men* with entrenched beliefs of dominance and superiority, who take what is not theirs (the female, the female body) on the (false) premise of male supremacy.

POWER:

Rape is not just the physical taking of a body in a sexual manner. Rape is an act of power, and so it is important to denote here the many significations of power I will employ throughout this project.

In the strictest and simplest sense of the word, power may at times be utilized to signify the anatomical, bodily force a man exercises over a woman in the act of physically/sexually violating and objectifying her body.

Knowledge, as Aníbal Quijano explains in his theory of the *coloniality of power*, is power. He asserts that the hierarchical order put forth through the introduction of racial categories is one display of such power. Later, María Lugones will broaden Quijano's conception of the coloniality of power to include gender as she develops her theory of the *coloniality of gender*. I will untangle these theories in chapter one, however, it is of note to include Michel Foucault here in the introduction so as to explain the full scope of power in understanding the oppressive regime of *Knowledge* and its intrinsic connection to *Power*.

Biopower is a mode of governance whereby the human body, or human populations, are concerned. In the 1970s, Michel Foucault wrote two seminal works that would touch on the topic of the history of knowledge and power and how both of these concepts have transformed over time. *Discipline and Punish* speaks to the origin of modern-day prisons and *The History of Sexuality* Volume 1 is concerned with the transformation of sexuality in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Michel Foucault's concept of biopower is one of the most direct ways to understand the role of power in society today. In the simplest sense, he explains that power may be executed by a single source which represses from the top-down (those who establish our laws, policies, criminal codes, justice system, institutions such as universities, for example), delineating a hierarchical power structure whereby there is a central sovereign force, an oppressor. This ultimate authority judges you, may take things from you and monitors your behaviour to conform to the standards and categories established by this stable centre. An extension of this power is what is now at play in society at large. A network of power flows from all directions and goes everywhere at once. "A horizontal network of power relations. This power is not something that the powerful have and the powerless lack, it only exists in action; it exists precisely in acts that have effects on other acts," (Peggs, 66). Everyone exerts their *power over* everyone else by defining social and cultural norms, (re)defining how we[3] share information, what information is shared, encouraging certain behaviours, discouraging others, who we listen to, who we silence, who we consider worth taking seriously… this is all a form of power. This model of power is diffused from within as we all participate in this paradigm actively and/or passively. Power operates on all levels and the fact remains that this form of power is invisible and omnipresent. This form of power is a system of knowledge disseminated and embedded into our way of thinking, doing, and being. It shapes what is *normal* and therefore what is not normal, not accepted, stigmatized, etched into the margins, kept silent. We comply with these conventions and it is only by bringing consciousness to our complicity that we will set forth a different set of narratives that could replace these old, oppressive ones.

[3] I say "we" to explicitly point to our (in)direct complicity in this exercise of power

There is no power without knowledge and there is no knowledge without power. Thus, the people who produce knowledge decide who has power by developing knowledge that privileges them. This brings us full circle back to Quijano and Lugones' theories of coloniality of power and gender, and where I will centre the argument on the *coloniality of rape culture*.

Finally, power can also be understood as a dynamic, a relationship between two people. One superior, one inferior. One dominant, one subordinate. The one who holds the power is empowered because he disempowers the other. The disempowered is in her state of being powerless, because her power has been taken from her, further empowering the already powerful. We will explore these nuances throughout the project.

As both Quijano and Lugones contend, knowledge is an object of currency and/or property and this fact finds its roots in colonial theory. Knowledge as property is a concept developed during the colonial era and is therefore a colonized entity, so to speak. Western conventions and structures have been coded into our system for centuries. It may feel like these powers are inexorable, however by bringing consciousness to these grey areas, acknowledging our complicity, and actively resisting, we can decolonize these ideologies which continue to oppress us.

This brings me to a major disclaimer I would like to put forth.

The nature of this literature-based study is to investigate the individual cases of sexual violence in my chosen corpus. I use gender as the common variable in these instances of sexual assault and solely focus on male-perpetrated sexual violence on the female body. I am aware that there are various forms of sexual violence that must be nuanced. Systemic, top-down, infrastructural differences made within our society that perpetuate racialized violence, transgender/transsexual

violence, and other forms of minority-inflicted violence are all addressed but not necessarily distinguished.

There are vectors of intersectional violence that create a blind spot for those women who experience sexual violence, those women who stand at the crux of race and gender. I touch on this while working with theoretical works as well as literary texts such as *Cereus Blooms at Night* by Shani Mootoo and *In My Own Moccasins: A Memoir of Resilience*, by Helen Knott*.* In these literary texts, I make a distinction that these subjects of sexual violence are not only subject to gender-based violence but also are both part of a racialized category that sees them as objects of systemic and systematic violence. The sexual violence they incur is both an attack on their gendered bodies as well as an exertion of power through categorical logics of oppression. Their experiences are markedly different from the two characters/women from *Memories of the Future* by Siri Hustvedt, and *The Apology* by Eve Ensler.

For the purpose of this project, I do not adhere to a hierarchy of rape. Intraracial, interracial, intersectional and systemic/systematic nuances will be made where they contribute to my literary analysis (in terms of symbolism and other literary devices), and types of assault will be nuanced, but not in order to hierarchize the pain or experience the person/character lived through, but rather to be precise in my analyses. Not all rapes are the same. Not all pain is the same. The only common denominator in the crimes of sexual violence that I treat herein is that the crime is perpetrated on a gendered body, a woman. The operational healing structures I put forth are set in place to better help the individual woman emancipate from the trauma, as well as bring clarity on the topic of sexual violence, understanding of the after-effects and vocabulary with which to speak of the event to society at large.

It is inarguable that the systemic violence that happens in minority groups is part of a larger problem, however for the sake of this project, I use a microcosmic sample size of literature-based sexual violence that touches on a range of sexual violence including, rape, incest, pedophilia, almost-rape, abuse, and molestation, across colonized people such as Indigenous and Black women, as well as white women, to show how gender-based sexual violence is pervasive and does not discriminate. As Rebecca Solnit explains in Wanderlust: A History of Walking, "Other categories of people had their freedom of movement limited, but limitations based on race, class, religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation or local and variable compared to those placed on women, which have profoundly shaped the identities of both genders over the millennia in most parts of the world" (235). These thoughts blanket my research as I explore fiction, memoir, poetry, oral storytelling, and multi-genre literary works exclusively written by women about their own personal accounts - real or other - to implement and root an operational healing structure which serves not only the writer or artist of the work itself, but the reader as well.

I also acknowledge here that the purpose of my work is not to erase difference, it is to show the pervasion of sexual violence – when a crime of sexual violence is committed on a person, the experience is felt on her body. Experienced by her, singularly. The effects cross generations, they are passed on to the collective, they are felt more widely as the impact trickles outward. These are facts. But, the act itself is on her body alone.

My work is framed through literature. I cannot claim that my reach goes beyond that scope. I study here the effects on two fictitious characters and two real women who have written their accounts in memoir form. These four narratives are the basis of my analysis and are the only evidence, as well as my own story, I have to interpret my theoretical and critical

observations. In chapter two, I do make wider claims outside of these works as I illustrate how society and rape culture have come to be and are maintained, however, all arguments that are made are evidenced only through claims made in the literature analyzed here.

Given that two of the four women/characters (literary objects) are real women who have written their stories as memoirs, I leave space for my observations to jump off the page and make tiny sparks in the lived world. I approach this work not only as a feminist, but as a gendered being; not as a white person, but as a woman; not as a scholar, but as a person who has experienced sexual violence. There is so much work to be done on this topic, if there are gaps in my study, that only proves that there is space for more work to be done.

more disclaimers…

I will also take this opportunity to elucidate my choice for utilizing a theory that does not belong to sexual violence, but rather to the Indigenous peoples. I will be mindful in my usage of terms and thought systems that do not belong to me. I will honour the practice and work that has been done by a people for a people that I do not belong to. I am an ally and do not wish to disrespect anyone in borrowing decolonial theory and utilizing it to fit my analysis.

Eve Tuck K. W. Yang states in "Decolonization is not a Metaphor" that:

> Decolonization is not a metaphor. When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation. When we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression. Decolonization is not a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. Decolonization does not have a synonym. (3)

It is not impossible for me to strike the term decolonization from this project. I could use words such as healing, emancipate, liberate, reclaim, repossess, recover, and so on, in order to paint the full picture of coming back to oneself and finding freedom from oppression. I choose to use the term not as an act of appropriation nor as a swappable term.

I root this entire project on colonization and colonial theory, drawing the full picture of the pillaging and raping (both as a metaphor and not) that the Indigenous people have experienced since the 1500s. By extension, the theory draws a straight line to the only possible way out: decolonization. No other term resonates as deeply nor as accurately.

I acknowledge that the purity of decolonial work is a social-justice movement through which Indigenous peoples fight for their independence from settler colonialism. I acknowledge the major distinction between decolonization as a social-justice theory and decolonization of the sexual violence I will put forth in chapter four.

The contribution I wish to make here by borrowing the term decolonize (the verb), is one that shows the marginalized voice of women (all women) who have experienced sexual violence – as I strongly believe that the hidden gender logics of colonialism have an oppressive presence and have been bulking up on omnipotence of misogyny for 500 years. The intellectual contributions of centralizing female experiences using female voices adds language to an otherwise male-centric vocabulary, and the only way to undo the effects of colonialism is to decolonize… everything.

As Carolette Norwood says in "Decolonizing My Hair, Unshackling by Curls: An Authoethnography on What Makes my Natural Hair Journey a Black and African Diasporic Feminist Statement,": "[it is] very much a manipulation, a rape and a destruction – an occupation of the mind, the body, the spirit and the consciousness," (4). She goes on to explain that

decolonization for her entails nothing less "than falling in love with a self I did not know, a self that was prohibited, a self that was shunned for no apparent reason, a self that was (and is) beautiful as is." It is with this sentiment that I move forward with my decision to utilize the term decolonization in my final chapter.

I wish to apologize for any disrespect to the Indigenous community this choice might reflect, and also make explicit that I am personally extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to study and learn more about all the unlearning I myself still have to do.

What to expect: chapter summaries

In chapter one, we will explore the explicit violence of both European colonization and rape as a form of colonization. As in colonization, rape is the exertion of force of one dominating body over another, objectified body. The colonization of a body thus takes place through the act of rape. Within the framework of colonization and colonial theory, I apply Aníbal Quijano's theory of coloniality of power to draw a straight line from the invention of racial categories, to María Lugones' observation that Quijano's theory neglects to include gender as an oppressive factor in his matrix of power. These logics of oppression will allow us to explore the myriad of domination tactics used by the colonizer at the time of colonization. Oppressing her autonomy, her bodily integrity, her agency, and person, he, the rapist, eradicates and erases her identity and replaces it with that of the colonizer. The rapist, along with the act of raping, inferiorizes, subjugates, and objectifies the person being raped. Additionally, we will look at the literal and metaphorical muting she incurs. Physically silencing the person by placing his hand over her mouth illustrates her physiological limitations to produce speech. Being choked, gagged or being told to shut up, are all ways that the perpetrator exercises his voice over hers while limiting her

capacity to form words. In a less physical manner, her silence is one of figurative force: she is being silenced into secrecy, muted as he takes her voice, removes her agency, and thrusts an experience on her that defies the laws of language. The fear of speaking and the physical covering of her mouth, combined with the weakening of her agency forces her into the oppression that rape encompasses.

In chapter two, we will pick up on themes from chapter one and pursue them toward the larger infrastructural oppression that colonization imposed through settler colonialism and coloniality of power, gender, and rape culture. Once again, I will explore Quijano and Lugones' theories and deepen the analysis to demonstrate how racial/gender categories contribute to logics of oppression by also establishing knowledge production as a core component of power, favouring and privileging certain (groups of) people in power. I will look at binary pairs and the construction of woman as body; woman as a situation. We will walk down a cleanly paved road from colonial theory to rape culture: the normalization of sexism and the conventions of misogyny.

We will explore sexual violence within the framework of trauma theory in chapter three. We will touch on concepts such as time and memory, authority and *truth.* Sexual violence shares with trauma the inability of absorbing the event in the moment of its occurrence, which leads to iterations, nightmares, fragmented memories, double life, dual realities, cognitive dissonance, dissociation, depersonalization, and other "symptoms" that have been studied thus far in the field of trauma. In each of the texts, we will explore time lapses, memory lags, and other tropes used to demonstrate trauma incarnate. Lived as a disembodied experience, rape is a shock to the body whereby the entire system shuts down, and so as it amps back up again, the violence recurs both as phantom traces on the body as well as immaterial fractures of the mind.

The clear path from colonization and colonialism leads to one possibility: decolonization. In chapter four, we will disentangle over five-hundred-years' worth of knowledge production, oppression, appropriation and erasure, by looking at established heteropatriarchal systems that continue to enforce the adherence to binary categories (such as mind/body, civilized/savage, language/silence), the illusory concept of unidirectional, linear *H*istory, the naturalization of categories (race, gender, and so on), which all work within a system to delegitimize the colonized experience and continue to oblige that *she* be the object of study rather than the subject of her own experience. Exclusionary practices of oppression deny self-governance, self-identification, agency and autonomy to the colonized. By rupturing these oppressive practices, we make space to unlearn centuries of violent beliefs, re-centre the body as a valuable contributor of knowledge, dissolve categorical oppression, and give audibility to marginalized voices to speak about her own experience. By looking more in depth at decolonial theory, I work to unhinge the colonized body from her colonization. Through decolonizing language, history, memory, trauma, and writing conventions, we can decolonize the effects of sexual violence from the person who experienced it and work toward a space of true healing.

My Profile Projects

May I write words more naked than flesh, stronger than bone, more resilient than sinew, sensitive than nerve – Sappho

The basic principle of sharing is that the more you share, the less you own. You partition off what was once whole. In terms of sharing information about yourself, the same principle applies. By sharing our stories, our secrets, we divide and fraction off bits of ourselves, we relinquish control, and we no longer own the story. The reason this is significant is because I once held onto "my" story. It was mine. Belonged to me and no one else. I lived my life in this way for many years, safeguarding my story, burying it deep inside of me, drawing on it whenever I needed to protect myself, using it to create boundaries, alienating and isolating myself from others because of it, and so on. It was only recently, I believe around the time I had my first child, that a seed was planted inside of me that it was time to let this story grow outside of me rather than stay rooted within. I slowly began to share my story. The more I shared the words out loud, the less a part of me they were. The more I heard myself speak my truth, the more people my story branched out into - connecting with others as they shared their stories. All of a sudden, I wasn't the only one with my story. Others shared my story. It was our story. I belonged less to my story and my story belonged less to me. Incidentally, I started to build a community of people that helped dissipate the weight of my past and so began my journey toward healing.

I've written about my childhood in many formats. Poetry, fiction, opaque prose, and so on. But I had never written the truth in plain words. In words that didn't need a trauma dictionary to decode. In 2017, I embarked on my first year as a PhD student. I searched everywhere for a topic that would resonate with me. Try as I may to sink my teeth into a topic like Gothic Women and the Reader's Response, the real topic was within me, and no tiptoeing around it would stop it from eventually hitting me in the face. I couldn't deny it nor avoid it. It was staring me in the

eye—every article I read, every book I was assigned—I went searching for what would eventually emerge on its own. Sexual violence against women and the symptoms that manifest in the aftermath. I started sharing this information with friends and yet again, found that all of the symptoms that were lightly coded in narrative symbols were experienced ubiquitously across all members of my new community. We all lived different iterations of the same trauma, yet the symptoms that manifested were all the same. One word came up time and again: disembodied. To not be in your body. This was huge because it explained everything, and although it requires pages upon pages to unpack, disembodiment basically says it all.

As I worked through my trauma, my studies took on new shape. I wrote multiple articles on rape narratives and their likeness to a sort of metaphorical colonization. Once I exhausted that topic, I moved onto rape narratives and the modalities of silence—dissecting each form of silence from submission to resistance. Once again, I squeezed the life out of that subject, but something shifted inside of me. The healing had begun. By simply reading, writing, talking and learning about the various forms of silence that oppress victims of sexual violence, I slowly started to feel liberated from the silence that had once subsumed me. I closed the chapter on that topic and moved along. I am now at the phase of my own therapy that aims to understand healing structures and ultimately, I hope to create new operational healing systems that unknowingly I had been implementing in my own life through My Profile Projects.

In 2018, I embarked on a series of interviews without a clear goal. I wanted a chance to sit with women, one on one, and get to know them by asking questions I normally don't ask in everyday conversation. So much came to light with even some of my closest friends, because when dialogue, as we know it, is suspended, and people get a chance to talk without interruption, to an empathic listener—it kind of sounds like I'm describing a peer-counselling and the truth is,

that's kind of what it felt like—so much surfaces. However, although I was mostly on the receiving end of these monologic conversations, I was the one being treated, because through the stories of these women, I was the one who found my words.

I lived a life filled with a lot of pain, deep, traumatic pain. The wounds are still (in)visible, but they are slowly taking on new form. As I wrote each of these profiles, I slowly saw the traces fade away. I noticed what I had been unconsciously working toward and unknowingly attempting to exorcise from my body and mind. I saw my PhD topic emerge and I knew that I had to articulate operational modes of healing that broke with convention. I wanted to create a healing system that is somewhat tangible, somewhat possible, and completely operational in an applicable form, accessible to everyone.

Write your story. Simple. Write what you need to say, write what you need to hear, write what you remember, write what you've trained yourself to forget, write the fragments, write the meaning, write it all, just write through the pain. In reconstructing the past, you will discover yourself. That was a very profound lesson for me. Because this "self," had long-since been erased, and so to discover her would mean to reclaim her. Agency full throttle.

I found my story and it is composed of the collective stories of over 52 women that I feature in my project entitled My Profile Projects. Each one of these women shifted something inside of me because of their honesty, vulnerability and strength. It is due in large part to these women that I have found my voice.

My Profile Projects is my contribution to the production of knowledge about the female experience from the perspective of and told by the 52 women included in the project. Although the stories cover a wide range of topics and experiences.

Decolonizing Practices in My Profile Projects
For no sooner has one said this is so, then it was past and altered – Jacques Derrida

This project brought a lot of stories about trauma (sexual, physical, emotional) to the public in a collective show of vulnerability and strength[4]. The resilience each of the 52 women, with a special light on the stories of trauma, show magnanimous displays of resilience. By reconstructing her past and putting it out there for the world to read, each profile demonstrates a woman's willingness to cease control over her narrative and once and for all shed her story from her body and mind regardless of how (and by whom) it is read or received. Sharing her story with the intention of feeling free. That's all.

The emancipatory effects of sharing one's story and contributing to the collective narrative is a work of constant practice. One does not definitively heal and never look back. But by witnessing one's own story, unlearning old patterns that no longer serve us, decolonizing our minds from heteronormative hegemony and patriarchal discourse to pave news ways of knowing, are all steps in a more peaceful, healing direction. Re-centering the body as an act of resilience and shifting our understanding of how our survival instincts in the time of trauma were acts of silent resistance – these are all ways to expand the vocabulary of sexual violence and amplify the voices of the unheard.

Unlike any other trauma, those who have experienced sexual violence make up the isolated members of a statistically giant community. We stand silent and hidden, looking into the eyes of strangers searching for our own reflection, but instead, are met with glazed eyes; voids of darkness. I spent years in silence, years disconnected—both from myself and others—incapable of truly relating to people as a huge part of me, I felt, was incapable of being shared. As I

[4] A nod to Adichie's *the danger of a single story*

interviewed each of these women, I was met with their bravery and courage, their vulnerability and strength, their unparalleled sense of strength and wanting. Each woman trusted me with her story, perhaps because I ensured their confidence, perhaps because I was a friendly face, or perhaps, because like me, they were ready to break their silence. I remember a few women I spoke with talked around the topic, and in an effort not to invade her privacy or force her to speak of something she was not ready to disclose, I would slowly start to offer parts of myself. In sharing my story, I created a safe space for over a dozen women to share theirs. Out of the 50+ women I interviewed, the statistics were in line with the numbers available online about sexual violence: over 50% of the women had experienced sexual and/or physical abuse at some point in her lifetime. I was not the only person searching for someone who shared my story; we were all floating silos seeking connection.

Each woman added to the collective narrative. We created a new sound, we put forth a new language, we found liberation.

Being a part of someone else's healing journey has been empowering for my own healing. When I had originally begun the project, I couldn't pinpoint the precise reason that motivated the work. I knew I wanted to connect, I knew what I was secretly searching for, but fear still lurked behind every decision. After each interview, I felt completely depleted, taken on these backward journeys of some intense experiences, I started to take on the pain each woman had felt throughout her life. I was focusing on the struggle and, admittedly, I was trauma bonding. It was halfway through the project that I started to realize what the true objective was: I wanted to learn how, despite the hardship and pain, each of these women could still find the courage to smile. I wanted to know what the meaning of happiness was and how they could feel happy despite the trauma. Each woman offered me the wisdom they picked up on their journey,

the lessons learned and the self-directed inward reflections they generated in order to break through the trauma and find peace. Through listening to their stories, I was able to find closure to my own. I don't think I could have ever predicted just how connected I was going to feel throughout the journey this project put me on.

My Profile Projects ran in tandem with my academic studies and looking back on the last few years of my life, I realize that I was on a very specific mission. I needed to cover all of my bases, go back to all the moments in my life that had been affected and reclaim them. Each and every one, piece by piece.

My thesis as well as My Profile Projects were my therapy; my healing journey. Both taught me that I am not alone. Both showed me that everything I have ever felt is normal and everything I experienced is, unfortunately, all too common. I had spent most of my life avoiding saying certain words, not watching certain movies, skipping over major novels (or at least the pages that would trigger me), because I was scared and easily triggered. In the past few years, I faced it all head on. Read every book, learned all the theory, listened to all the stories, said all the words. I was flooded with information that helped me understand myself. Venturing backward in time, however this time with a sense of purpose as opposed to unconscious reliving, I freed my mind by educating it. I learned about conventional symptoms, hegemonic therapeutic practices, and psychological diagnoses. I learned that none of those things resonated with me, but rather made me feel even more caged within. So, my writing (both academic and creative) took shape and fulfilled a purpose bigger than me. My thesis project and My Profile Projects are spaces for authentic listening, shared storytelling, and a collective narrative of vulnerability, resilience, and

healing. In order to read some of the profiles, and peruse some of their photographs[5], visit www.myprofileprojects.com.

[5] All photographs were taken by Jennifer Fellegi

CHAPTER 1 – COLONIZATION, RAPE AND BEING SILENCED

It was me, and a gun, and a man on my back, but I haven't seen Barbados so I must get out of this – Tori Amos

Literature and the Lived Experience

Literature has the propensity to complete a socio-political purpose. Many points in history have been poignantly captured across literature to convey truths, injustices, social issues, points of views, trauma, and so on... Embedded with cultural conventions, literature mirrors what we know and see in the real world as the structure of a text requires the manipulation of the very language with which we use to communicate. The "real" world informs literature; however, the reverse is true as well as reality learns from the text, inspires it, engages with it, and mimics it. As Maaike Meijer makes clear in *Countering Textual Violence*, text and reality are on a continuum (373); text begets reality as much as reality begets text. At the pen of many authors, the experience of sexual violence has been explored starting with what makes space for such an act to take place, the act itself, and the aftermath thereof. Through voice, style, theme, metaphor, symbol, and other literary devices, the vast damages of sexual violence have been acutely portrayed and capture how society (mis)understands the experience, is (not) armed with the vocabulary to tackle the crime and the people involved, and so on. That being said, in literary fiction, the rape experience is often treated as a minor moment, an overlooked event which is then mined for its connotative and provocative imagery, disconnecting the damage of sexual violence from its inherent trauma, or worse, sensationalizing it. As literature draws its inspiration from the real world, it is unfortunately all too fitting that the conversation surrounding sexual violence in literary fiction reflects society's inability to treat the person who has experienced it. The study of rape has ultimately reached the walls of academia. Locked in an exclusive

relationship with trauma theory, little real-world impact on operational healing structures has been made to emancipate the victim from the rape act. The linguistic and intrinsic relationship rape has with sex reinforces the connection that rape is merely some violent version of a sexual act. Notwithstanding the fact that rape comprehends a sexual experience, rape is not sex. Rape is a political act, rape is a violent act, rape is an act of power, but rape is not sex. It is a fact that the sexual nature of the crime distinguishes it from all other experiences of trauma.

Up until recently, literature, and the scholarship that treats it, has blatantly disregarded and (mis)treated sexual violence—and its physical and emotional ramifications—with thick and heavy silence; a convention that traces its origin in how society reacts to the act, including everything from legislation to psychological practice, as well as the other way around, seeping from the stories in literature off the page to lived practice. The act of rape has long been tied to a larger crime of "traumatic violence," not zeroing in on the sexual aspect and its specific repercussions. Unlike any other violent offense committed by one person (or groups of people) onto another, sexual violence, at a very elemental level, renders a person into an object by the mere act of taking her body against her will and using it to fulfill the desire of the perpetrator. Stripping her of agency, speech, bodily autonomy, and identity, sexual violence, in broad terms, transforms the person in question (in this case, a woman) into a non-person.

The Three Modalities of Silence

There are conventions across literature and scholarship that uphold the silence with which rape is met. There are three modalities of prevailing silence in literary rape narratives: the first two are oppressive silences, and the third resilient. The first modality shades silence as both an action and a reaction to the acute urgency and threat of the rape act: under the physical domination of another, silence is at once an expression of fear and a direct reaction of having her mouth

covered, being told to shut up, forced into keeping his secret, fear for her life should she scream, and so on. She is silenced, rendered voiceless. The second modality occurs once the imminent danger has passed, and silence proves once again to be the only possibility for the person who experienced rape as the limits of hegemonic reality are the limits of language, thus not providing her with the words to describe her experience. Alongside this incapacity to articulate the inarticulatable is the woman's new identity as someone who has experienced sexual violence. Having lost her sense of self and agency in the act, she now assumes a role that is fixed in relation to both her perpetrator and trauma. Even if she chose to speak, the shame and guilt she now dons would impede her from being heard. I also lay the groundwork for understanding the alternative ways a woman experiences the act of rape and how that experience has been exacerbated by oppressive binaries, conventions of "sanity," phallocentric cultural and political structures, and a complete misunderstanding of the scope of symptoms that manifest because of the trauma including nightmares, naming practices, anxiety, hysteria, addiction, and PTSD, to name a few. The last modality shifts the oppressive understanding of silence and shows how it can have a resilient connotation. By transforming silence and moving it away from an expression of powerlessness, the third modality opens an emancipatory space to understand the self anew, thus allowing us to rethink the negative undertones of silence, reinterpret it, and colour it with empowerment and healing. In exploring new ways of interpreting silence (both as a literary convention and a real-world lived experience), there can be true emancipation. One such example is relearning the silence of submission as a tool of empowerment. Exploring the fight, flight or freeze schema, learned behaviours, and survival instincts, we can unlearn submission as a sign of weakness, participation, or inferiority, and see it for what it truly is: a survival instinct. Another example is the operational healing tactic seen through writing. Locating and reclaiming

her voice and sense of self-governance, writing her story paves way for new possibilities. Possibilities of an otherwise. Possibilities of otherworldly evocations that endow her with voice, narrative, agency, point of view, and authority of authorship. By using writing as a modality to make silence audible, she can explore phantom voices, ghostwriting, anthropomorphic transformations, rewriting the past, and alternative ways of understanding forgiveness.

Corpus

The rape narratives I have chosen to explore here all show how mixed genre as well as new genres, authorship as well as readership, are all ways of witnessing the past—revisiting and rewriting it—to allow for a more robust way to imagine freedom and make space for true healing. The healing derived from writing the imaginary are evidenced in how the fictional novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* by Shani Mootoo traces the horrific effects sexual violence has on a woman and how society deems her insane (or mad) for fear of not understanding that her transformation into a bird and her choice to disavow language are both ways for her to exercise her freedom from and reconnection to her body. *Memories of the Future* by Siri Hustvedt tells the story of an American woman confronted with sexual violence on multiple occasions with poignant reflection on how patriarchal discourse blankets society and promotes rape culture as a normal and natural system in which we live. In this story, the main character S.H. confronts her past through re-reading and re-writing her memories and journal. *In My Own Moccasins: A Memoir of Resilience* by Helen Knott is the account of Helen's lifelong struggle with rape, sexual abuse, and addiction and how choosing to forgive herself for the emotional pain and guilt she placed on herself was an empowering decision that freed her mind and liberated her from the anchor that was tying her to the past. Eve Ensler's *The Apology* evokes a phantom-father writing a posthumous letter to his daughter apologizing for the brutal atrocities he forced on her.

(De)Colonial Theory

To further complicate the exploration of silence in rape narratives, I will present colonial and decolonial theories to string along the analysis. Borrowing (de)colonial models provides a logical structure and vocabulary with which to speak of the process of political, cultural, social, physical, and mental domination that sexual violence comprehends. The intimate intertwining of the two theories works at each of the three phases: the "*is*-ness" of colonization to the rape act, coloniality as the effects after the "conquest," and decolonization as the space of resistance.

A Brief History

The story of systemic European colonization, in broad strokes, started with four trips and three boats. In 1492, the first Spanish expedition set sail looking for a new trade route, inadvertently arriving at what the Europeans would eventually name the "New World." Christopher Columbus, the head of these expeditions kept a log of his travels noting the discovery of this new world, the people he found (bestial and animal-like, easy to conquer), their potential for labour and service, the materials and produce that would enrich his motherland, as well as the monarchy, and how the Queen should invest in these voyages as they would be beneficial to Spain. The story is long and well-known, but briefly, Christopher Columbus stuck his flag in the New World, and so, history was written (and erased).

The colonization headed by European expeditioners is understood as an explicit political, social and cultural order concentrated during an active era of unequivocal physical, sexual, mental, and systemic violence. Throughout the active era of fighting and warring, the European colonizers exploited and dominated what is now known as Latin America as they persistently, and violently, imposed a new structure of social organization. The multiple revolutions, battles, and overall colonization of the Indigenous people was catalogued as a win in the books of

European history. In this story, the colonized peoples underwent a vicious score of erasure and appropriation. Ignoring the history that produced the Indigenous people and their land, the Europeans named it all as a discovery. In tandem with this discovery came the eradication of a whole world—all previously held beliefs, ideas, cultures, languages, knowledges and other ideas—a multitude of their customs, traditions, and cultural artifacts were arrogated, redefined, expunged, and appropriated. The colonized peoples were viewed as an expendable resource, bodies put to uncompensated work, pillaged for parts, and forced into objectified sources of labour. This systemic repression made way for the explicit violence to cease to be constant. Putting in place systems that would safeguard their mighty position as conquerors, having changed the colonized from the inside out, Europeans could go back to the motherland and rule from afar.

In "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality" (2007), Aníbal Quijano accurately explores and explains the colonization by putting forth a matrix of power that was established in the 15th century at the time of the European expansion set forth in their successful efforts to become a global power. Quijano's theory explains how Western Europe, centuries after systemic and violent colonization, had completed its mission, and was able to maintain its domination to present day.

> [I]n spite of the fact that political colonialism has been eliminated, the relationship between European – also called 'Western' – culture, and the others, continues to be one of colonial domination. It is not only a matter of subordination of the other cultures to the European, in an external relation; we have also to do with a colonization of the other cultures, albeit in differing intensities and depths. This relationship consists, in the first place, of a colonization of the imagination of the dominated; that is, it acts in the interior of the imagination, in a sense, it is a part of it. (169)

Quijano expounds that such systemic repression of the colonized peoples and their respective lands was made possible due to the knowledge production that was being established

simultaneously in Europe. This space/time relationship eradicated one knowledge and replaced it with a new one: rationality. This new system of *knowing*, which is responsible for much of the way the global population understands and interacts with the world, was established in tandem with the expeditionary missions.

> [S]pecific colonial structure of power produced the specific discriminations which later were codified as 'racial', 'ethnic', 'anthropological' or 'national', according to the times, agents, and populations involved. Their intersubjective constructions, product of Eurocentered colonial domination were even assumed to be 'objective', 'scientific', categories, then of a historical significance. That is, a natural phenomenon, not referring to the history of power. This power structure was, and still is, the framework within which operate the other social relations of classes or estates. (168)

Quijano states here that the construction of race as a category was a colonial invention during the Modern era. Race would be a convenient category created to naturalize the stratification with scientific evidence that there was/is a natural order to society. By organizing people along racial lines (at the time, race was determined by colour), colonial systems of knowledge were produced and pervaded the world over. The "imposition of 'racial' criteria to the new social classification of the world population on a global scale" (171) produced new identities within the European capitalist system, organizing labour on racial lines: salaried/non-salaried, serfs, slaves, merchants, resources, and so on. Quijano coins this system "coloniality of power" and explains that it is through the invention of racial categories that Western systems of knowledge of social relation became the cornerstone of how Europeans were able to become a world power.

By creating a natural order through racial lines, European domination was upheld and even necessary. "Unlike in any other experience of colonialism, the old ideas of superiority of the dominant, and the inferiority of the dominated under European colonialism were mutated in a relationship of biologically and structurally superior and inferior" (171). These new "inferior" identities paved the way for eurocentered world power, as the colonized were not only seen as an

expendable resource to serve the dominant group, but they were also "objects" of scientific inquiry. This distorted paradigm of knowledge allowed for a fully 'subjectivized,' 'human' reality for the colonizer, and an 'objectivized,' 'animalistic,' 'non-human' reality for the colonized. Knowledge, therefore, became an instrument of power producing a relationship between someone and something, not a relationship between two someones. The object, or the property, was 'othered,' invisible, and denied existence within the social totality of colonial order. The objectification of body as nature, allowed body to become the subject of scientific inquiry. If body is closer to nature (more so than spirit and mind), then body becomes dominable and exploitable. "This new and radical dualism affected not only the racial relations of domination, but the older sexual relations of domination as well. Women, especially the women of inferior races ('women of color'), remained stereotyped together with the rest of the bodies, and their place was all the more inferior for their race, so that they were considered much closer to nature" (Quijano 2000, p. 555). Naturalizing the relationship as such, European colonization was able to extend their domination without physical force. Knowledge became both a currency and a weapon. When inequality is perceived as "being of nature: only European culture is rational, it can contain 'subjects' – the rest are not rational, they cannot be or harbor 'subjects'. […] the other cultures are different in the sense that they are unequal, in fact inferior, by nature. They only can be 'objects' of knowledge or/and of domination practices" (174).

The formalization of these racial categories working in parallel to settling in newly colonized lands was part of the European capitalist system facilitating hierarchical structures and division of labour. These epistemic systems created identities that denied the humanity of colonized people. In sum, Quijano purports that there are two historical processes associated in the production of that space and time that converged and established this new model of power. In

"Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" (2000), he delineates the two exertions of power as ideological, with race being the catalytic invention that the whole world would use as a *de facto* model. He contends that:

> a supposedly different biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to the others. The conquistadors assumed this idea as the constitutive, founding element of the relations of domination that the conquest imposed. […] The other process was the constitution of a new structure of control of labor and its resources and products. […] control of labor, slavery, serfdom, small independent commodity production and reciprocity, together around and upon the basis of capital and the world market. (534)

All falling under the coloniality of power, Quijano's theory accurately portrays the matrix of power that persists today, some 500 years later. However, in order to see the full picture of exactly what was at play from the beginning of European expansion to date, Quijano is guilty of one major omission. In her essay *Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System*, María Lugones elaborates upon Quijano's theory and explains that by restricting the coloniality of power to one ultimate identity factor, i.e. race, he excludes other extremely relevant factors, such as gender. Gender systems were introduced and imposed where there was once no such differential. In other words, European colonization included the exertion of the European gender system upon the cultures that were once not gender*fied*. Male and female, the gender binary, became the essential, distinctive and qualitative markers of the only two possible options for the human species. This binary of gender constrained Indigenous nations and forced them to conform to what our contemporary society continues to utilize as a mode of distinction: binary, cis-heterosexist, gender systems. Firmly rooted in hegemonic gender norms, Lugones explains that these categories were invented as, what she coins, a "modern/colonial gender system" and was further exercised as the 'natural' norm in the historicizing thereof. Gender, insists Lugones, is historicized because without history, we would concentrate on "patriarchy; that is, on a binary,

hierarchical, oppressive gender formation that rests on male supremacy without any clear understanding of the mechanisms by which heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification are impossible to understand apart from each other" (187). By rooting gender in history, we unveil the reach and consequences of such a system. This gender system continues to oppress and subordinate females in all aspects of life. With binarily opposed hierarchical social categories,

> women are defined in relation to men, the norm. Women are those who do not have a penis; those who do not have power; those who cannot participate in the public area. […] the emergence of women as an identifiable category, defined by their anatomy and subordinated to men in all situations, resulted in part, from the imposition of a patriarchal colonial state. For females, colonization was a twofold process of racial inferiorization and gender subordination. The creation of 'women' as a category was one of the very first accomplishments of the colonial state." (197)

Gender, just as much as race, is a mythical category; "both are powerful fictions" that perpetuate the subjugation of minority groups, and that includes women.

The construction and systematic institutionalization of gender was itself a colonial development and it is the 'deepest and most enduring expression of colonial domination" (191). Set up as a system of oppression, gender was a method of controlling reproduction and inheritance. It also structured society hierarchically with white males possessing dominance. The legacy that is the coloniality of gender is maintained through patriarchal, authoritarian status quo that continues to exclude women from the sphere of knowledge production and often results in the gendered group being the victims of violence.

Lugones explains in "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," that gender and race were invented as a system set into position to impose a hierarchy of power whereby an intersection of race and gender would create a blind spot in the hierarchical scale. She goes on to explain that non-white was a category inferior to white, and non-man was a category inferior to man. While

Europeans maintained positions of civilized, fully human, anyone not in either the white or man category was considered non-human. This logically left the non-white, non-man to be considered the lowest on the ladder; the non-white non-man is the non-human (to use contemporary terms, this includes anyone from the BIPOC—Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, and LGBTQIA+ categories). The colonized, non-white, non-man were non-gendered, bestial and inherently sinful, sharing a commonality with animal inasmuch that they both had a dimorphic nature (743). To further judge colonized non-humans with a normative understanding of male and female, non-white men were understood as "not-human-as-not-men" and colonized non-white women were "not-human-as-not-women".

Lugones goes on to state that "[t]he civilizing mission, including conversion to Christianity, was present in the ideological conception of conquest and colonization," allowing these two non-human categories the opportunity to hypothetically climb the established social ladder, because "judging the colonized for their deficiencies from the point of view of the civilizing mission justified enormous cruelty" (744). Under the guise of civilizing, or bettering, a pre-civilized people, European colonizers violently eradicated entire cultures on the pretense of 'civilizing' them, making them into humans, according to European models. Quijano explains that "the cultural repression and the massive genocide together turned the previous high cultures of America into illiterate, peasant subcultures condemned to orality; that is to, deprived of their own patterns of formalized, objectivized, intellectual, and plastic or visual expression." By eradicating an entire way of being and deeming it invalid or unrecognized by the established order, entire peoples were wiped out and dehumanized. By creating a gender system on top of the racial model, yet another power play was established: a hierarchy within a hierarchy where white colonizers are at the top, the colonized at the bottom, and colonized women at the utmost

bottom. Like the coloniality of race, the coloniality of gender purports that woman (non-man), was an identity factor that is the inherently and biologically inferior sex.

Like Quijano's racialized model of coloniality, Lugones shows that "[u]nlike colonization, the coloniality of gender is still with us, it is what lies at the intersection of gender/class/race as central constructs of the capitalist world system of power" ("Toward a Decolonial" 746). Coloniality of gender is what perpetuates exploitation and sexual violation; it is what keeps women at the lowest echelon as a justification for the brutality that is so commonly forced upon them. Applying the terms of coloniality of power to the matrix of gender, Lugones expounds that "humanity" was natural in man, but did not extend to his female counterpart, thereby diminishing woman to a level of expendable resource, object, possession; a state of inferiority that legitimized her innate exploitation.

Within the twofold violent system of colonization along with the epistemic belief of natural social stratification based on both newly created categories of race and gender, women were the object of physical and sexual violence as it was engrained as a part of a constitutive colonial state. A normal part of the conquest, the power structure developed by European males continued to uphold this coercive superiority that infiltrated the matrix of power. Rape was both a part of colonization and one reason why colonization was so mighty and successful. Violently forcing a gendered people to submit to the sexual whims of the colonizer, they were able to enforce their control and power over the colonized land and its people. Subjugating the collective *her* to systemic and systematic sexual violence, she became a possession of those in power, as well as a possession of those within the power structure. Furthermore, her essential reproductive nature served to perpetuate a system set up within society, one she could not participate in.

Colonization itself was a gendered act, carried out by Western imperial labour force, overwhelmingly men, drawn from masculinized occupations such as soldiering, mercantile and trade industries. The rape of women of colonized societies was a normal part of the conquest, because the colonial state was built as a power structure operated by men, based on persistent violent force. Brutality was built into colonial societies, built into the way they were structured and operated as well as into the way they produced knowledge. Rape was very much an integral part of active colonization as well as a colonization itself.

Rape is not like colonization, it is colonization. In the following list, you'll read the actions of the conqueror, the colonizer, the person/people who fulfilled the European mission of colonizing the land and its people.

The conqueror: takes the land & people
objectifies it
makes it what he wants
takes what he desires
shapes it to his will
transforms it in his image
discards the rest
alters its identity
until it becomes unrecognizable
changes its name
strips it of rights
strips it of humanity
irrevocably changes its nature
is the "self", the land and people are "othered"
exploits
inferiorizes
subjugates
erases
leaves the trace of his "conquest" on the land & people
takes the language, imposes a new one that does not describe the land or people's reality
gets away with it, because these privileges are built into the very system he created

I will now ask that you go back and read this semi-comprehensive list and replace the word "conqueror" with the word "rapist". Also, replace "land and its people" with "woman who has experienced sexual violence". The rapist, the man, claims sovereignty over the woman's body, and in so doing, he delegitimizes her claim to her own agency and identity. In *Rethinking Rape* Ann Cahill, describes rape as "a sexually specific act that destroys (if only temporarily) the intersubjective, embodied agency and therefore personhood of a woman" (13). She goes on to explain that:

> in the act of rape, the assailant reduces the victim to a nonperson. He denies the victim the specificity of her own being and constructs her sexuality as a mere means by which his own purposes, be they primarily sexual or primarily motivated by the need for power, are achieved. Because this assault is bodily, it is sexed; and because it is sexed, the scope of its harm includes the personhood of the victim. The dominance inherent in an act of rape, by which the assailant forces his incarnate will on the victim, is a hierarchical structure by whose unity and coherence the victim's difference from the assailant—her ontological, ethical, personal distinctness—is stamped out, erased, annihilated. (192)

Denying her of her own being, her identity or personhood is annihilated. In "Toward a Decolonial State," Lugones states that "[there are] many colonial differences, but one logic of oppression" (755). There is so much that we know when we think about theories of the oppressed. From the moment of oppression onward there are effects such as alienation, ossification, arrogation, psychological oppression (Lugones, 1992, 31). From the beginning of colonization to the present, stripping someone of their personhood is the root component of that *one logic of oppression* and along with that come the laundry list of after-effects. In *After Silence: Rape & My Journey Back*, Nancy Venable Raine states,

> The rapist had violated my most basic human need—my bodyright. By destroying my ability to control my own body, he had made my body an object. I lost a sense of it as a boundary of self, the fundamental and most sacred of all borders. A self without boundaries is like a weak country that has been overrun by a stronger one. Once the borders are violated and the invader is entrenched, inhabitants can do little

> more than go into hiding and hope for outside aid. Touch that respects bodyright is healing; it restores the autonomy and authenticity of the self. (63)

By using the female body as a resource of expendable proportion, both her physical body and ontological being are rendered an object. Once again, rape is not like colonization, it is colonization. As a political act, rape "removes a person with agency, autonomy, and belonging from their community, to secrete them and separate them to depoliticize their body by rendering it detachable, violable, nothing." (Gay 140). Rape is a violent conquest of one being over another, a complete annihilation of agency; an ideological weapon of power that subjugates the invaded body and locks her into an oppressive relationship whereby her identity is eradicated, only to be understood in permanent tandem with the violence that stripped her of her identity in the first place. Rendered powerless, the person who experienced rape suffers a violent erasure of self, leaving her on the margin of her community; inculcated into a sub-culture of which she is an involuntary, yet permanent, member.

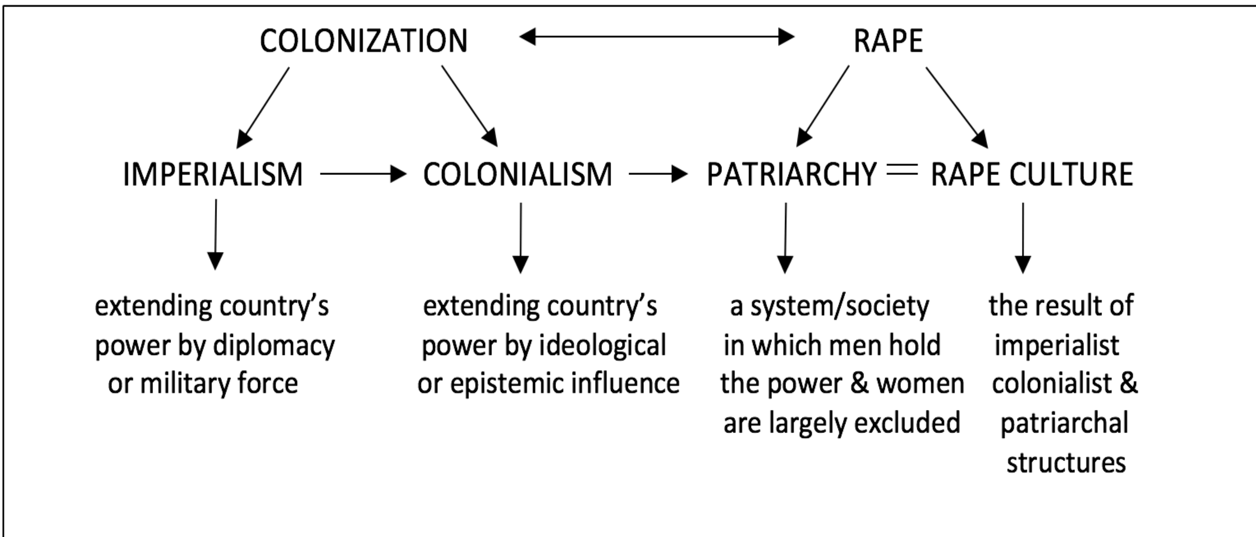
Susan Brownmiller, in her book *Against Our Will*, explains that:

> Rape became not only a male prerogative, but man's basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear. His forcible entry into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggle, became the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood. (14)

The object of colonial domination is not only evidence of the abuse of power at the institutional level, but also the physical dominance assumed based on the primacy of the male, superior, sex over the female, weaker, sex as the "rape of women [happened] when it suited men to impose relations of gender colonization" (Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial" 197). With limited access to power, the woman is subject to be the object of the colonizer's possession; forced into submission, her body is the site of colonial oppression – physically and psychologically abused. As (the white colonizer) man develops society's infrastructure, the unequal distribution of power

benefits and reflects those who are in the upper echelon of governance, creators of the dominant discourse; a status to which woman does not have access. Below is an image displaying how colonization includes and is a form of rape, as well as a system that leads to and endorses rape and rape culture.

COLONIZATION IS RAPE; COLONIZATION TRACES A STRAIGHT LINE TO RAPE[6]



Chandra Talpade Mohanty states in *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse* that "[t]he connection between women as historical subjects and the re-presentation of Woman produced by hegemonic discourses is not a relation of direct identity, or a relation of correspondence or simple implication. It is an arbitrary relation set up by particular cultures" (334). The classification of "gender" is one devised by colonial vestiges, whereby the colonized woman is characterized as: ahistorical, invisible, silent, mutilated, violated and powerless.

By calling attention to the implicit gender imbalance of coloniality, Talpade Mohanty and Lugones, amongst many others, demonstrate how the unequal power relations of the man/woman relationship are inherent in the domination/subordination binary. Implicit in the structure of

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[6] All images and graphic illustrations have been developed by Alecs Kakon and were created for this thesis

domination is the patriarchal model of hierarchy, as it reveals that the hegemonic powers that invented concepts such as Modernity, Nation, History—and of course, developed social and institutional infrastructures such as judicial systems, language, politics, and so on—were consistently and irrefutably male. Woven into the structure is the language with which we express our reality. However, as language serves as a colonial tool and imperial conquest to reflect the world views of the dominant culture, the colonized peoples were incapable of articulating their world. Not only were they stripped of their language and made primitive and illiterate, incapable of sharing their stories, past, and beliefs, the language provided to them by their colonizers delimited the possibilities of what they wished to express, as it could only articulate the world as known by and limited to European realities.

Lugones states in "Hablando Cara a Cara," that "[w]hen something is not heard it is hard to relate […] since these mutings are not heard, they are not heard as related" (44). True of the colonized voice, Catherine MacKinnon in her book *Only Words* similarly expresses of the rape experience: "Your reality subsists somewhere beneath the socially real—totally exposed but invisible, screaming, yet inaudible, thought about incessantly, yet unthinkable, expressed, yet inexpressible, beyond words" (6). Weaving silence back into the colonized/rape experience, it is with this framework that I will begin to analyze the rape narratives that comprise my corpus.

The Rape Act in *Cereus Blooms at Night* by Shani Mootoo

Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates – Gloria Anzaldúa

Embedded with cultural conventions, literature mirrors what we know and see in the real world as the collective structure of a text requires the manipulation of the very language with which we use to communicate. The "real" world informs literature; however, the reverse is true as well as

reality learns from the text, inspires it, engages with it, and mimics it. As Maaike Meijer makes clear in *Countering Textual Violence*, text and reality are on a continuum (373); text begets reality as much as reality begets text. In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, we will briefly explore the explicit forms of colonization of race through the missionary process, however, we will focus on the implicit colonization of gender through sexual and physical abuse committed by father on daughter.

In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, the Christianizing mission of Reverend Thoroughly's, is the colonization of the east Indian people. At a young age, Chandin Ramchandin is brought over and adopted by the Reverend. He is the model convert as he not only abandons his culture and forgets his biological family, but also adapts well to his new environment, looks clean in his dress and shows promise of a fruitful religious career. Boosting the Reverend's cultural capital amongst his community, Chandin proves to be the perfect symbol of possibility for the Indian people: "he was introduced as the Reverend's son, and his story, already well known to every labourer, was expounded as a tangible benefit of conversion" (Mootoo 30). Promoting the tangible opportunities of conversion, Chandin is an excellent prop to show the superiority of the white race and the chance conversion provides for social ascendency.

As the story unfolds, readers are privy to learn that Chandin's conversion and adoption into the Thoroughly family does not instill the sense of belonging to a community that it once promised. Chandin's biological nature corroborates his station as a fact that cannot be overridden by conversion. Being adopted by a white family cannot make Chandin white just as much as converting to Christianity cannot extract the true Indian within him. Chandin falls in love with the Thoroughly's biological daughter Lavinia, however when this information comes to light, the Reverend chastises Chandin for his sinful and incestuous feelings, insisting that a brother loving

a sister is unnatural: “If I have performed as your father and my wife as your mother, what is the relationship of my daughter to you?” (Mootoo 36). Reverend Thoroughly asserts that his besotted sister must not be desired as he declares Chandin’s status as a family member, using this position as a way to keep them apart.

However, within a few months of travel to the Shivering Northern Wetlands, Lavinia returns engaged to her first cousin Fenton Thoroughly; a moment of friction for Chandin as this reveals the pecking order within his own race. The avowal that blood relations are punishable by God is the veil that hides miscegenation as the true perversion. Chandin’s deviant desire for his sister is transgressional as Lavinia is his colonial superior; displacing moral righteousness, interracial marriage is revealed to be the true root of all evil. Lugones explains:

> [t]urning the colonized into human beings was not a colonial goal. The difficulty of imagining this as a goal can be appreciated clearly when one sees that this transformation of the colonized into men and women would have been a transformation not in identity, but in nature.” (“Toward a Decolonial” 745)

Chandin’s conversion, as aforementioned, was a device of tangible benefit. The subliminal pejorative connotations of incestuous taboo versus interracial sin perpetuates the coloniality of power. Kimberlé Crenshaw points to this blind spot in *Toward a Field of Intersectionality*, illuminating the intersection at which Pohpoh stands, giving evidence as to why the intra-racial rape she undergoes at the hand of her father throughout her lifetime is not only ignored, but at once justified and denied.

> By these logics, Black females are both too similar to Black men and white women to represent themselves and too different to represent Blacks or women as a whole. Although Black male and white female narratives of discrimination were understood to be fully inclusive and universal, Black female narratives were rendered partial, unrecognizable, something apart from standard claims of race discrimination or gender discrimination. (790)

Upon shutting down Chandin's perverse love for his white sister, he is further shamed and punished through the scapegoat of religious righteousness. He goes on to marry a woman, Sarah, from his own racial category, an Indian woman who shares his colonized background. They have two daughters, but eventually, his wife leaves him for another woman. When Chandin discovers that he has been left, he begins to rape his daughter Pohpoh (Mala's nickname; I will use both names interchangeably) for what will persist for over a decade. Chandin's incestuous, pedophiliac actions and explicit raping of his daughter, Mala, is largely overlooked, denied, and at times, seemingly culturally accepted by the Lantanacamarans. This begs the question Lugones poses in "*Coloniality of Gender*," why do men who have themselves been targets of violent domination and exploitation commit crimes against their own? Why are they complicit, why do they collaborate in the violent domination of women of colour? (1). And, why does it go overlooked? Mootoo creates this world of overlapping and symbolic colonizations so as to both sublimate and highlight the dysfunctional system we live in.

The first time Pohpoh is raped, she is under threat of appropriation, she fears for her life, and is rendered into an object pillaged for parts. The following excerpt shows the first rape scene in the novel. Chandin was asleep in his daughters', Mala and Asha, bed, and

> in a fitful, nightmarish sleep, mistook Pohpoh for Sarah. He put his arm around her and slowly began to touch her. Pohpoh opened her eyes. **Frightened and confused by this strange, insistent probing**, she barely breathed, **pretending to be fast asleep**. She tried to **shrink** away from under his hand. Suddenly, awakening fully, he sat up. Then he brought his body heavily on top of hers and **slammed his hand over her mouth**. She opened her eyes and **stared back at him in terror**. A sweat covered his face and neck and dripped on her, breathing heavily like a mad dog, he pinned her hands to the bed and **forced her legs apart**. That is how is started. The following night her sent the two children to sleep in their room, but they both came to know that he would call for one or the other to pass at least part of the night in his bed (65, emphasis mine).

The scene demonstrates the brutal and ferocious experience of rape. Thrust into a violent life of sexual abuse, the language used here to describe her state is one of fear and terror. She pretends to be asleep as an example of submitting with a "freeze" response to the traumatic experience. As she awakens fully, he slams his hand over her mouth as an active demonstration of being silenced. The violent vocabulary used here—insistent probing, slammed, forced, heavily, and so on—all leave little to the imagination of how paralyzing the event is, as well as the imminent danger she would go on to fear as she continued living in a home together with her father every day after he raped her.

Toward the end of the novel, we read the last rape scene:

> Instead of **hitting her he unbuckled his belt and unzipped his trousers**. Mala ducked down and tried to slide past him. This infuriated him further. It was the first time she had tried to defy him. He **caught her by her hair** and pulled until she straightened up. […] He **pushed her to the sink and shoved her face down** into the basin, pressing his chin into her back as he used both hands to pull up her dress. He **yanked out his penis, hardened weapon-like by anger**. He used his knees to **pry her legs open and his feet to kick and keep them apart**. With his large fat finger, he parted her buttocks as **she sobbed and whispered**, 'Have mercy, Lord, I beg, I beg.' He **rammed himself in and out of her**. He reached around and squeezed her breasts, **frantically pumping them to mimic the violent thrusting of his penis**. […] his still erect penis pointing at her, Chandin **slapped her** back and forth with the palm and the back of his hand. […] pulled her hair and **shoved his penis into her mouth**. She **choked and gagged as he rammed it down her throat**. When **she went limp**, he **took the weapon out of her mouth and spurted all over her face**. […] He pulled open a drawer and **took up a cleaver. He dragged her into the bedroom**. […] He threw her on the mattress of his sagging bed and **ripped her dress** off. **She shut her eyes and cried out loudly**. […] Chandin locked the bedroom door. He **set the cleaver down by the bed. He raped her three more times that night**. (222-223, emphasis mine)

The extreme violence of this scene goes on for three pages, describing the rape as an 'invasion' complete with cleavers, weapons, gagging, choking, and other aggressive imagery and language. Serving to demonstrate the cruel and brutal force Mala lived through, the explicit and graphic description of Chandin beating and raping his daughter is one of immense and intense violence.

Pohpoh's sense of person had long since been erased, she stood no chance at being heard as she sobbed and whispered for her Lord to have mercy on her. Shoving his penis into her mouth is a powerful image to further denigrate any agency she may have had prior to this scene. Slapping, ramming, dragging, frantically, choking and gagging – all words that point to how he objectifies her, takes what he wants, alters her irrevocably, inferiorizes, subjugates, erases, and discards the rest. When he "took the weapon out of her mouth and spurted all over her face," he left his trace all over his possession, his property, his object. As a show of implied violent force, he leaves the cleaver by the bed to remind her of his power over her, a tangible object to symbolize the fear with which she must submit.

In both rape scenes, the vocabulary used to describe her terror and fear show that the safest way out, or only way to survive, is to remain silent and submit, neither of which signify consent. As marked at the beginning of the second rape scene, when she does try to duck and slide away, she only further infuriates him. We don't learn much about Pohpoh in these moments other than the fact that she is backed into silence. And silence, although thick, is an absence that is difficult to represent. Easier to analyze Chandin's actions as they are loud and dominating, much more difficult to read that which is not written, not visible. This just further proves both the limited possibilities of describing what happens to a person when she is in this position, but also the unfeasibility of speaking up once the imminent threat of rape has passed.

Rendered mute and voiceless, Pohpoh is destined to live a life that has been permanently altered. Just as in the act of colonization, which "brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world. It was a process of systemic fragmentation" (Smith 29), so does rape disconnect a person from who she was prior,

making it extremely difficult, if not impossible to interact with the world around her. After experiencing ongoing sexual violence, Pohpoh's story will go untold as she never relates her experiences to another person. As a child who underwent brutal rape and then continues to live in its aftermath, she lacks the language necessary to tell her story. The limits of her silence portray the limits of her reality. She is viewed as an invalid, a mute, a crazy person, but she is never viewed as Pohpoh, the woman who endured a decade of sexual violence. In Pohpoh's case, telling her story would prove to be futile, as "even if she transgresses, her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine" (Cixous 9). We will explore the modality of 'being silent' in the following chapter.

The Rape Act in *Memories of the Future* by Siri Hustvedt

"Violence doesn't have a race, a class, a religion, or a nationality, but it does have a gender." – Rebecca Solnit

Siri Hustvedt's *Memories of the Future* is a quasi-memoir written by an older S.H. piecing together the writings of her younger self. The novel is a self-conscious, almost ghostwriting exercise of revisiting her past to question her memories and experiences and how they've shaped the person she has become. Multi-genred, S.H., the novel's narrator and author, also nicknamed Minnesota, reads through an old journal she kept while living in New York City for the duration of one whole year. The fragments are interspersed with the scrapings of a detective novel she attempted to write throughout the year spent in NYC. Presently, packing up items from her mother's home, S.H. sits in contemplation of the year 1979 and how much she remembers, how much she forgets, and how much falls in the space between the two.

S.H. reads through her journal and interjects from the present tense to fill in the blanks, as well as question some of the "truths" that have bene recorded. Using time and space as literary

tropes to confuse the reliability of both her memory and authorship, the story is a powerful reflection of what constitutes truth and who is in the position to make those ultimate authoritative decisions.

The first time S.H. plays with the question of authority, she reminisces about the first weeks living in New York City. "I roamed Manhattan, but I had no friends or acquaintances. When I told the story of my urban initiation […] it turns out to have been a blatant falsehood, although I had never intended to lie. […] Memory is not reliable; it is porous" (17). With Quixotic style and voice, she goes on to question the reliability of the author as she remembers her, misremembers experiences, forgets and questions the past that she had at the time fixedly recorded, but that continues to be subjected to time as she recalls it. The past takes on new meaning as she witnesses her own sexual assault in the pages she reads which are, incidentally, also the pages she wrote.

There are a couple encounters with sexual assault throughout the novel. Stories to ascertain the patriarchal system we live in. The inferiority, weakness, and fragility of the female sex are interspersed throughout to demonstrate the pervasiveness thereof. The first marked episode of a sexually violent nature was in a Hungarian coffee shop listening to a man give her a lecture on Hua culture.

> He probably doesn't even know he is **speaking to my boobs**. I am patient, but after a bit more of the Hua hooey, I feel **pressure in my chest**, a **suffocating** discomfort so strong that I have to flee. […] I begin to stand, and Aaron reaches across from his table and **grabs my wrist**. He hisses, 'You are beautiful, do you know that? Really beautiful.' I recall that my cheeks **felt hot**, and I **stuttered**, but now only a few hours later, **I'm not sure what I said to him**. He loosened his fingers from my arm, looked up at me with a pleading face, and I felt bad—that **little tug beneath my ribs**. […] I could see the **disappointment in his face and it pierced me**. I had been kind, but I **felt as if I had been mean**. I felt **bruised—guilty, ashamed, humiliated**—as if those various feelings were not distinct as they should have been but had merged into an amorphous blob in my upper gut. (33, emphasis mine)

The scene does not depict any explicit abuse; however, it does demonstrate with affecting language the distress she felt being caught in this gendered power dynamic. S.H. felt uncomfortable in the conversation and with agency, chose to abandon the situation. However, that agency was quickly questioned as Aaron made a violent grab for her wrist, disguised with compliments about how beautiful she is. Feeling the implications of the total experience (both actions and words), S.H. felt hot in her cheeks and pressure in her chest. She alludes to a tug beneath her ribs, which is an image she will come back to later on in a similar iteration of this experience. Notably, she makes it clear that she didn't do anything wrong, "she had been kind," but because of his reaction to her "kindness," she felt as if she had been mean. Rebecca Solnit explains this delimiting imprisonment that cages women and their behaviour in *Men Explaining Things to Me*: "because they [women] have limited access to the world and limited right to participate. The fear that limits her voice, her movements, her behaviour, limits her in ways that make it unnoticeable to society, so it's almost impossible to address" (67). Although no explicit violence had taken place, there was an implied danger that S.H. felt and she immediately internalized it as she felt guilt, shame and humiliation simply because she made a choice to flee a situation that had made her uncomfortable. It is as though Aaron's compliments to her physical beauty should persuade her that he is not a threat and that peril is in fact, all in her head. This sense of unreliability on her own sense of intuition and instinct severs S.H.'s entitlement to her thoughts and explains a system of control that allows rape culture to persist in our present time.

S.H.'s second encounter with being accosted was when

> a man coming toward me politely lifted his forefinger to stop me, a question in his eyes. I thought he was going to ask me for directions or the time. Instead, after I had paused in front of him, he **pushed his face closet to mine** and, teeth bared, **growled** at me in a voice **unfathomable rage**, '**Fucking cunt, evil, filthy, disgusting bitch**!' I **can't remember what the man looked like… but I recall the street** […] I can **still feel the shock**. I **jerked backward, leapt out of his way**, and began striding

> down the block, my **heart pounding**. I did not run. […] I retain a clear memory of walking through the door that night. (56, emphasis mine)

In what seems to be a triggering experience for S.H., she recalls a day when a man randomly approaches her for what she thinks is a question of needing directions, only to be met with a verbal assault in the street. There is a pervasive myriad of violence that women share and have experienced throughout our lifetimes. The words of this growling man whose voice was filled with unfathomable rage convey the social and lived reality of many, if not all women. This pedestrian drive-by verbal assault, further genders S.H. into the category of woman. She, as she reads back the passage of her past experience, remembers that she forgets everything about him, but what remained was the feeling, the sensation that took over her body. The shock, jerking back, and leaping out of his way. The fear that thwarted her body into "flight," even though she did not run. She makes a point of saying that she retains a clear memory of walking through her apartment door that evening, because like most women who experience assault, sexual or other, the onus is on her to deliver these truths, facts, and detailed pieces of evidence upon confession, and it is in this manner that she records these happenings in her journal.

This leads to the final assault S.H. reads back as she recollects the fragments of her past. She makes a point to quote Alfred North Whithead to explain that every moment she recorded in her journal is there for a reason, because we are nothing if not an accumulation of "drops of experience." With this in mind, she explains how she was driven to her final sexual assault, how she "let it happen," and how it intimately shaped the person she has become.

S.H. was at a party one evening with a few friends. She met a guy, Jeff, with whom she flirted and danced with. She makes a point in her journal, which she wrote in immediately afterward, that she wants to tell it "exactly as I remember it" (159). Jeff asked her to accompany him to another party, and so together they left by cab. He commented on her beauty and she

remembers thinking how boring it was that people always seem to look right through her. It's of note that "she was used to people looking through her," once again demonstrates her gendered body, her invisibility, and her awareness of the two. She goes on to say that she found it "compounding and confounding and jarring" all at once. Up until now, she reads back how her former self desperately tried to convey all facts, albeit, all whilst consistently questioning her own memory, her own sense of truth, and her own Quixotic unreliability as a character/narrator/author.

At the second party, S.H. remembers feeling as though she wanted to leave, to which Jeff responded: "A girl who comes with me leaves with me. I'll take you home." (164). These words are paramount as she obsesses over them for the rest of the year (up until present-day narration she continues to fixate on this one statement), as she tries to figure out why these words held so much power over her, as well as why he felt empowered enough to say the phrase in the first place.

> What did those words mean? Do I know what he meant by them? Why did they make me feel vaguely ashamed? […] I must think carefully now. I must try not to read the past through the present. 'A girl who comes with me leaves with me.' Did I receive that sentence as a threat? I heard it with some alarm. Then why did I stay? There is something in me I don't understand. […] I waited for Jeff outside the elevator. While I waited, I felt uneasy. Why did I wait? I waited because it was polite to wait, and I am polite. […] I worried that if I didn't wait, it might be awkward … He would be insulted, perhaps even humiliated if I left on my own. But why did I care? That is not a full explanation either. Why didn't I get on the elevator and disappear? What was my restraint about? Why did I feel bound by him? (165)

Her self-talk as recorded in her journal points toward her lack of agency. She questions why she waited, why she was polite, why she cared. As she reads the journal of her former self, the present self can't understand why she had felt restrained and bound by him.

> I leapt out of the car, my keys at the ready. I heard the cab door shut, heard the car pull away, **took a happy breath**, and **then stopped breathing** when I heard the **fast, strong** footsteps of **Heavyweight Crew behind me**. My key had already turned in

> the lock and I felt his hand **push open the heavy door**. I pulled the key **violently** out of the lock and closed my fingers tightly around it. […] **Did I believe I could "handle" the situation?** When I pushed the second key into the lock of 2B, he **pressed his body against my back and pushed me flat against the door**. I felt his hips move into my tailbone and then his fingers in my hair as he gently tugged at a bobby pin […] **My chest was tight with anxiety**. I said, '**It's time for you to go.' He looked down at me, his eyes indulgent, patient. 'you don't really mean that,' he said. 'I'm afraid I do.' I must have believed then that my will was still at play**. […] but he placed his hands on my hips and **pushed me through the door** and closed it behind him, but didn't lock it […] **He leapt toward me and shut the door**. I backed away from him, but he **rushed me and grabbed me by the shoulders**. I **yelped or squeaked**. A high noise came out of me that was not a scream. My throat had almost closed, but **I gulped air**. (165-166, emphasis mine)

She remarks that she felt relieved when she jumped out of the cab, her "happy breath" at the fact that the night had ended, and she was safe from Jeff. However, she immediately stopped breathing when she heard his fast, strong feet behind her. She uses vocabulary that describes a fear-inspiring dynamic, replete with grabbing, pushing, violence, and indulgent eyes. She goes on to question how out of synch with reality she must've been in order to believe that her "will" was still at play. The danger she was in was evidenced in the fact that her agency, her will, her freedom was restricted, if not completely denied, as it was his whims her body would be subjected to. She yelped, squeaked and gulped for air, which are adjectival ways of describing someone who is in a state of terror, begging for her life and a chance to escape.

> He **pinned my arms to my sides** in a bear hug, **smashed his face toward mine**, and began to slobber, his tongue seeking my mouth. I turned away from him and **struggled** to release myself, the word ***straitjacket*** in my head. **He was a straitjacket**. **'You want it,' he said. 'You know you want it. I saw you looking at me. You were hungry. You want it.'** I began to **wail**. The **unearthly noise shamed me even as it escaped my mouth**. I seemed to hear it reverberate in the air. He **flipped me around violently**, **covered my mouth** with his hand, and hissed into my ear, '**Who the fuck do you think you are? You think you can drive me crazy and then ditch me**? Again, I remember every word. They are scored into my consciousness. He **dragged me across the floor**. I lost a shoe. I felt it fall off, but I didn't see it. I **bit into the palm of his hand so hard my teeth hurt. He cried out**. I am certain of all this so far. **Then I must have been thrown. He must have thrown me. I hit the bookshelf. My head**. I fell. I slid to the floor, my bare feet in front of me. I saw him, the room, the books, all in black and white. I noticed this. **He had**

> **taken his penis out of his pants—an extremely thin, small, hard one. I saw his penis clearly. […] his enraged face**. Where did this rage come from? He was **panting, face flushed as he stood over me, looking down, hideous penis sticking out from his open zipper above me**. The refrain had already begun by then: '**Please, no. Please, no. Please, no**.' I can hear the **begging, pleading, sobbing** voice now, but **it was as if I were someone else, some other unfortunate, desperate person**. […] **I was no longer inside me. that poor girl on the floor wasn't part of me any longer**. I am telling the whole truth. I am awed by this truth now. she had feelings, but I didn't. she begged. I didn't." (166-168, emphasis mine)

He smashed his face, pinned her arms, threw her against a bookshelf and she lost consciousness, and as we saw in the rape scene in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, the action of her mouth being covered, a symbol of the silence she must sustain. He told her repeatedly that she wants it, even though she asked him to leave more than once. Referring to him as a straitjacket to complete the image of being forced and utterly paralyzed. He blames her for driving him crazy and then explains that she owes him and must fulfill her promise. This once again draws narrowly on the experience of gender-based violence, whereby the man will endorse his abusive actions as permissible because of her femaleness, her suggestive nature, her original consent which, according to him, cannot be reversed. She remembers noises leaving her body, but she cannot recognize the person who made those sounds, as he had rendered her unrecognizable even to herself: "as if I were someone else," and "I was no longer inside me." It is a fact that need not be stated, but as Ann Cahill states in *Rethinking Rape*, "a refusal to treat someone as human is an infringement of their basic human rights. My body is mine is a basic human right. You cannot have access to it unless you ask. It should not be a no means no prototype, it should be a yes means yes" (10). It is with this logic that Jeff should've known that the instant S.H. said, "it's time for you to go," and then again "Please, no. Please no. Please no," that it was time for him to leave. No questions asked. However, it is the matrix of power, the structures of gendered power that govern the way society is set up, and so, although he was told explicitly to leave, he felt

sanctioned by his human rights to dominate over her non-human non-rights, rendering her an object for him to penetrate at his will. However, S.H. is saved from impending rape, as her neighbour Lucy and a friend charge through the door, watching as Jeff flees with urgency. Although she does not experience the full extent of the rape act, the imminence thereof, in tandem with the physical abuse and threatening sexual advances, are enough for her to feel stripped of her of dignity, agency, and self-sovereignty.

In all three of these scenes, S.H. is not an "I" with *self*hood and agency. Instead she is the object in his subject-relationship. She is a function of his power. María Lugones explains in *Pilgrimages* that "there is no 'you' there except a person spatially and thus relationally conceived through your functionality in terms of power. That you is understood as thoroughly socially constructed in terms of power […] And if 'you' (always the abstract 'you') are one of the dominated, your movements are highly restricted and contained," (9). In the model of power that is maintained in our patriarchal society, 'she' (the 'you' in question) is only relationally understood. Therefore 'she' (the abstract 'she') is the one dominated, restricting and containing, like a straitjacket, her movements, thoughts, and freedom. S.H. elucidates this cunning observation seamlessly throughout the novel. She authentically portrays rape culture in *Memories of the Future*, and the abuse of power (physically and ideologically) men have on S.H. and in our society in both her journal and re-reading thereof.

The Rape Act in *In My Own Moccasins: A Memoir of Resilience* by Helen Knott

You may write me down in history with your bitter, twisted lines. You may trod me in the very dirt, but still, like dust, I'll rise – Maya Angelou

As a memoir, Helen Knott gives a first-person account of her experiences as an Indigenous woman who lived through multiple acts of sexual violence, a lifestyle of addiction and how she

journeyed out of the chains and into freedom. There is an alleged allegiance to categories of oppression, namely gender and race (in current day, race as a category comprehends BIPOC). The intersection where Knott stands leaves her in a textual blind spot, much like Pohpoh in *Cereus Blooms at Night*. Her experiences of violence are justified by the community in which she was raised and further explained away by the choices she made (lifestyle choices such as addiction, for example). Knott makes it clear in her writing, as she ventures backward and revisits her former self, that hers is a story that gives perspective on what it means to be an Indigenous woman. Not unlike many other Indigenous woman who share her past, her story is not singular, but rather tells the collective truth of a pervading systemic oppression that lives on the "dark side" of the coloniality of both power and gender.

Lugones' colonial/modern gender system explicates the difference between the light and the dark side of coloniality. The characteristics of the light side contain white bourgeois women. Categorized as weaker, inferior minded, not capable of holding any position of power or authority, these women were groomed and trained to be virginal, pure and kept. The expectation was that they would marry and fulfill their gendered duty of reproducing and becoming a mother/wife. White women felt the strong hand of oppression in many ways as described in this chapter so far, however, to reiterate, this oppression was gendered through relation allowing men to maintain their power at the expense of women.

The dark side of this experience consists of non-white women, such as Indigenous, Black, Native Americans, and so on. These women were not viewed as "dainty or civilized," but rather as animalistic and thus, not gendered. Reduced to a category of non-human, the violence they experienced was exploitative by nature, as they were deemed to not have value (not even reproductive). Women on the dark side have brutality and rape written into their history. It is

important to understand how this light/dark experience dictates one's assigned role in society, as it has seeped into the unconscious of our current-day system and persists to date. All women were subjugated, all women were inferiorized, but not all women were non-human.

With this framework, we look at Knott's accounts of sexual violence, of which there are many. She stands firm in her identity as a Native woman as this marks her position in society, a position she wants to make clear as it shades her experience differently than a woman on the light side. "I hated that being a Native girl made me feel like I was disposable and that it gave white boys the right to grab me whenever they wanted. I hated the skin that I belonged in and the people I belonged to. I didn't want to belong to them" (187). She recalls the first time she experienced sexual assault at her aunt's house. She provides a backdrop that clarifies this was one of many times she was assaulted by the men her auntie brought around. She was 13 years old when one of her aunt's boyfriend's tried to touch her:

> 'So can I have **a kiss then? As a thank you**?' He asked me as he came close enough to me that I could smell the **beer on his breath**. 'No. No. I'm not kissing you,' I said, **panic rising** in my voice. He **reached to touch me and I hit his hand away**. 'Whatever then. **You fuckin' owe me**,' he barked at me as he stormed out and slammed the door. (224, emphasis mine)

He barked back that she shouldn't tell anyone. However, when she returned home, she told her mother what had happened. The next day, she received flowers from her auntie saying, 'sorry for the misunderstanding.' Being asked to kiss a grown man as a thank you is a blatant crossing of authoritative boundaries, however it is the expectancy of his demands being met that colours Knott's experience with a violent abuse of power.

> **No one was there to protect me** and I **wanted to save myself the shame of ever receiving another card like that. So I never said anything**. **Boundaries being crossed by men in authoritative positions became too normal for me**. I learned who to stay away from. I **held onto these secrets** and lived with them. There was **no one there in my corner to tell me that it was these men who were wrong**. (225, emphasis mine)

The secrets she holds onto and has had to live with gives way to the numbness that will eventually pervade her system. Never being taught that what had happened was wrong, never being validated that she did the right thing by hitting his hand away and running to tell her mother, paves the way for her agency to be doubly stripped away and her voice to be disempowered. Internalizing the shame of the experience as materialized in that "sorry" card garnered the vicious cycle of impending sexual abuse she will go on to experience.

Knott was in grade 9 when she woke up in a hospital bed with no recollection of how she got there. She had already been inaugurated into a life of substance abuse, and so she understood that the habit would manifest in many ugly ways, one of which would be "blacking out." Left on railroad tracks in a ditch, she is told by a friend Jack that she was found naked and alone.

> My mom paused and took a deep breath. 'You could have died, Helen. They said they think you were raped.' – I heard her voice catching. She was crying. I wanted to **disappear** into the car, into the **cement below, slip into the earth**. **I wanted to stop existing**, to not hear the rest of the story. 'You were naked. Naked except for a sweater that was draped over you.' […] My **feelings left my body**. My **spirit sat outside of me like an unacknowledged apparition**. **I didn't know whose life I was living, whose body I inhabited. This wasn't my story, my life, my reality**. I felt like I could float away at any moment, but a vague awareness kept me nailed to the ground. It's a weird thing to disconnect from your body and your experiences and yet be present almost as a bystander. I was scared that if I tried to lean into my feelings I would fall off the emotional edge and I didn't know what I would do to myself. I learned later in life that this is called dissociation. (21-22, emphasis mine)

Knott's powerful description of what the shock and after-math of learning what happened to her felt like marks an out-of-body experience not unlike S.H. in *Memories of the Future*. Dissociating from her body, emotionally floating above, is a powerful tool that she uses to disconnect from the violent reality and jarring truth her body is forced to live through. Wanting to die, slip into the earth and disappear is yet another coping mechanism she draws upon so as to go limp, numb, almost catatonic so as to separate herself from the trauma. However, in the

moment, in that hospital, her "tears burned my cheeks, my chest roared as if a wildfire had been lit in its cage. I didn't know if I could survive being in my own body" (23). Because regardless of the hindsight she had when she wrote the memoir as an adult, in the moment, the story had yet to be lived out.

> My body was shaking, and tears and snot flowed down my face. My emotions forced themselves on me all at once and I wasn't capable of taking the inward assault. I began hitting the dashboard and the windows as if hitting something would take me out of my body and stop whatever I was feeling. I thrashed about in the car seat. It felt like my spirit was trying to jump out of my body. […] It was not the beginning of sexual trespasses on my body and it was not the ending of rape in my life. (25)

Try as she might to jump out of her body, she had learned time and again that hers was dispensable to men around her; hers was an object that would be repeatedly trespassed throughout her life. Another example of rape that Knott recalls was as a 17-year old woman, working traffic control on a reserve an hour away from her town. She slept over at a co-workers home one night. He offered her the bed and he would sleep on the couch. However, midway through the night she heard his footsteps through the door. He got into bed with her and asked if she wanted to cuddle. "My body felt frozen to the spot. Boundaries were still really new to me. A few months before, I finally had said no to sex for the first time. It took me two years of counselling to muster up the nerve to regain some control over my body. I felt like I was trapped. […] I woke up to him dry humping my leg" (233). After the myriad of experiences of sexual violence, she had lived through, bodily integrity, agency over her body, and control over herself was something she had yet to learn. The man tried to make her get closer, but she told him to go to sleep. She was too scared to tell him to stop, because she knew that being physically hurt was a possibility as he was much bigger than her. She drifted off to sleep.

> He woke me up a second time—when I felt a strange sensation near my anus. I realized his face was down there. He had pulled my pants down. '**What the fuck are you doing?' I shrieked as I pulled away and reached for my pants. He pulled me**

> **quickly and hard into him. 'Just fuckin' come here,' he said as he started to kiss my neck and hump my bare ass**. 'No,' **I whimpered** as I pulled my face away from his—I didn't want him to kiss my lips. '**Shhhh**,' he whispered as he continued to **hump me**. **He was stronger than me**. He kept me pulled into him and his hands **grabbed onto me and held me tightly until I was hurt**. At seventeen I already knew what it was like to be raped. **I know how it feels to have something taken from you. He was going to take it**. **He was going to take it no matter what**. **If I fought, I knew he would get violent with me**. **Sometimes it's easier to just let it happen. I stopped resisting and my body went limp**. His empty brown eyes stared into mine and he tried to kiss me. […] when his lips hit mine I started to cry and then **I couldn't stop crying. He shoved himself into me a few more times until he climaxed with me crying underneath him**. I was still crying softly and rolled over on my side when he stood up and went to go sleep on the couch. (233)

Knott's narrative and inner monologue throughout this scene are piercing. At seventeen she had been through this before, her body knew what to do: she went limp. It was easier to submit for fear of what else he might do to her. This compliance with his threats is a testament to the silence that penetrates the dense space between her will to make it stop and her knowledge that she can't. "Shhhh" he told her, because to be silenced is part of the deal. She cried, and he kept going, until he was done, rolled over and went to sleep on the couch.

> The pervasive threat of rape constitutes an element of the overall social and political dominance of men, to such an extent that the threat literally shapes the details of the feminine bodies. The beings produced in such a context are assumedly to be wholly derivative of the dominant beings. Their distinctness from the dominating class is both ignored and destroyed. The actual experience of rape enacts a similar dynamic on a more individual level, as the rapist constrains the mobility of the victim, disregards or disbelieves her stated desires […] and refuses to view her sexuality and her sex as anything other than tools for his use. In violating the sexed body of a woman, the rapist is undermining the possibility (at least temporarily; and more likely with significant subsequent ramifications) of the victim's personhood. (Cahill, 193)

Disregarding her stated desires, constraining her mobility, using her sexuality as a tool to fulfill his own sexual needs, it is more than just her body and her sex that are being taken. Her personhood is at stake. Sex is not a tangible thing. Sex is not material. In the instance of rape, the thing that is being taken is not sex, it is the you, it is her. She is capable of writing the sounds of

her silences. The symbolism is heard through the screaming, the whimpering, the whispering, the crying; the many sounds of her silence. Deliberately not speaking conveys Knott's reality as the discursive importance of her silence is central to the message here: there is no language with which to speak of rape, the inability to capture the physical horror is underscored by the life-threatening experience and the violence itself. Muted by her perpetrator, Knott woke up the next morning and the guy had acted as if nothing. He made her coffee, played with her hair as if her were her lover, as if "what he did was consensual."

> I had always blamed myself for that night. Whenever I looked back I started on the *why didn't I*s and *I should have*s. I should have told him to sleep on the couch to begin with. Why didn't I see that he was crazy in the first place? Why didn't I call somebody? I should have fought harder. I should have called the police the next day. I should have said *no* one more time. New mantra: *No one had the right to harm me. Ever.* I wrote a letter to me seventeen-year-old self. I would later burn this later with a tobacco offering in a sacred fire so that Creator would hold onto the pain for me. (235)

In the following chapter, I'll unpack this quote and the ubiquitous feeling of shame, guilt and responsibility a woman who experiences sexual violence feels, further proving that the system is broken, the patriarchal discourse that abounds in our society has infiltrated thought systems, and has produced a knowledge, a way of knowing and being, that continually erases her experience and etches her into the margin.

The Rape Act in *The Apology* by Eve Ensler

Our thoughts are condemned to the limitations of language and language oversimplifies our reality – Jorge Luis Borges

The Apology is an eerie conjuring of a phantom voice calling upon a posthumous rapist to apologize to his daughter. Eve Ensler suffered a lifetime of sexual, physical and emotional abuse at the hand of her father. When he died, thirty-one years ago, he had not uttered a single word of repentance. In order to move on and break free, Ensler wrote herself an apology letter in Arthur's

(her father's) voice. She takes us back prior to her birth, to characterize her father, through her younger years as she writes his acknowledgement of the crimes he committed. She brings us through her adult years to validate the pain she suffered because of him. By summoning his ghost, she tells her story writes hears the words she needs to hear in order to heal.

Eve Ensler underwent childhood rape, physical violence, and emotional abuse throughout most of her childhood and adolescent years. Arthur's authority as father, and his role as the patriarch of the house, complete his arsenal to freely exploit Eve and render her into an object that he could use and abuse as he wished. He hijacked her innocence, her body and her human rights. He hijacked her childhood and set her on a path of subjugation, subordination and constant violence. He doubled down on his crimes of sexual violence by obliterating any subjectivity she may have had about the experiences. Being told repeatedly that she was dishonest, a liar, and delusional, her version of her reality was appropriated and replaced with his forcefully imposed perspective. By writing *The Apology*, she placed her words in her father's mouth, and in so doing, she reclaimed the narrative, sought her validation, gained visibility and audibility, and most importantly she reimagined her past in a way that would liberate her future.

At the beginning of *The Apology*, Arthur describes his savage and predatory character pit against Ensler's tender sweet nature. He explains that he had another being inside of him, the Shadow Man, that brought on darkness and took full advantage of the connection they had as father and daughter. He iterates time and again that he was a 52-year-old man and she, in the beginning, was only a five-year-old child. The first time he abused her and crossed the line into the "gate of sin," he convinced himself that she wanted it. Even though she was crying, he was testing her openness. The Shadow Man took advantage of their deep connection and would come alive in the darkness of the night, "I would find myself in your room at some twilight hour. I

only felt alive between the daylight and darkness in that crepuscular realm where dream and memory are indecipherable. That's how I controlled you" (39).

As a grown man aware of what he was doing, Arthur's sense of power was intricately interconnected with the notion of patriarchy in more than one sense: as the father of the house, he controlled the micro-society, the micro-world Ensler lived in, and as a man in the world, Patriarchy (with a capital P) served as a foundation for the gender-based violence he inflicted on Ensler and the silence he enforced on his wife and other children. The systemic social inequalities based on gender were elemental in an established social order in which women as a category are subjected to and the domination of men they are confined to. "Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Edwards 6). The relationship of power between Ensler and her father was expressed through his sexual exploitation of her body. Ensler was only five when the oppression, domination, and horrific sexual violence began, she thus was barely able to even form an identity before it would be completely erased:

> [T]he horrific destructiveness of rape becomes obvious: if a being chooses to victimize another in a particularly sexually violent way, then the embodied being of the victim is going to be deeply, even fundamentally affected. However, embodied intersubjectivity is not static. It is an ongoing process; therefore, the violent actions of a rapist, while profoundly destructive to the victim's being and intersubjective personhood, need not be the final word. The being of the rape victim is transformed by the experience (and women who have not been the victims of sexual violence have themselves been affected by the pervasive threat of such violence), but that transformation is not necessarily that self's final development. Intersubjectivity allows for the possibility of understanding the rape victim as not only a victim, but as a person whose experience of victimization is a crucial element, among many crucial elements, of her being. (*Rethinking Rape* 9)

Knowing herself consciously for the first time as a victim[7], experiencing rape and victimization became crucial, if not elemental aspects of her identity. Her father's power over her was not limited to physical and sexual abuse, but due to the young age she was when the abuse started, his power over her extended to how she would know herself, i.e., knowledge production. He decided who she was; he created her identity. She was a despicable liar, according to him. She was forced into leading a double life whereby she would keep his secrets. Her silence became his power and her identity was his to be made.

The first rape scene is written in full and describes a five-year-old Ensler:

> there and then [Shadow Man] **broke through the gate of sin**. He began to **pet** your **tiny** body. First it was to **calm**. Or at least that's what he told himself. Hands slowly and **soothingly** across your chest, across the slight **delight** of budding nipples. This seemed to **comfort and relax** you some. But it was more for him. He wanted this. Down your soft stomach where you were **tickled**. Then slowly more methodically down, down to your cotton underwear. **I knew I should have stopped**. I knew this was **horribly wrong** but I went on. I was a fifty-two-year-old man with a five-year-old child. My **need**, **my desire more powerful than your comfort or sanity**. Hand down touching but not touching the rising knob of your **sweet spot**. Imperceptible at first. Testing perhaps. I used your **openness**. **I abused your trust**. **I told myself you wanted this**. Your crying stopped. My touch was poisonous medicine. (36-37, emphasis mine)

Using what I can only describe as the creepiest language to illustrate just how young and innocent Eve was at the time of the first rape, Arthur was fully conscious of both her age and vulnerability. He doesn't care that her comfort and sanity are at stake, because his desire and needs are more powerful. He uses words like soothing, relaxing, calm, pet, and tickled in a way that engages the reader (or at least myself, even as I transcribe these words) to want to rage on

[7] The words victim or survivor bungee the person who has experienced sexual violence to the trauma, tying her identity to a crime from which she cannot disconnect. Much like post-colonial theory that presents as a horizon of an "after-colonization," victim and survivor suppose a "post-trauma" identity that continues to identify the person in relation to the trauma. For the purposes of this project, it is of note that I have mindfully omitted these vocabulary words from this dissertation, speaking of the *person who has experienced sexual violence* in those words exactly.

Eve's behalf; save her from the monster in the dark. Because the only thing worse than being a child predator is a child predator who tries to convince himself that she wanted it.

Ensler takes us through every abuse and beating and rewrites the story to force her father to acknowledge his actions and feel the remorse one should feel. In humanizing him, she is able to endow herself with her stolen/lost humanity, the person of her former self. In the second rape scene Ensler is nine years old. Unlike the first scene, which tells a softer story of exploration, tickling, and limit testing, the violent language in the second scene matches the intense violence of rape.

> That night, Shadow man came to your bed but his rules had changed. He was **impatient and aggressive**. He **ripped back** the sheets. He **pulled your legs** quickly and **forcefully** apart. He moved you **roughly** in the bed. **He took what he wanted**. He no longer pretended to be a healer: **he was a hunter**; you, no longer a patient, you were his **prey**. **You were terrified**. Your **shock and judgment shamed Shadow Man and further provoked his fury.** […] he was the **boss**. He would call the shots. **You motioned for him to stop, tried to push him away**, you were **panicked** and had **clearly stopped breathing**. Your eyes wide open seemed to be **screaming**. His fingers, now hawkish talons, went further. They **tore** through your tightness. They **ripped** your tender flesh. […] they **clawed and clawed** at the golden gate of your precious garden, and when you **refused** entry, they **forced** their way in. […] You **fought and fought and then you stopped fighting**. (46, emphasis mine)

This scene picks up on so many of the themes covered above. The language of rape becomes predictable: forced, fury, rage, push, terrified, ripped, clawed, screaming… all of these words only describe half the atrocity that rape truly encumbers. He describes himself as a hunter; her as prey. He rips through her tender flesh, and even though she motions him to stop, he forces his way in. She fights and fights, and then like all of the women described thus far throughout these micro-readings, she submits. Her choices are limited, and as the trauma of sexual violence obliges, she must submit, and she must be quiet. He goes on to describe her as property: "this was his territory and this his grand invasion," and how it didn't matter how much he hurt her, as long as he could control her:

> I **raped** you, Evie. I **raped** you as a daddy doctor and I **rape** you now. I **raped** you with my seductive healing and I **raped** you with my **rough** fingers. I **penetrated** you again and again. Getting **deeper** and **deeper** into the place where you could be most hurt. **Coercing** you, **forcing** you **against your will**. **You were the country I was claiming. The land grab. The spoils of war. It didn't matter that I was despoiling the earth and all that grew there as long as I owned it**. **Better you be broken and bending. Easier to capture. Easier to control**. (47)

In order to persist as the powerful and dominating predator that he was, he needed her to be broken and bent. Borrowing colonial theory most explicitly, the paradigm of colonizer/colonized can be applied here one-for-one. He is the oppressor, appropriating, eradicating, erasing, and leaving his trace all over her body; she is the object, oppressed, dominated, subjugated, obliterated, stripped of humanity. The system he sets up favours his absolution, for there was no crime in the first place. The more he tore her down, the easier it would be to control her. It didn't matter that he was destroying her, as long as he owned her. Her, a non-person; an Eve that would never exist.

He reigned with terror and smashed her to pieces, physically, metaphorically, and literally. "Your whole body went flying across the room until it crashed against the wall and you dropped like a flimsy rag doll […] you smiled and smiled as if you were some deranged robot doll. […] you were no longer there. It was as if Evie had been displaced and this new Eve," (55). With his ferocity and brutality, his wickedness and his project of torture, he beat the person out of her body until she became nothing more than a deranged robot. It was like she had died, "a possum protecting yourself from a predator, willing yourself into a state of thanatosis" (52). She did not fight or flee, like she had in her first experience of sexual violence. Instead, like most women who experience sexual violence repeatedly, she learned to freeze: fake death, learn numbness so as to live through the pain.

He left his mark on Eve, he burrowed his poison into her. He humiliated her, demeaned her and beat the life out of her. "I am reeling now imagining the tsunami of fright you were pushing back in your little body and being since you were five. How this daily and extraordinary exertion taxed and tore your muscles and blew out the fragilely webbed fibers of your nervous system. Your violent death was ever present. And each murderous episode escalated the stakes and the brutality," (76). Despite the fact that she did not stand a fighting chance against his vehemence and rage, he continued to beat the life out of her with both physical force and sexual abuse.

> I robbed you of the ordinary. I destroyed your notion of family. … you lived in perpetual self-hatred and guilt. I created hierarchy, distrust and violent competition… none of you would recover from this. I robbed you of agency over your body [..] you had no sovereignty. I exploited and abused you. I took your body. It was no longer yours. I rendered you passive. You compulsively gave it to whoever wanted it because I taught you you should. I forced you out of your body, and because you were dislocated and numb, you were unable to protect yourself. I compromised your safety and ability to defend yourself. I made it so that rape became what turned you on. I eviscerated your necessary boundaries so you never knew what was yours and when to say no or how to stop. I tore the delicate walls of your vagina and made it vulnerable to disease and infection. 109

Ensler describes the act of rape as a colonization by explaining that her father robbed her of sovereignty over her own body, a hierarchy created complete with violence, loss of bodily integrity, rendered passive and dislocated. She was no longer a human with a sense of self. He eviscerated her and all bodily boundaries of space and safety. He forced her out of her body, stole her agency and left an empty shell behind.

Ensler goes on to describe the multiple after-shocks that reverberated through her body as she grew older. How she became so controlled by the violence that her identity changed, her demeanour altered, and how she had become sullen, shameful and unresponsive. She "moved like a ghost," (50). She was the "visible outcome of his brutality."

Thus far we've established that the rape eradicated her identity (had she even had the chance to develop one), in chapter two we will pick up at this juncture and explore the changes in her identity that can be seen as a direct response to the sexual violence and omnipotence reigned over her, as her father held a literal and figurative power over her for many years after the abuse stopped. As mentioned earlier in the theoretical analysis of colonization and the coloniality of power/gender, chapter two will explore how this systemic repression made way for the explicit violence to cease to be constant as the conquerors could rule from afar, virtually having changed the colonized from the inside out.

Conclusion

Colonization is an act of political force and physical violence. It is a display of one person's (or group of people's) power over another person (or group of people). It is a negation of human rights, bodily integrity and a constriction if not complete eradication of one's free will. Colonization is the violent conquest of a dominating people over an oppressed people. Colonization is rape. It is a seizure, by force, of a person-rendered-body, body-rendered-object.

In the next chapter, we will explore how: the privileging of the male status in society leads him to everything from entitlement to a woman's body to the guilt-free attitude and blame/shame-reversal that he so cunningly benefits from. We will explore how a woman's body is the site of colonizing violence and colonialist thinking, because the system is set up to violate her and then deny her experience. The fact that rape even occurs is marked by ingrained ideology that has been trickling into our system for over five-hundred years. There are after-shocks and residual effects that will be explored under the term *trauma* in chapter three, however, how we got to a place in our society where we allow rape to occur on systemic and systematic levels is

delineated with an extremely brief history lesson starting from colonization to rape culture. Here is an overview:

⇒ Colonization was an active period of battles, revolutions and conquests—all of which were violent—ultimately leading to the colonizing of Latin America (Asia and Africa). These colonies reigned under the sovereignty of Spain (Europe) for centuries, changing hands every so often, eventually including the dominating hands of the United States of America.

⇒ Colonization was working in time and space through both settler colonialism as well as through colonial epistemes (categorical logic, natural hierarchies, "H"istory) that would sanctify the domination of one group over another.

⇒ Colonization paved the way for colonial governance, patriarchal structures, and phallocentric ideology.

⇒ Colonialism (coloniality of power/racism, coloniality of gender/sexism, and other power -*isms* invented as conceptual facts) comprises a hierarchy which sanctions violence as part of a top-down, bottom-up infrastructure.

⇒ Colonization and colonialism lay a clear path to the inferiorization of women as part of a natural social order.

⇒ Colonization paves a clear path to rape culture.

⇒ Coloniality of rape culture.

CHAPTER 2 – COLONIALITY, RAPE, AND BEING SILENT

In colonial conquest, language did to the mind what the sword did to the bodies of the colonized
– Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

In chapter one, we explored the explicit violence of the conquest of both colonization and rape, and their similitude in extending past the symbolic. As in colonization, rape is the exertion of force of one dominating body over another, objectified body. The colonization of a body thus takes place through the act of rape. Within the framework of colonization, we also explored the myriad of domination tactics used by the colonizer. Oppressing her autonomy, her bodily integrity, her agency, and personhood, he, the rapist, eradicates and erases her identity. The rapist, along with the act of raping, inferiorizes, subjugates, and objectifies the person being raped. Moreover, we looked at the literal and metaphorical muting she incurs. Physically silencing the person by placing his hand over her mouth revokes her ability to form sound. Being choked, gagged or being told to shut up, are all ways that the perpetrator exercises his voice over hers; limiting her capacity to produce speech. In a less physical manner, her silence is one of figurative force: she is being silenced as he removes her voice, her agency, her ability to express the inexpressible. The fear of speaking and the physical covering of her mouth combined with the weakening of her agency forces her into the oppression that rape encompasses. In chapter one we moved through four pieces of literature to exemplify the violent domination of the conquest read in each rape scene. These analyses provide but a microcosm of the true violence and extent of damage experienced through the rape act, as the long-lasting effects are only truly absorbed once the imminent violence has passed.

Rape is to colonization as the aftermath of being raped is to colonial theory. Beyond Europe's global expansion as seen through the active expeditions and years of violent

colonization, it was modernity/rationality, or the production of knowledge created and promoted as science that extended the European reign over its colonies. The construction of categories such as race, as we've seen, was one such property of knowledge that was produced which sanctified the oppression of BIPOC for centuries (still today). By legitimizing these categories as backed by science, the inherent and natural biological inferiority of non-whites allowed Europeans an all-access pass to sustaining their world power from afar. The universal paradigm created a hierarchy that saw the west as human, and the rest as non-human. The paradigm presupposed that Europe is the subject and others are the object, implying an organic relationship of superior/inferior. It was built into the system and became the mode of practice for the subsequent five-hundred years and counting. The articulation of this social order further contributed to this notion of power by historicizing it: "History was conceived as an evolutionary continuum from the primitive to the civilized; from the traditional to the modern; from the savage to the rational; from pro-capitalism to capitalism, etc. Europe was the mirror of the future for all societies and succeeded in imposing that "mirage" upon all other cultures that it colonized," (Quijano, "Coloniality, Modernity/Rationality," 176). This axis of power, rooted in history, became the basic perspective that fueled the active work of the colonization and continued into western ideological hegemony:

> [T]he modern world-system that began to form with the colonization of America, has in common three central elements that affect the quotidian life of the totality of the global population: the coloniality of power, capitalism, and Eurocentrism. Of course, this model of power, or any other, can mean that historical-structural heterogeneity has been eradicated within its dominions. Its globality means that there is a basic level of common social practices and a central sphere of common value orientation for the entire world (Quijano, 2000, 551)

The orientation was western-facing, which is yet another way of saying all cultures, beliefs, languages, practices, and so on, that pre-existed colonization were eradicated and appropriated;

absorbed into the dominant culture, using a newly invented logic that benefitted and justified the domination of this now "othered" people. "People were dispossessed of their own and singular historical identities. […] their new racial identity, colonial and negative, involved the plundering of their place in the history of the cultural production of humanity. From then on, there were inferior races, capable only of producing inferior cultures," (552). Erasing all pre-existing cultures, and denying the possibility of new ones being born, this was the first successful global expansion working a two-pronged strategy which created a new matrix of power that locked the "other" in a *de facto* oppressive binary.

Suffice to say that Eurocentric hegemonic perspective of knowledge expanded their power farther than on-the-ground colonization. Along with science and the rationalization of human-subject versus non-human-object/property, came a new codified language that expressed these binaries as intrinsically related: "East-West, primitive-civilized, magic/mythic-scientific, irrational-rational, traditional-modern—Europe and not Europe" (541), were a few categories invented to codify a dualist perspective that served a Eurocentric perspective and was imposed globally throughout the course of their expansion.

> It would not be possible to explain the elaboration of Eurocentrism as the hegemonic perspective of knowledge otherwise. The Eurocentric version is based on two principal founding myths: first, the idea of the history of human civilization as a trajectory that departed from a state of nature and culminated in Europe; second, a view of the differences between Europe and non-Europe as natural (racial) differences and not consequences of a history of power. Both myths can be unequivocally recognized in the foundations of evolutionism and dualism, two of the nuclear elements of Eurocentrism. (541)

First, the idea of history as a newly generated temporal perspective which rooted the story of human civilization unidirectionally stemming from Europe onward, would function to erase any respective history or culture that preceded their own. This migrated the origin of human life (civilized, rational, natural) to the centre of a European world. Along with rooting itself in this

newfound, mythical concept of history, comes the weight and power of history. By vanquishing all other cultures and redefining their respective trajectories, Europe held a natural control over the history of the world, claiming authority over all other existing stories.

Second, the notion of "Europe" and "non-Europe" was conceived to mark the racial distinction created to naturalize both the history and power Europeans had set in motion through their colonial expansion for global domination. Aníbal Quijano's theory on the coloniality of power centres this expansion on the newly invented racial classification. Coloniality, however, is more than a simple categorical creation resting on the back of race. María Lugones calls Quijano out on his neglect of gender as a categorical invention of the colonial era. She contends that coloniality is an "encompassing phenomenon, since it is one of the axes of the system of power and as such it permeates all control of sexual access, collective authority, labor, subjectivity/intersubjectivity and the production of knowledge from within these intersubjective relations. Or, alternatively, all control over sex, subjectivity, authority, and labor are articulated around it," (Lugones, "Heterosexualism," 191). Constructed from a heterosexual viewpoint, this new gender system was part of the operation of colonial power that established sex based on a set of biological attributes that were socially constructed.

In "Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System," Lugones explains that the category of gender was created during times of Western expansion and that race was not the only factor to determine the positionality of non-whites in the social ordering of the world. As unpacked in chapter one, it was within the coloniality of gender that Lugones explains that gender was created as a concept which both necessitated and perpetuated the hierarchical and oppressive binary that rested on male supremacy, as:

> the emergence of women as an identifiable category, defined by their anatomy and subordinated to men in all situations, resulted in part, from the imposition of a

> patriarchal colonial state. For females, colonization was a twofold process of racial inferiorization and gender subordination. The creation of 'women' as a category was one the very first accomplishments of the colonial state. (197)

Injecting gender into the model of hierarchical systems, we move backward in history to trace how women have been (mis)treated, dominated, exploited, and erased, leading to the disproportionate bloating of male superiority. Emphasizing the gender binary as well as the historicity of gender, Lugones shows that by introducing gender as a category into the collective memory, man can rely on the authority of history to maintain his ascendency and power. Lugones states:

> We historicize gender formation because without history we keep centering our analysis on patriarchy; that is, the binary, hierarchical, oppressive gender formation that rests on male supremacy without any clear understanding of the mechanisms by which heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification are impossible to understand apart from each other. (187)

The definition of gender itself is a colonial tool and leaves women as lowered individuals excluded from the sphere of knowledge production as well as the public domain, as "'Women' (the gender term) is not defined through biology, though it is assigned to anafemales [animal females]. Women are defined in relation to men, the norm. Women are those who do not have a penis; those who do not have power; those who cannot participate in the public arena" (197). This often results in women necessarily being victims of violence, as power and violence can be understood to be inextricably linked.

As knowledge is understood as produced by those in power (those who hold power *over*), the concept of knowledge as property can be introduced as: "In tandem with colonialism in the Americas, there was modernity/rationality happening in Europe – the Knowledge as production – and therefore understood as property. A relation between an individual and something else (subject and object)," (Quijano, "Coloniality, Modern/Rationality," 173). Solidifying yet again

the subjectivity of the knowledge producer and the objectivity of the repressed, the imposed logic formalized cultural domination—an efficient means of social and political control—giving access to power to those responsible for producing perspectives.

Within this hierarchical paradigm, it is significant to iterate the subject-object relationship constructed as a way to refer to "subjects" outside of European context. This binaristic mode of thinking split the global population as the *west* and the *rest*. In the era of rationality and modernity, this self/other, subject/object, saw its extension in the Cartesian dimorphic pair mind/body. Mind, capable of reason, logic and rational thought, was a domain that belonged to man: the subject, the self, the human. On the other side of that split, the body, capable of nothing more than being the "object of knowledge." The enforced Eurocentric rationality fixed the body, non-man, as the object outside of reason. There is an inherent privileging of one alternate in each pair. The mind is the self with the possibility of subjectivity, which:

> can most simply be understood as the process of becoming, or condition of being, a subject, or actor with agency, in relation with other subjects […] a *subject* is an entity with a particular experience of reality, an agent acting in relation with other subjects, expressing agency beyond the discursive, an active participant in the social construction of knowledge. (Schnabel 11)

The coding of the female as the body innately reduces her to an inferior status, so much so that she is understood only as what she is lacking, what she is not. This relationship set the stage for inequality on an essential and naturalistic level paving way for what is central to this paper: a woman's body as the site of gender-based violence. "The coding of femininity with corporeality in effect leaves men free to inhabit what they (falsely) believe is a purely conceptual order while at the same time enabling them to satisfy their (sometimes disavowed) need for corporeal contact through their access to women's bodies and services," (Grosz 14). Having access to her body as the object of study, her non-Self leaves men free to use and abuse her body at his will, as she,

naturally, does not possess agency. This gender dichotomized cosmology centralized man on the axis of power and etched non-woman into the invisible margin. As Ann Cahill states in *Rethinking Rape*,

> Rapists do not rape individuals, but members of a class; the act of rape, then, becomes a reminder to both assailant and victim that membership in one of these classes is defining element of identity. To be a man is to a member of the dominant class and thus to have nearly limitless power, or at least power extensive enough to include the power over bodies of women; to be a woman is to be constantly subject to the dominant power and unable to protect oneself from its reach. (26)

The binary ideology trickled into a belief system that nurtured the domination of one alternative in the pair. Oppressing the female by creating natural limits to her reach (marked by her body), she became and still is subjected to his domination as these ideas became lived ideologies. It is significant to recognize that "[t]he body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a culture, *the* cultural product," (Grosz 23) of a historicized past. There is no doubt that the body is a cultural artifact; it is the sponge that communicates all of the signs and messages around it. As with all parts of culture, "we perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through culture. Culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them," (Anzaldua 38).

Those in power mapped out the cartography of the female body, presupposing its *objectifiability*. By embedding this information onto her (the plural her) body, a females' inferiority becomes a fact evidenced by nature. Knowledge was transformed into the tool used to dominate and control, exogenous oppression, and as Foucauldian[8] theory would retrospectively explicate, dominate, police, and control from within. These thoughts continued to contribute to the phallocentric episteme that governed (governs) for centuries to come.

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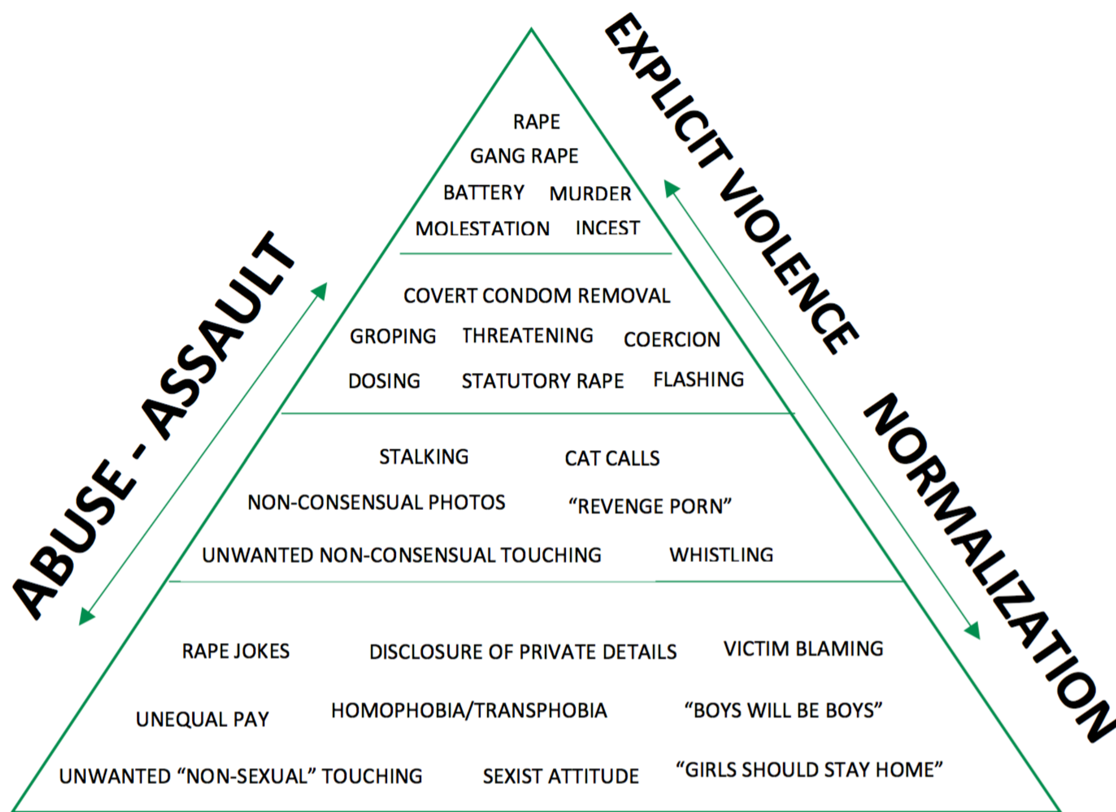
[8] Foucault's theory on biopower

Tracing the notion of the mind-male/body-female binary to the late nineteenth century, the distinction between men and women was further evidenced when Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the father of psychoanalysis, was inspired to treat the female disease known as *hysteria.* Throughout his studies, he found many psychological distinctions between women and men that he substantiated to be based in biology and physiology. Much of his work has been known to be the subject of controversy—a once-preferred topic of feminist debate, which I will delicately gloss over here[9]—, however, the question he posited later in his work is what I find particularly vexing: "what does a girl want?" is a loaded question which:

> speaks to the belief that women are a different, inferior kind of being, hence impossible to understand. Women are subordinate to men *by nature*. As inferiors, women must always be kept in protective custody, under the control of men […] What a girl wants, what a woman wants, is what Freud knew is held precious to every man" self-determination, autonomy within reason, life without undue fear, liberty without causing harm to others, and the ability to pursue one's happiness. (Buchwald, *Transforming Rape Culture*, 213-215)

Ideas are powerful shapers of behaviour, attitudes and belief systems. The idea that one group is superior to another *by nature* is the bedrock of "racism, sexism, nationalism, imperialism, and speciesism," (215). As a lived ideology, the construction of gender, and all the inequality that it expresses, has transformed into specific bodily practices. These practices all fall under the umbrella term Rape Culture.

[9] In chapter three, I discuss Freud and the development of trauma theory slightly more in depth



The Coloniality of Rape Culture

You develop a self who is ingratiating and obsequious and imitative and aggressively passive and silent. You learn, in a word, femininity. – Catherine A. MacKinnon

Rape culture is a term that came into widespread circulation in 2012 after the stories from New Delhi, India and Steubenville, Ohio hit the news. In *Men Explaining Things to Me*, Rebecca Solnit defines rape culture most accurately as:

> an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence against women is normalized and excused in the media and pop culture. Rape culture is perpetuated through the use of misogynistic language, the objectification of women's bodies, and the glamorization of sexual violence, thereby creating a society that disregards women's rights and safety. Rape culture affects every woman. Most women and girls limit their behavior because of the existence of rape. Most women and girls live in fear of rape. Men, in general, do not. That's how rape functions as a powerful means by which the whole female population is held in a subordinate

> position to the whole male population, even though many men don't rape, and many women are never victims of rape. […] the term "rape culture" lets us begin to address the roots of the problem in the culture as a whole. (130)

This sexually violent representation of women, either through misogynistic language or sensationalizing of her body as a tool of seduction (through the male gaze, for example), normalizes, fetishizes and objectifies a woman (and her body), thus creating a society in which a woman is denigrated, further gendered, simply because of her femaleness. She is limited because she lives in fear. This fear constricts her thoughts, movements, behaviours and speech. Aware of the looming threats and potential danger that lurks, women are forced into a position of subordination and domination as a part of the female experience. A woman is her body in this patriarchal system. She is aware of that. Additionally, a woman's oppressed status is further subdued as it is overlooked by society writ large. It is engrained in our culture to believe men over women, stigmatize a woman's sexuality, victim blame, slut-shame, shame a woman for speaking up, not speaking up, consenting, not screaming loud enough, screaming too loud, calling for help, not calling for help, (I'd keep going to show how incredibly insidious this is, but I think I've made my point).

A woman's body is her situation. That has been the viewpoint adopted by many great thinkers, because a body is the instrument of our grasp upon the world, it is the limiting factor of our lived experience. Anatomically speaking, a woman is typically weaker than a man, she has less muscular strength, is usually lighter than a man, and so on. She cannot take him in a fight. Her weakness is a factor that works against her, as is his strength a factor that makes this power dynamic unfit for a fair fight. However, sheer anatomy alone is not responsible for a woman's "situation." A woman's body is coded with culture, a cultural artifact as earlier mentioned, and throughout history, the language that has represented her femaleness includes, but is not limited

to: fragile, docile, gentle, weak, submissive, maternal… In a word: feminine. Her body connotes inherent inferiority, which, in this phallocentric discourse, only serves to prove her obligation to be dominated by those who are superior. Rape culture normalizes this gendered way of life and locates the body as a situation in every sense of the phrase.

> The fear of sexual assault that is part of the daily life of women in this country and takes up a continent of psychic space. A rape culture is a culture of intimidation that keeps women afraid of being attacked and so it confines women in the range of their behavior. that fear makes a woman censor her behavior—her speech, her way of dressing, her actions. Fear undermines her confidence in her ability to be independent. […] Women's lives are unnecessarily constricted. (Yung Shin, *Transforming Rape Culture*, 219)

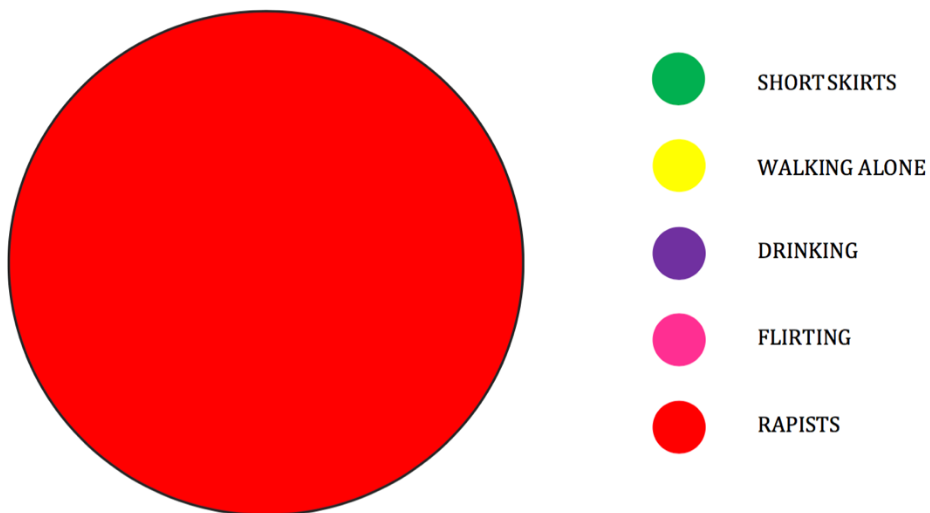
The psychic space the fear of rape takes up consumes and constricts a woman's range of behaviour. Undermining her confidence, self-esteem and self-worth, a woman is taught to shut up for fear of acting outside of permissible gender norms and conventions.

Furthermore, rape culture is legitimized by the failures of our legal system, including everything from legislation and our justice system to the (mis)handling of rape reporting (when and if she does report). The laws are not set up to serve justice to the criminal, rather laws are there to protect him; doubling down on the shame and blame she incurs. Hashtags like #BelieveHer sum up the problem with the accurate use of a word that requires persuasion and witnessing in order for her experience to be deemed true. Societal conditioning promotes the violent behaviours of boys and men and necessitates the submission, subordination and silence of girls and women.

Rape culture is a manifestation of patriarchal systems, a phallocentric ideology which works to promote embedded misogynist and sexist attitudes, indoctrinating us with these beliefs that women are inherently inferior—should be dominated—, and irrational—should not be believed. In her essay "Seduced by Violence No More," bell hooks says:

> We live in a culture that condones and celebrates rape. Within a phallocentric patriarchal state the rape of women by men is a ritual that daily perpetuates and maintains sexist oppression and exploitation. We cannot hope to transform rape culture without committing ourselves fully to resisting and eradicating patriarchy. […] For the sexist, violence is the necessary and logical part of the unequal, exploitative relationship. To dominate and control, sexism requires violence. Rape and sexual harassment are therefore not accidental to the structure of gender within a sexist order. This is no new revelation. (295)

The (mis)training and (mis)education women receive propagates an imbalanced system and falsely leads people to believe that sexual violence against women is a singular crime committed against an individual woman by a deranged stranger. However, this malevolent crime is enacted universally against women as part of our gender-hating training and is ignored because she lives in an intimidating, all-encompassing rape culture.



The following literary analyses begins with *Cereus Blooms at Night* which will explore textual violence, intraracial/intersectional violence, silence as a divisive tool, and the community's complicity in the mistreatment of the true crime. An analysis of the short story "Rape Fantasies," by Margaret Atwood is included here as it is an accurate portrayal of the lack of understanding,

education, and language we have as a society in order to properly address rape. The story also marks violence through abstention, further illustrating the power of silence and its inherent misinterpretation. *Memories of the Future* puts forth a myriad of stealthy sexist attitudes that informed S.H.'s upbringing and formed her body as a situation; a result of rape culture. In *In My Own Moccasins*, we read once again the governing ideologies that etch Indigenous women into the darkness, an invisibility that doubles down on her erasure. Knott submits and complies with the multiple instances of sexual violence she experiences, because that is what she has been taught to. *The Apology* is a consummate example of rape culture and how it informed Ensler's father's upbringing, rearing him into his set/learned gendered attitudes, which leads him to rape his own gender-marked daughter. Her learned silence was obliged by dominant discourse that reigned in her home. Her silence was his most powerful weapon in his rape-culture arsenal.

The Coloniality of Rape in *Cereus Blooms at Night* by Shani Mootoo

His story over mine, his story will be his story, and my story is a waste of time – TLC

Although the act of colonization, and therefore rape, is understood to be an external force, it infiltrates every aspect of one's being from within. During the rape, the person in question loses her identity and absorbs the message being communicated through the act: she is without free will, she is no one, nothing but a body. In brief, the rape devours her, and she is what it has made her: nothing but a body in the image of rape. Once the violence of the act has passed, it is the messaging that stays; like coloniality of power or gender, the coloniality of rape culture is best conceptualized as a process, one that begins with residual effects the moment the rape has stopped.

After the brutal rape scenes analysed in chapter one, we will now read the aftershocks and symptoms of having experienced the violence of rape. Pohpoh's undergoes a slew of

symbolic vestigial effects post-rape in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, mostly starting after she murders her father and the imminent threat of rape has stopped.

As a child who experiences repeated sexual abuse, there is not much written between the scenes for us to interpret, however the absence of telling shows that Pohpoh was incapable of stopping the assaults from coming, submitting so as to survive from one instance to the next, never reporting the crime, and of course, she was never saved. When she is in her teens, she finally kills her father after the atrocious rape scene transcribed in chapter one. She drags him down the stairs to the basement where he is left to rot for decades (completely unmissed by her community). It is there that the narrative picks up on Mala's (Pohpoh's given name, the name she asks to be called after she kills her father) changed behaviour.

Once the sexual and physical abuse has stopped, Mala transforms into an estranged version of herself. She lives in her home for years on end in isolation, slowly going more and more out of her mind. But before moving into *madness*, let's first explore what occurs immediately upon murdering her father proceeding the final rape scene.

Immediately upon murdering her father, Mala transforms into a mad lady who self-exiles from her house, moves into her garden, and begins to lose her mind. Ambrose, an old friend of Mala's, tells the story to his son Otoh (originally born daughter, Ambrosia). He explains that he had walked into her home and witnessed a distressing scene. He had gone back the next day, but,

> she came flying at me with a stick, brandishing it and growling like an animal […] she chased me out of the yard […] she had no idea who I was […] she just screamed sounds that had no meaning, and she beat the air in front of her with that stick, and it occurred to me then, and the thought broke my heart, that my sweet one's mind had flown out of her head" (235).

By describing Mala as an animal-like creature who has lost her mind, Ambrose hijacks the narrative of self-defense against rape. Instead, Mala is a homicidal murderer, who is now acting

irrationally and savage-like. Her brave act of self-defense is convoluted in a way that works against her; rendering her a deranged savage in the eyes of Ambrose, the community he will inform, and the reader. This representation of textual violence does not come singularly, as from the beginning of the novel Mala is depicted with inhumane qualities—Mala communicates with animals and nature, loses her English language, has strange demeanour—Mala is depicted as frighteningly uncivilized.

Ambrose's passivity is a marker of his involvement in the violence Mala suffers. His "strategic ignorance is a means of developing a consciousness resistant to oppression" (May 110). This resistance to oppression May refers to violates Mala's right to proper justice and treatment as a full human being. Due to his inaction to the event he witnesses, Mala undergoes a deeper violence: one of erasure. Her story, untold, goes hidden into the darkness; she learns to be silent. Mala's character is sullied throughout the years as people strategically and negligently forget Mala's traumatic life story, and as earlier mentioned, her story transforms into a legend used as a cautionary tale for the generations that come after her.

Mala does not disclose the information to anyone about the rape. She remains silent about the violence as what extends as part of the rape is the complicit nature the victim feels as having taken part in the act. Passivity and submissiveness should not however be confounded with complicity. Mala keeps her secret for what could be interpreted in a plethora of ways, but most significantly it is the blatant disregard she would have been met with should she have come forth and accused her father of his heinous crime. Instead, she is stigmatized, sullied and unvirtuous. The disgrace and shame Mala is met with forces her into silence as society conflates victim with perpetrator and the blame shifts between the two as though they were co-conspirators in the act. By not coming forth, she is etched into the margins of society, isolated from her community and

cut off from any "normal" way of being as she confines herself to her garden and lives off her own harvest, limiting her speech practices to grunts and groans, and acting in other deranged and estranged ways.

The Lantanacamarans are aware of the violence Mala has undergone, but choose to ignore it, as it is easier to be negligent than to get involved. Furthermore, they use Mala's deranged behaviour as yet another excuse to pardon their inactivity, further proving that their awareness of her painful reality wasn't enough to propel them to defend or protect her, but rather treat her as a non-human. She was used as a warning sign to the Lanatanacamaran children of what may come if one's virtue is stained. Using her experiences to build a story around her that acts as a cautionary tale, "as though she were a whipping cane" (113), to the young children proves that community members were explicitly aware of the ongoing abuse Mala was living, however, they chose to construct the narrative that worked for them, enabling passivity. Depicting Mala as sinful allows for the complicit silence of the Lantanacamaran community members—which reinforced Mala's silence—as well as their active participation in her colonization.

Eventually, Chandin's body is found and Mala is accused of being a murderer and clinically mad. She is thrown into the Paradise Alms House as a crazy old woman, denying the version of events that took place which tell the true story of the crime.

Dehumanizing Mala in the process is an added effect of estrangement, but as long as the violence in Lanatanacamara is carried out intra-racially then the community willfully turns a blind eye. Lugones says: "the two colonized beings are turned against one another as "turning colonized people against themselves was part of the mission" (745). The two colonized beings turning against one another as expected; it was "part of the mission." She continues to

explain that this collaboration which sees that men who have been subject domination and exploitation (due to race) perpetuate the violence within their own racial category (i.e., women of colour) is a blind spot that allows us to "not see the violence" (1). The indifference is written between and in the overlapping of categories.

Mala's inability to report the violence she has been victim of extends beyond her voicelessness and reaches to the futility of speaking if no one is listening. In the essay "Trauma in Paradise: Willful and Strategic Ignorance in Cereus Blooms at Night," Vivan M. May explains that:

> the community colludes to create and defend socially accepted boundaries. Keeping the incest, and violent rape a secret, Mootoo acknowledges that the community values keeping the family unit intact over the individual safety of one being. Breaking the entire feudal and capitalist system of the family enterprise for one colonized Indian girl would turn centuries of colonial practice on its head. (127)

Through her intricately woven storyline, Mootoo exposes these colonial ideologies by never intercepting or punishing Chandin's crime. Through the narrative, the author exposes the hierarchy of Christian over Indian and male over female to excuse Chandin's sin as well as the community's negligence. She transforms Mala into a defenseless child, an animal-like creature, completely distorting her character and rendering her completely strange and unidentifiable to the reader to illustrate the violent erasure Mala, like many women who experience rape, undergo. By rendering Mala deranged, or as trauma theory would label it: hysterical, her community is excused for not stepping in and helping her. Being aware of Mala's painful reality wasn't enough to propel them to defend or protect her, instead, she was used as a warning to the Lanatanacamaran children of what may come if one's virtue is stained. Using her experiences to build a story around her that acts as a cautionary tale, as though she were a whipping cane to the young children proves that community members were painfully aware of the ongoing abuse

Mala was living, however, they chose to construct the narrative that worked for them, enabling inactivity. Depicting Mala as sinful allows for the complicit silence of the Lantanacamaran community members as well as their active participation in her colonization.

Bullying her, pelting her home with mango seeds, and using her persona to elicit fear in children, Mr. Hector recollects how through the generations, children would harass Mala. Choosing to remember or strategically forgetting about Mala, community members avoid thinking about her, neglecting the overt trauma they all knew about, but ignored.

> 'Serious though,' he continued, 'plenty people used to go and harass the lady, but, you know, is strange, I was never one, myself, to torment anybody. Children used to go and pelt she and pelt she mango and come back frighten-frighten but still excited that they break a window or sling-shot a bird. You know how children could be, na. It was the thing to do, and though I didn't take part in it, I didn't question it either. Hmmm. I never question them.' (68)

This silence is informed by established heteronormative gender hierarchy which tolerates (or worse, necessitates) the absence of activity as the "most obvious forms of discipline were through exclusion, marginalization and denial" (Smith 71). Ignoring the violence implicates each community member as co-conspirators in the violence, and just as Chandin's behaviour goes unpunished, as does the community's negligence. Instead,

Text has authoritative power to represent our world through echo, mimesis, and language. Cultural attitudes reflected back to us as readers, a tool with highly operational violence. Meijer explains that "sexual violence and racism, as acted-out realities, [are] deeply embedded in longstanding, continuously inscribed cultural attitudes which are textually transmitted and thus naturalized, made into the inevitable, the normal, the natural" (369). By seducing the reader into the naturalness of certain events (violence, rape), the author demonstrates how the reader, like society, is complicit in silencing a woman who has experienced rape.

Coloniality, different from colonization "refers to colonial power relations not limited to economic-political and legal domains, but also the epistemic, cultural dimension" (Verschuur and Destrmau 3). The full reduction of a Mala into a dehumanized, powerless, inferior being, stripped of personhood is achieved through the coloniality of gender as Lugones explains, damning the female gender and locking her into an inherent binary relationship of oppressor/oppressed.

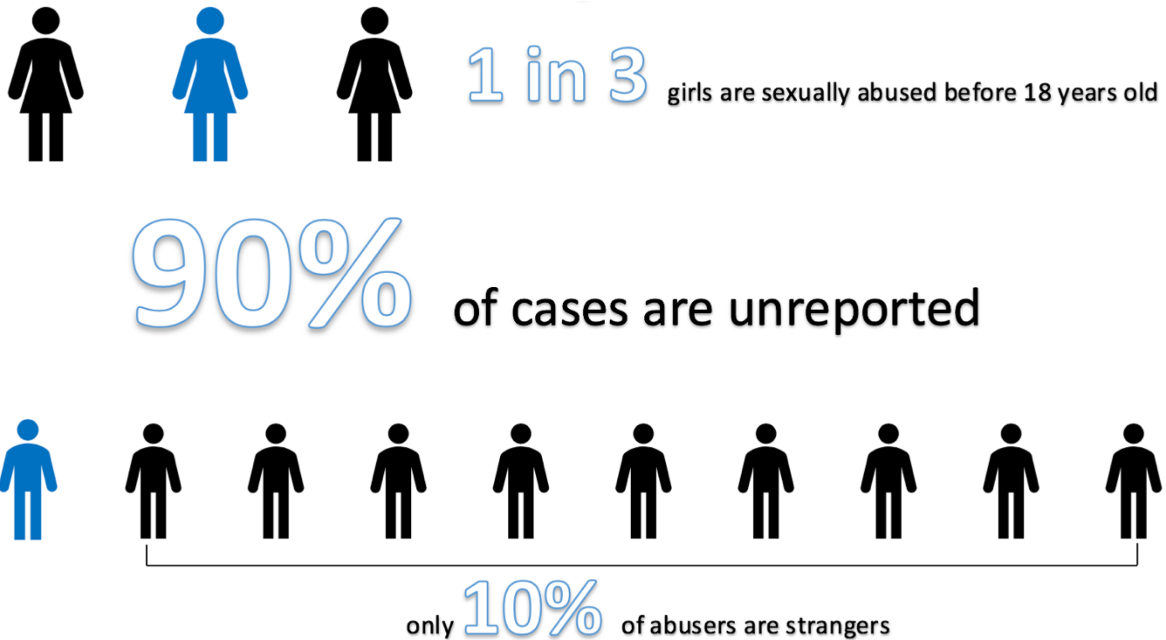
Mala's story is one that is not represented in the dominant discourse of society as her past is told and *mis*told by community members. As language serves as a colonial tool and imperial conquest to reflect the world views of the dominant culture, the colonized stories, past, culture, are not represented, nor does language afford them the vocabulary necessary to describe their reality (even if it did, who would listen?). As Mala retreats to her garden, she disengages with language completely and through this purging of intelligible sound—English language—her body swells with a heightened sense of awareness; an acuity and intuition that allows her to see in the dark, understand animals, communicate with plants, and experience the world with enhanced perception. When she is brought into the Paradise Alms House and ignites fear in those who are there, we learn that this fear comes from the nursing staff's inability to understand her as she no longer uses language to communicate: "Eventually Mala all but rid herself of words" (Mootoo 126).

Her insurgency reclaims her agency and subjecthood as she is released from the metaphoric shackles that have bound her. Margaret McLaren explains in *Decolonizing Feminism: Transnational Feminism and Globalization*, that decolonial approaches "must attend to the complexity and richness of diversity and experiences and identities without decontextualizing those identities from the processes of domination and subordination and

exploitation that create and maintain identities as social locations in a matrix of unequal power relations" (7)

> [W]omen are defined consistently as the *victims* of male control—the 'sexually oppressed.' Although it is true that the potential of male violence against women circumscribes and elucidates their social position to a certain extent, defining women as archetypal victims freezes them into 'objects-who-defend-themselves,' men into 'subjects-who-perpetrate-violence,' and (every) society into powerless (read: women) and powerful (read: men) groups of people […] Sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete, historical and political practice and analysis. (Talpade Mohanty 339)

Throughout the story, the female body is the site where sexual violence and coloniality of gender converge. We will explore this further in chapter four.



The Coloniality of Rape in *Rape Fantasies* by Margaret Atwood

Language is never innocent… – Roland Barthes

In "Rape Fantasies," a short story by Margaret Atwood, four women sit around a lunch table at work and discuss their rape fantasies while playing cards on their break. Here we read another

account of how rape etches the victim into silence. As in *Cereus*, it is unclear in "Rape Fantasies" as to whether Sondra's silence is symbolic of her inability to articulate her personal experience with sexual violence or for a lack of a "safe" space to speak because the public discourse of rape—as understood in this microcosm of this lunch-break, card-playing community—is limited and would be incapable of understanding, and thus handling, the gravity of the experience.

The scene of the story is simple: four women are on their lunch break from work and are playing bridge together. Although the mention of bridge is brief, the interaction between Estelle and Sondra, partners in the bridge game, reveals a tension that elucidates the conversation that will take place as the story unfolds. Before getting into the story, Estelle, the story's narrator, says:

> I had a bare twelve points counting the singleton with not that much of a bid in anything. So, I said one club hoping Sondra would remember about the one club convention, because the time before when I used that she thought I really meant clubs and she bid us up to three, and all I had was four little ones with nothing higher than a six, and we went down two and on top of that we were vulnerable. She is not the world's best bridge player. I mean, neither am I but there's a limit. (93)

This brief commentary on Sondra's poor bridge playing is an accusation that Sondra does not understand the conventions of the game, meaning their team will lose a round of cards because Sondra has failed to properly bid and follow other conventions of the game. Bridge is a highly structured game and it is not insignificant that the women sitting around during their lunch break are playing a highly coded, highly conventionalized game. This is proleptic of the conversation Chrissy invites as she closes up a magazine where she has just read an article entitled "Rape, Ten Things to Do About It."

Chrissy asks the women to share their rape fantasies. At first mention of the word 'rape,' Sondra's "head went round like it was on a ball bearings and she said, 'What fantasies?'" (93).

She then goes on to ask if by rape fantasy she meant "like some guy jumping you in an alley or something" (93). This situates rape as a violent act that occurs in a dark alley between woman and stranger. It is a subtle nod toward what the reader can understand as Sondra's context. Each woman then goes on to share her rape fantasy, which is mocked and prodded by the other women as they make light of their "rape" fantasies. Estelle points out at the end of her anecdote that "Sondra never did get a chance to tell about her rape fantasy" (97). Sondra's silence evokes a distinctive difference between her and the other women. Her inability to speak marks that hers might not be a fantasy, but rather a true account of her experience with sexual violence. Perhaps the other women spoke over her and so she couldn't find the space or time to tell her story, but more likely, the silence on Sondra's part is deliberately present so that Atwood could show the absence of something. The women at the card table are not cued into the subtleties and conventions of a rape narrative, and so Sondra's silence is coded and presents a lacuna in the text that only a more experienced player would be able to interpret.

A close examination of each of the women's stories shows how each of them would exercise their control over potentially being raped; an event where actual rape victims do not have control. This is but another issue with the casual conversation the women have during their break. Each "fantasy" is represented as a sexual fantasy with a stranger who comes in uninvited, leaving the women with time and conviction to talk her way out of it or enjoy what is transformed into consensual sex. Likening rape to a sexual fantasy shows how commonly misunderstood rape is in society.

Greta speaks first about a gloved man coming in through her apartment window and then he "well, you know" (94) she says. Skipping over the subsequent sexual violence and substituting it with "well, you know" shows Greta's excitement to share the sexual intrigue of it

all until it comes time for the actual act to take place. This inability to speak about the act as she glosses over it with allusion shows how little she knows of the topic. Chrissy interrupts and says her rape fantasy happens in the bathtub, again skipping the violent rape that happens once the bubbles overflow. By describing sexual fantasies with strangers, the women show how, in society, sex and rape are understood to have an inextricable tie. However:

> Rape is not motivated by sexual desire, they conclude. 'Quite the contrary, careful clinical study… reveals that rape is in fact serving primarily nonsexual needs. It is the expression of power and anger… [Rape is an act] addressing issues of hostility (anger) and control (power) more than passion (sexuality). To regard rape as an expression of sexual desire is not only an inaccurate notion but also an insidious assumption, for it results in the shifting of the responsibility for the offense in large part from the offender to the victim. (Venable Raine 211).

Rape is not a sexual act, it is a violent act of power that has nothing to do with sexual satisfaction and more to do with asserting one's power over the other.

Estelle goes on to tell several rape fantasies, all of which end with her having talked her rapist out of committing the atrocious act. She contends that if she can show her perpetrator her human side, then he wouldn't be able to go through with raping her. However, she also rebukes her own statement in quoting the article: "the statistics in the magazines, well, most of them anyway, they say it's often some-one you do know, at least a little bit, like your boss or something" (102). This shows an innate contradiction that in the case of imminent danger, showing your human side would be a lost cause, as the rapist, in most cases, already knows his victim intimately. This once again shows how danger is omnipresent and that no matter how well equipped one is for planning out what they would say or do to escape the emergency, threat lurks everywhere. The readers get a sense by the end of the story, that the anecdotes are all told in monologue in a situation where Estelle might be trying to talk her way out of potential harm, creating a human connection so as to avoid imminent violence with her interlocutor. She states at

the end that “once you let them know you’re human, you have a life too, I don’t see how they could go ahead with it, right? I mean, I know it happens but I just don’t understand it, that’s the part I really don’t understand” and “[t]he funny thing about these fantasies is that the man is always someone I don’t know, and the statistics in the magazines, well, most of them anyway, they say it’s often some-one you do know, at least a little bit, like your boss or something” (103). This might be understood as her plea to please not rape her, because ‘now you know me.’ Estelle’s examples each point to her talking her way out of each scenario shows the absurdity of her “outsmarting” her perpetrator. Although the story shows the ineffective ways women think they can outrun their assailant as well as the gross misunderstanding that a rape fantasy is in actual reality just a sexual fantasy with a stranger, the most significant takeaway is that every woman has thought about how it would happen if it happened, and what they would do if the moment presented itself.

“Rape Fantasies” shows a spectrum of misunderstanding when it comes to sexual violence. Most poignantly, the conversation centres around how to evade the act, but not what to do once the rape has taken place. This is marked by Sondra’s silence, as that is the only logical outcome to having experienced rape, yet one that goes unnoticed. This shows the limitations of both language and knowledge about rape and as we see in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, the fact that Mala never discloses the violence she has undergone, shows yet again that silence is a marked literary representation of showing the (non)consequences of the rape act.

The Coloniality of Rape in *Memories of the Future* by Siri Hustvedt

The personal is political

Before S.H. goes on to recount the events of her drive-by street assaults, coffee-shop manhandling, and almost-rape experience, there are grand patriarchal brushstrokes that paint her

into the gendered person she had become throughout her upbringing. Describing the reactions (or constricted behaviour) as the only ones she could be capable of, S.H. explains that every moment leads up to the person she is, each experience informing her way of being and thinking, "that's how one story seems to have bled into another," (198). In reconstructing her past through the reading of her journal and the active remembering that it sparks, S.H. pontificates the actions of her younger self and observes a keen distinction between her former self and the I of today. The question of why she waited at that elevator for Jeff still badgers her presently, but she realizes she will never be able to find the logic behind it all, "no, it can't be reduced to true and false, to algorithms or even fuzzy logic. It's not mathematics. There are rules, though, lots of rules and regulations that parade as the one true logic. The rules and regulations are about narration and authorship and who gets to tell the story and in what way," (304). Her authorship is her stewardship, she manages her past to make meaning and it is through the retrospective journey that she will gain access to a fuller, although subjective, understanding of herself.

Socialized from a young age with a gendered awareness of herself, S.H. recollects growing up and being told by her mother to pose for the camera, close her legs and "be a good girl." She notes this memory with significance to mark the impact it had on her knowledge of herself as a girl, female, feminine, and all that that implies. Her identity and sense of self was delimited by her gendered body, as it is clear that,

> the body is literally written on, inscribed, by desire and signification, at the anatomical, physiological, and neurological levels. The body is in no sense naturally or innately psychical, sexual, or sexed. It is indeterminate and indeterminable outside its social constitution as a body of a particular type. This implies that the body which it presumes and helps to explain is an open-ended, pliable set of significations, capable of being rewritten, reconstituted (Grosz 60).

Her female body was acculturated to align with patriarchal discourse, limiting all possibilities to her restricted category. She remembers watching her father, a doctor, perform heroic acts, and is

reminded of the time she helped him on a patient call. He turned to her and thanked her by stating that she would make a fine nurse one day. "But I wanted to be a doctor. I want to be a hero. I am a girl, and it is bitter," (131), she remembers thinking to herself as a young child. She draws a distinction she's learned that "men can smoulder with intelligence. Women aren't allowed such subtleties… a young woman's face acts as a barrier to her seriousness," (54), which she states reflectively as she is told time and again how beautiful she is. Slowly layering on her role as woman, body, other, S.H. takes the reader down the road of her childhood to explain why she would one day be the kind of girl who would wait by that elevator. She struggles between being a body, passive and written on, and being a subject, an agent who chose to wait by that elevator, as she is delimited by her own sense of credibility and reliability. She is not afforded the grace of mind, of intelligence, for she is body, woman. She has been trained to self-doubt, (she, the collective female).

S.H. attempts to understand why she was paralyzed at that elevator as well as why Jeff kept coming at her regardless of her cries and pleading: "I have wondered why he didn't hear me […] over and over, I have spoken and not been heard. Over and over, I have been looked through," (173). His desires are enacted upon while hers are silenced and she is rendered invisible. S.H. paints the picture of a world where rape culture is pervasive. She writes about how her body was a situation on multiple occasions as she was confronted by the man who verbally accosted her on the street in a sexually explicit nature as well as the sundry microaggressions where she was subject to the male gaze:

> I was often roused from my amnesia by the ubiquitous stare that belonged to no man in particular but to many men all at once, and which accompanied me down the street, and I remember that all that gazing at my body in motion had a stiffening effect on my limbs because it turned a simple stroll into an unwilling performance. […] I remember, too, that I was sometimes commanded to smile at a stranger on the sidewalk. (55)

and:

> Although I don’t remember young Aaron Blinderman with any precision, he was one of many, and the many have been conflated in my mind to become one, one sort of man I encountered again and again, a man, younger or older, whose eyes continually strayed from my face to parts below, a man who talked and talked and talked and asked me no questions, a helpful, smiling, knowing man who for reasons that baffled me seemed to believe I was incompetent in all matters large and small […] He, that reduction of many men into one man. (36)

Her reflection on the male gaze, the ubiquitous male who turned her ordinary actions into an “unwilling performance” is an acute awareness of her body as gendered. Regardless of age, men, young and old, have all talked to parts of her body (i.e., Blinderman in the coffee shop talking to her chest), is a poignant observation of how she has been reduced by men, “he, that reduction of many men into one man,” because the body is always in some social context, and always “has some social meaning and significance, [it] always gives rise to lived bodily experience, i.e. it is always somehow situated,” (Gatens 145)

Regardless of the assault—verbally accosted in the street or almost raped in her home—S.H. lives her body as an experience of gender and is made blatantly aware of her status as inferior as she later refers to herself as Nobody. After Lucy runs Jeff out of S.H.’s apartment, S.H. tries to diminish the event by saying that she is fine and that it wasn’t that bad because at least he didn’t rape her. Lucy replies by explaining that “the cuts and bruises don’t matter. Beating makes you feel dirty, like nothing. That’s what really matters,” (183). In a world where physical wounds take precedence over emotional or psychological ones, there is no space to fully comprehend the experience of sexual violence.

> Feeling like dirt was the problem. The bruises and the cut I sustained were of no importance. It was the man’s contempt and condescension I couldn’t shake off, his smiling confidence that my words were meaningless, that I did not deserve to be answered, that I was Nobody. The moment he grabbed me I lost my borders because

> he did not believe in them. What remained after that was an edgeless thing, abject flesh to be penetrated and tossed away. (185)

What remained after the near-rape was Nobody. Whether she had boundaries set up to protect her body was of zero importance to Jeff. He penetrated as he wished, disregarding her borders, because "he did not believe in them," and what was left was what he tossed away. "Just as there is a zone of sensitivity concerning the body's openings and surfaces, so too there is a zone outside the body, occupying its surrounding space, which is incorporated into the body. Intrusion into this bodily space is considered as much a violation as penetration of the body itself," (Grosz 79). In the case of being grabbed by the wrist in the coffee shop, called a cunt on the street or being almost raped in her home, S.H.'s body, the space surrounding her body, were intruded and violated, and that is as much of a penetration on the body when speaking of traumatic events.

This is where hierarchy of victimization comes into strategic play. Commonly heard retorts such as "it's not that bad," "at least you didn't get raped," or "you're lucky you're alive," are all ways of subduing the full venom of the traumatic act of sexual violence in all its manifestations. S.H. wrote in her journal the day immediately after the almost-rape where she states: "it's hard to overstate the indifference. I know I said to myself, You are alive, not dead. He did not rape you. You were not raped, but I had no feeling of relief, no gratitude, no nothing. It was merely an observation," (169). Because the truth is, on a scale of a little bit raped to violently raped, there is no bad to worse. It's all rape. It is all a violation of your bodily rights, your basic human rights. A blatant disregard for *no means no*. S.H.'s bodily integrity, her right to her body, her autonomy and right to choose were revoked, because Jeff exercised his power over her. His power to silence her.

> I coldly compared my minor misfortune to the monstrous happenings visited upon countless other people—rape, torture, lynching, war, starvation, flood, pestilence—the lectures I gave myself had little effect on the nauseating repetitions that had taken

> hold of me, not only the dream that split open seven nights in panic but my studious, obsessive return to the hours of Jeff. Again and again, I dissected the evening, its scenes, its dialogue, its violence, and again and again I was struck by my unconscionable helplessness and cowardice. (184)

S.H.'s shame toward her inaction, this lack of recrimination becomes the very minutiae she obsesses over. She is not solely preoccupied by the beating or the almost-rape, she is caught up in her shame, her helplessness, this disbelief at how and why she waited by that damned elevator. The disgust she felt toward herself became unbearable, and eventually she would "dissolve into something inchoate and unrecognizable," (186). Later in the narrative, when S.H. reads her journal and bears witness not only to the evening's events, but also to her former-self's reactions to them, she recognizes that although there is a wide gamut of human suffering out there, she must not disregard her own experience on the premise that she was only almost-raped. There is not a hierarchy of sexual violence. Rape culture's ability to normalize sexual violence is part of what infiltrates the mind of the abused. It's what silences her, shames her, hides her in the dark. But that is part of the knowledge that has been produced and absorbed into the fabric of societal discourse. It's what creates a pecking order that absolves rapists from their crime. But, as S.H. grows kinder to herself, she forgives her inaction, her helplessness; it was engrained, learned behaviour, and it was pounded into her with every passing sexist remark and violation of her body. How these experiences permeate the skin and change a person from the inside out is what makes every instance of sexual violence equal on the playing field. There are only individual experiences, and only *she* decides if it was in fact *that* bad.

At the time of the almost-rape, S.H. deliberates telling her friend Whitney what had happened and is jarred by her belief that Whitney would never have waited by that elevator. She is jealous that Whitney is a woman who would have acted in that moment, would've taken control and not allowed a breath of time to pass over her as she stood waiting by that elevator

simply because a man said, “a woman who comes with me leaves with me.” After many years have passed, and S.H. and Whitney continue to develop their friendship, S.H. is able, in hindsight, to see that Whitney may not have waited at that precise elevator, but that was only because she had waited at my other elevators:

> I couldn’t have predicted the meanings our friendship would accumulate over time […] I envied her, I envied her confidence and her courage and her clothes and her money, […] I knew she wouldn’t have waited at the elevator, and I envied her that fiercely. But I have come to understand that before we met, Whitney had waited more than I had imagined, had suffered more than I had imagined, not as I had but in ways I hadn’t understood because for me she was a being enchanted by the fairies. (299)

S.H. realizes that Whitney has lived her body as a situation, she has had to fight against the fixed narratives of her gender, she has had to shrink within the system, but like S.H. she has cultivated the strength over time to unravel it all, to stand in her truth and work against the stories that have been written about her (299). This parallel closeness S.H. and Whitney share, this connection that marks their femaleness, is a simple way of nodding at the omnipresent, widespread occurrence of sexual violence, this permeating rape culture, this implied awareness that all women have lived this shared experience.

There is a pivotal scene toward the end of the novel where S.H. is invited to a dinner party with a few intellectual literati of NYC. She sits across from a professor, Martin, and his wife, Sarah. At some point during the conversation, Sarah attempts to speak, and is quieted by the heavy hand Martin places on her shoulder. S.H. feels a keen sense of shame as she watches this display of misogyny unfold. She is upset that he gripped her in that way and even more upset that Sarah shrank down:

> I watched Martin lean back and extend his hand comfortably onto the back of Gorse’s chair in a gesture of relaxed colonization. I watched him smile at the painter of the invisible on his left. […] I felt a sudden pressure in my chest. Something was

> happening to me. I looked at him. Everything I had admired and enjoyed about him vanished. […] Sarah had not uttered a word since. I felt it as a burning silence. (233)

Most pointedly, it was that patriarchal hand on her shoulder, that gesture that symbolized his superiority that triggered something inside of S.H. to feel as upset as she did. An iteration of every molestation, sexual assault, and of course, the almost-rape, this shoulder-grab was more than an innocent gesture, it was loaded with memory for S.H. It was an act that "colonized" his wife, in the proverbial sense of muting her, censoring her, erasing her, governing her, and rendered her invisible. "Any part of the body is capable of sexualization, although which parts become eroticized is determined by the individual's life history (and especially the history of its corporeality). There is a complete plasticity in the body's compliance with sexual meaning." (Grosz 54). So, whether it was a phantom, transferred sense of trespassing, or a trigger that reminded her of all the ways she had been made to feel from all of the sexual violence she had lived up until that point, this is where S.H.'s experiences culminate and form transformative power. At that moment, Martin looks in S.H. direction and asks a rhetorical question, to which he appends the condescending and diminutive, 'my dear'. S.H. clears her throat and in a monologue akin to an intellectual swordfight, she pounces, swipes, defeats… and faints. This scene points to S.H.'s first act of reclaiming her sense of agency, her first successful step toward being somebody. We will explore this scene further in chapter three and four.

The Coloniality of Rape in *In My Own Moccasins* by Helen Knott

But my words like silent raindrops fell, and echoed, in the wells of silence – Simon and Garfunkel

As Helen Knott's memoir unfolds, the reader learns of the multiple sexual assaults she has experienced and how these offenses were able to be committed, almost accepted, as normal in her community. She explains that she was not armed with the proper information or language to

validate the feelings she had when confronted with sexual affronts and was met with colluding silence more often than not from people around her. Throughout the narrative, she moves us in and out of harassment, slut-shaming, victim blaming, and other normalized rape culture behaviours that doubled down on the initial traumatic abuse.

In the chapter one, we read the first incident of rape as Knott awakes in a hospital and her mother is crying over her. They had found her naked in a ditch and the police were saying it was rape. After a few days spent at home, Knott returned to school. Her thoughts were consumed by public perception: "I realized that everyone knew what had happened to me. Small towns leave no room for secrets. […] Their whispers zipped through the air and broke down whatever loose barrier I had placed around me before coming in. My skin stung with shame," (24). The notion that people knew what had happened to her exacerbated the trauma; there is no mention of compassion or sympathetic gestures by community members to quell the discomfort of reintegrating into public life after such a heinous crime was committed. Instead, ignoring it, and her, Knott returned to high school to walk the hallways as the shameful girl who had gotten herself raped.

The sexual nature of rape puts it in a category of its own when it comes to legal offenses. Unlike any other crime or traumatic experience, rape exposes the most private arena to the general public, lays bare the naked body for all to see and imagine. Eroticized, fetishized, sensationalized in graphic and explicit sexuality, rape is its own beast. Furthermore, within the trauma of rape, there is also a death. That is the living dead of the woman who must keep on despite the fact that her life, the one she knew, the person she was, has been extracted and erased, and is now gone forever. For Knott, the multiple iterations of sexual violence throughout her lifetime act as a palimpsest of trauma upon trauma, death to the already dead, further burying her

in her own lifelessness. However, in addition to the unique nature of rape, is the unique response of society (from legal to parental, from general to specific).

Knott experienced a second form of erasure as she was met with the omnipotent rape culture response: it's not that bad, it was your fault, it happens. She remarks that she:

> I learned that the world is unkind to '**sluts who get raped**." After all, **sluts can't get raped**. Sluts get told in so many ways that rape is inevitable. The words ***slut* and *rape*** used in the same sentence have the **effect of cancelling each other out**. Or rather, they cancel out the validity of the rape because people still point to the **sluttery as a reason why the slut got raped**. (184)

Knott brings in this element of slut-shaming, which is so much a part of our story as a gender, this notion that sexuality belongs to men and the female body is used to bring him to his ultimate pleasure. This notion of slut, a woman who has sex, perhaps a lot of it, is shamed for enjoying her body and her right to sex-positive sexual activity. However, all this is beside the point in the case of rape. Because, as we've concretely established, rape is not sex. Second, rape is never a woman's fault. The fault is always and only the fault of the rapist. By slut-shaming Knott into her participation in the act, if not seduction and "begging for it," as sluts do, she is shamed into taking on the guilt of a crime committed on her body, obliterating the line between experience and truth, because "shame is one of the most malignant weapons because it suffocates the truth," (Valenti 279). Society fragments sexual violence into sex *and* violence, compartmentalizing the crime to make it more digestible. However, failure to see the whole picture only works to further delegitimize the woman who experienced the rape.

In the same sentiment, Knott continues:

> If I was a different kind of girl with a different kind of story, and a different kind of heritage, maybe all the messages would have all been different. Maybe I would have just been a girl who got raped, which is hard enough on its own. But, at least I would have been allowed some space to feel somewhat outraged about the act of being raped. (184)

Positioning herself as the "perfect victim," Knott draws the intersecting oppression that works to make her body the site of political warfare. The rape of her body is a crime of power, one that has been internalized as the role of the Indigenous women in her community as rape and gender-based violence are daily occurrences and are always overlooked as *the way things are*: "I hated that being a Native girl made me feel like I was disposable and that it gave white boys the right to grab me whenever they wanted. I hated the skin that I belonged in and the people I belonged to. I didn't want to belong to them," (184). Rape culture takes on a whole other dimension when looked at from the perspective of a woman who lives at the intersection. Categorically speaking, Knott's gender and race place her at the crux of non-woman, non-human; therefore, her inferior, 'savage' status made her body one that belonged to those who felt like to dominating it. It was theirs for the grabbing.

> The U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ) reports that the rate of violent crime victimization of Native women is higher than for all other populations in the United States. These statistics estimate that the rate or violent crime perpetrated against American Indian females is 2½ times the rate for all females. More specifically, research by the Department estimates that one of three Native women will be raped, that three of four will be physically assaulted, and that Native women are stalked at a rate more than double that of any other population. These estimates reflect a constant danger in the lives of Native woman and a threat to the stability of Indian nations […] Nearly four in five American Indian victims of sexual assault described the offender as white. (*Sharing Our Stories of Survival* 4)

Bearing in mind that this information only reflects those crimes that are reported – therefore the numbers are highly underestimated – the fact remains that violence perpetrated against Native peoples, specifically Native women, is a direct mirror of the violence adopted from colonial times. In order to achieve expansion, Europe needed to dominate the Indian nations. In order to understand how to end violence committed against Native women, we must trace the line back through history to European colonization and settler colonialism; the forced removal, displacement and eradication of the Indian nations. We must trace the line back through history

to reveal the domination and subjugation that persists today as a direct reflection of colonialism and the ideologies invented during that era; an ideology that pushed the Indigenous into the margin, and the female Indigenous completely off the page: “Us Native women know how to disappear. It’s an art, really—we can disappear even when we are right in front of your face. Sometimes one purpose, sometimes out of safety, sometimes by force, and sometimes because we can’t see ourselves anymore,” (36). Completely invisible.

The second rape scene analysed in chapter one describes a scene where Knott cried and cried under the body of her rapist, begging for it to stop, but ultimately submitting for fear of what he could potentially do to her. Upon waking the next morning, he nuzzles up to her as though it had all been consensual. Rewriting the past from his perspective, ignoring her cries, he banks the evening as sex between lovers. His male conquest over her is unacknowledged for what it was, instead, he reinforces her silence by writing over the rape with the way he will remember it. From then on, it’s her word against his. That’s yet another danger of rape: a woman has to have the confidence and self-esteem to believe herself so that she can speak it. She has to believe her body. She has to find the strength to remember not to forget and to not be delimited by her own sense of credibility. Delegitimized by his version of the story, she has to rely on her body, the same body that has betrayed her multiple times in her life already. She has to remember that she played no role in the rape, she did not ask for it, she did say no, it is not her fault. In a later part of the memoir, Knott brings the reader along on her healing journey. She poignantly remarks that she: “struggled with this concept of ‘not my fault.’ It’s true that I believed the guilt and shame of rape should not be relegated to those whose bodies are violated. I believed this so much. … I was trying so hard to convince myself that it was never my fault…” (194). The mere fact that she has to convince herself that it wasn’t her fault attests to the reality

that the system is set up to have her self-doubt, feel confused, self-blame, feel ashamed, ostracized, guilty for a crime committed on her body, because she was there, she let it happen. The system infiltrates her thoughts and persuades her that maybe she doesn't remember correctly…

> I had always blamed myself for that night. Whenever I looked back I started on the *why didn't I*s and *I should have*s. I should have told him to sleep on the couch to begin with. Why didn't I see that he was crazy in the first place? Why didn't I call somebody? I should have fought harder. I should have called the police the next day. I should have said *no* one more time. New mantra: *No one had the right to harm me. Ever.* I wrote a letter to me seventeen-year-old self. I would later burn this later with a tobacco offering in a sacred fire so that Creator would hold onto the pain for me. (235)

Sexual violence is not a silo. It cascades from and into all aspects of a woman's life and wreaks havoc on her body. Sexual violence forces her into silence and the system is set up to reinforce that silence. In chapter three, we'll explore the changes Knott internalized due to the sexual violence she experienced. Addiction and other malevolent lifestyle choices that morphed her into a person who lived outside of her body, another by-product of trauma.

The Coloniality of Rape in *The Apology* by Eve Ensler

But he washed me ashore, and he took my pearl and left an empty shell of me – Fiona Apple

In her memoir/letter addressed to herself from her late-father, Ensler endows her father with a childhood context that would give rise to the type of character capable of committing rape on the body of his own five-year-old daughter. At some points in the address to herself, it would seem as though she uses the "bro culture," this bond of 'let boys be boys,' attitude to give reprieve for why Arthur would be a person capable of sexual violence. Although the narrative seems to make space for such an allowance, the reasoning behind humanizing her father is so that she can be all the more able to have him own his crime. By granting him the upbringing of an era when "boys

didn't cry" and a childhood replete with the "entitlement and the divine right of kings," (16) Ensler grounds his rage and violence in sociocultural shortcomings, because "adulation is a powerful offering, an aphrodisiac. It fills you with a wildly enhanced version of yourself, charging you with a much-distorted and overblown confidence, and aggressive overdrive that never rests," (16). By casting him as a self-reflective phantom capable of seeing what led him to his actions, she is not absolving him of his guilt, but rather giving him the ability to reflect upon it. In so doing, she makes space for herself to be seen, validated, heard, and unchained.

Public discourse about rape would have you believe that rape is this threateningly violent act that takes place in a dark alley with a stranger and a gun to your head (as exhibited in "Rape Fantasies"), when in reality, the statistics show that rape is most often committed by someone in close relation (either a family member or friend, for example). In *The Apology*, Ensler's experiences with sexual violence all take place in the home, in her bed, and each crime is perpetrated by her father. This uncanny, eerie sense of comfort and familiarity of the setting is intensified by regarding one's father as a dangerous predator, further displacing her sense of safety. Ensler's sense of reality, her sense of self and subject-formation, is built on this premise of tumultuous instability with danger lurking in even what is meant to be regarded as the safest of places. Ensler writes in her father's voice: "I imagine it was all you could possibly think about. When would I strike again, how would you protect yourself? Would you die? You lived in constant anxiety and dread, and these emotions eventually became the neurotic ingredients of your character," (76). The imminent threat that she lived in daily was the reality she grew up in. A parent, no less, is the mirror from which a child shapes her sense of reality; how we see ourselves and form our sense of identity. Ensler's being in the world was informed at once by a father who abused his power and by the trauma he inflicted upon her. Furthermore, "the body's

exteriority, the outside, the lived experience, constitutes what the inside incorporates or integrates into the body inside, gives meaning to the ways in which body understands itself," (Grosz 83). For Ensler, from five years old onward, her repeated lived experiences of sexual violence and physical abuse integrated into how she came to know herself and how her body understands itself as an object of predatorial prey: a tool used to fulfill the sexual whims of her father, an object to hold power over.

Quijano's reflection on subject-object relationship established between the dominant Europe and the oppressed "rest" expresses a hierarchical order of a social totality, a closed totality, whereby all parts are necessary to the function of society as a whole. Ensler's closed totality is demarcated by the microcosmic society of her family unit. Her father, the dominant Self, and her, the child, the oppressed rest. His domination is ordained not only by class-consciousness (the authority figure in the home), but also as the natural superior gender. "The coding of femininity with corporeality in effect leaves men free to inhabit what they (falsely) believe is a purely conceptual order while at the same time enabling them to satisfy their (sometimes disavowed) need for corporeal contact through their access to women's bodies and services," (Grosz 14). Ensler says in her father's voice that he was "a privileged, forceful man. I lived above this world, above criticism, above reproach. […] You were my property," (64), which delineates his collaboration in heteronormative hegemonic discourse. He was "brought up in a time when men were praised for controlling and withholding their emotions. This was the patriarchal blueprint," (68).

The hierarchical factor his gender obliged were categorized as ordained by nature as well as congruent with a historical logic which includes but is not limited to the production of knowledge as Arthur created Ensler's identity (with the descriptors he forced on her such as:

dishonest, liar, malicious, seductress, dirty, "fallen for your father's sins," and so on, as well as by the way having experienced rape shapes one's identity). By objectifying her through sexual violence and objectivizing her as a part of this logic of totality, he repressed her potential for becoming a full human complete with subjecthood. His incessant exploitation of her body and mind left a profoundly violent impact on her capacity to develop into a woman with agency and a sense of self. Her father "dispossessed her of her own singularity," as Quijano states of the colonized people. Ensler was only ever capable of being inferior.

In *Rethinking Rape*, Cahill defines personhood as self-determination and autonomy (169). She explains that the denial of personhood through rape is the denial of a person's right over their body, and I will include here, the mind. What Ensler's father had her believe about herself, this emotional and mental abuse, shaped her identity as much as the sexual and physical violence did. She was set up in this system that would obliterate any chance of her ever being seen or heard under her jurisdiction. Internalizing Arthur's beliefs as truth about herself, Ensler was denied access to her own subject-formation. The knowledge he produced about Ensler became the truth of who she was. Ensler writes: "How many times did I convince you that your reaction was an exaggeration and that what you were experiencing wasn't that bad […] Daily gaslighting. … Had you imagined everything? Was it really as terrible as you remembered? […] What was wrong with you? Why not just move on?" (84). To gaslight, as we will see in the next chapter, is to manipulate someone, by psychological means, to question their own sanity, their perspective, their sense of reality. The daily gaslighting Arthur subjected Ensler to erase all possibilities of her claim to agency. He beat her down to have her question her own sense of truth and he invalidated her by imposing his version of her on their family. She was belittled and ignored, and he turned her whole family against her so that they despised her. Arthur fully knew that this

hatred would contribute to her destruction. By gaslighting Ensler he made anything she believed of herself or anything she said to her family unreliable:

> **Credibility** is at once an amorphous and a specific thing. It's suffused with **intangible qualities: sureness, confidence, calm**. Those who have been **beaten down** and been made to feel like **worthless idiots** can never exude such assuredness and poise. They appear desperate because they are **desperate**. **No one has ever believed them**, and so they are compelled to resort to extreme measure: **emotionality, hyperbole**, **exaggeration**. They speak louder, they wave their hands. They appear hysterical. Eve, you started to embellish facts and exaggerate […] And so the project fulfilled itself and **you became the one who could not be trusted, the one no one believed**. I can see now how this **robbed you.** (60, emphasis mine)

Credibility, he explains is something "worthless idiots" don't have. People could not have believed anything Ensler would have said because he had beaten her down to such an abject place that her voice and opinions (even about herself) were neglected and ignored. He goes on to describe the extreme measure she would have to take in order to be listened to and how that would make her appear to be hysterical, and no one can trust someone perceived as hysterical. His full project, to completely obliterate his daughter, was successful. Even on his deathbed he says that he wants her to have nothing, inherit absolutely nothing, because "it was my last chance at abolishing you, eradicating you, punishing you," (5).

Ensler was the "visible outcome of his brutality." In her teenage years she became unresponsive and depressed. She "moved like a ghost," (50) and had become suicidal as she needed to feel relief from the "ongoing terror and dread," (53). Ensler chopped off all of her hair and "looked like a boy," she was reduced to "the daily mantra of 'I'm sorry,'" overnight her personality had changed. He says: "you became defiant and obstinate […] you never smiled […] you never asked for help or expressed any needs. You let no one in. Your pretty face lost its pretty," (53). He had, in a word, made her completely unrecognizable. It's is difficult to say that he altered her course, as she was only five when the violence began, but suffice to say that he

forced her into a darkness that would govern her life for many, many traumatic years to come. We will explore the traumatic elements of her lived violence in the upcoming chapter.

Looking forward…

Imagination and fiction make up more than three quarters of our real life – Simone Weil

As designated by type, sexual violence is conventionally categorized as trauma, and treated with prescribed psychoanalysis. Although this particular study plucks sexual violence from this restricted category, the next chapter will touch on concepts of time and memory through the lens of trauma theory.

Sexual violence shares with trauma the inability of absorbing the event in the moment of its occurrence, which leads to iterations, nightmares, fragmented memories, double life, dual realities, cognitive dissonance, dissociation, depersonalization, and other “symptoms” that have been studied thus far in the field of trauma. In all four of the texts that make up my corpus, there are ample time lapses, memory lags, and other tropes used to demonstrate trauma incarnate. Lived as a disembodied experience, rape is a shock to the body, the entire system shuts down, and so as it amps back up again, the violence recurs both as phantom traces on the body as well as immaterial fractures of the mind.

CHAPTER 3 – TIME, MEMORY AND TRAUMA

Listen as the wind blows from across the great divide, voices trapped in yearning, memories trapped in time – Sarah McLachlan

A study on rape would not be complete if we did not at least touch on the field of psychoanalysis and the exhaustive research that has been done with relation to trauma. Under the scope of psychoanalysis, the theories on trauma are extensive and cover a wide range of symptoms, syndromes, psychological disorders, and so on. Due to its sexual nature, I've argued that rape is a category on its own (not simply trauma that is sexual in nature, but rather its own classification entirely). With that in mind, there are parts of trauma theory that allow us to partially comprehend the extent of distress that arrests the person who experiences the atrocious crime, for example: ruptures in time, iterations, fragmented memory, and so on. It is of note that in this chapter, although trauma theory functions to explain time warps, memory lapses, and other issues such as dissociation and depersonalization, I do not contend with the curative and prescriptive methods of trauma therapy that are otherwise deemed as a one-size-fits-all model. Chapter four will demonstrate how Time—theorized as a linear conception—, and Memory—as an authoritative agent of past truths—, are western-invented concepts that are practiced as objective starting points, facts that are both ubiquitous and global; unlearning and decolonizing these facts will liberate conventional medical practices which cannot fully serve those who have experienced sexual violence. For the intents of chapter three, I will suspend the curative practice of trauma theory so as to solely focus on time and memory within the framework of trauma studies.

In its most holistic definition, trauma is described as: "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 12).

It is a medical condition that is both physical and psychological, as trauma is a reaction experienced by an individual who, upon exposure to overwhelming situations and/or emotions, is left with long-lasting damaging effects. Trauma leaves the person vulnerable to both psychological and psychical flashbacks, body memories, emotional memories, post-traumatic nightmares, and behavioural re-enactments. Being too catastrophic to integrate in the moment, the integration of the trauma is often delayed. This lapse in time between the event and the absorption thereof marks a unique characteristic of trauma, especially in context of sexual violence. This distinction in time between the moment of the lived abuse and its delayed, suspended coalescence brings back the binary of mind and body. If we look at the sexually explicit nature of rape, we can distinctly mark the trauma as a bodily experience. However, rape, unlike sex, may be experienced as a sexual act for the assailant (although it has been argued that it is more an act of power exerted through the sex act), but for the person being raped, the act is most often one of disembodiment. The person experiencing the rape act, whether consciously or not, submits her body to the danger, freezing up and letting her mind leave her body; a sort of 'fleeing' or 'escape' almost. This rupture in consciousness allows the body to absorb the impact of the experience, and only later, with the passage of time when the mind returns, can the experience be assimilated consciously:

> that traumatic recall remains insistent and unchanged to the precise extent that it has never, from the beginning, been fully integrated into understanding. The trauma is the confrontation with an even that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge—that cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge. […] and thus continually returns, in its exactness, at a later time. Not having been fully integrated as it occurred, the event cannot become […] a 'narrative memory' that is integrated into a completed story of the past. The history that a flashback tells—as psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and neurobiology equally suggest— is, therefore, a history that literally has no place, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in that present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood. (Caruth, 1995, 53)

Never having fully been understood, the shock of trauma, which supersedes any prior knowledge of a lived experience, returns in perpetuity. However, with the given time lapse, and the disembodiment, the actual complete story of the past literally does not exist in the consciousness of the person who lived it. The time in between the conscious and unconscious is where memory plays its leading role. This temporal paradox is where most symptoms will begin to surface, for example: nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, post-traumatic stress disorder, and so on. These are all versions of re-experiencing the trauma unconsciously, as access to conscious recall is denied (Caruth, 1995, 52).

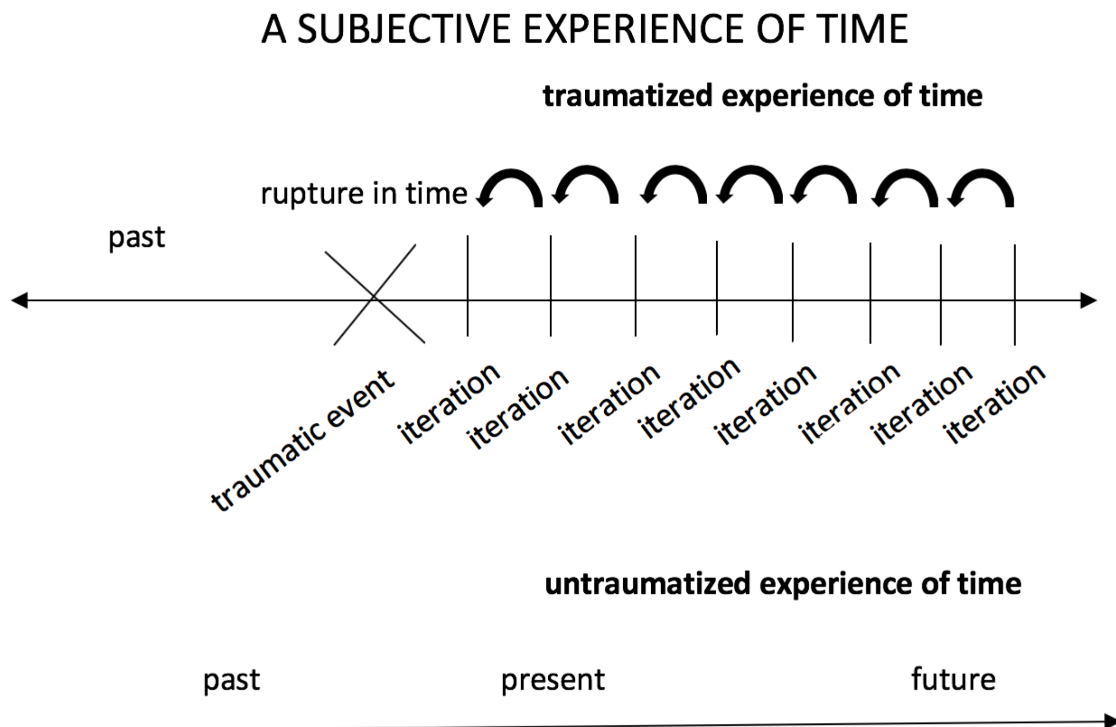
> Hypochondria, depersonalization, and hysteria indicate the overlap and the interchange between the organic and the psychical bodies through the mediation of the body image, they show that the biological or organic body is open to psychical meanings, able to take on meanings and accommodate intensities, to comply with and be of use to psychical systems. (Grosz 114)

There is an overlap and interchange which demonstrates that the body is marked by the traumatic event, but it is only upon psychical mediation that the person can fully integrate the intensity of the experience. Depersonalization or hysteria are examples of the mind's way of coping with the horror of the event. By exorcising the human qualities out of the trauma, or by unconsciously leaving your body so as to withstand the physical terror, the emotional numbing is a survival instinct that incidentally creates a time lag.

Moreover, the emphasis on the "complete story," the true story, places weight on the importance of exactitude—details, specifics and facts—as though a real version of a past experience could ever fully be derived at. Lugones explains in *Pilgrimages* that "time is reread over and over in the course of living outrageously in defiance of limits and limitations. The possibility of many senses to the past that one takes up in struggle is sometimes quieted down by anesthetizing and mythologizing history and place," (4). As a society, we privilege history,

objectively true stories of the past, but doesn't memory live outside of time? It is here where the inaccessible truth lives, not because it is inaccessible, but rather because there is no truth to past events, only memories of lived experiences. We will pick up on this later in this chapter when we explore how 'breaking the silence' feels more like confession, as well as how this emphasis on truth privileges the assailant over the person he assails. This is precisely where the traumatic event is compounded into more traumatic retelling, because for the person who experienced the event of sexual violence—the feelings, sensations, and emotions felt throughout the physical act—the unconscious assimilation of visceral, physical horror tells the story more accurately than the conscious, verbal articulation of the event. This bring me to my next point: sexual violence is an experience that defies the laws of language.

If we look at the traumatic event of sexual violence, we can understand how the delay in integrating the shock and horror makes space for traumatic re-enactments to occur.



These iterations or re-enactments are ruptures in time, repeated cataclysms that fold memory onto itself. Despite the attempts to remember, the mind actively tries to forget. In *Believe Me*, Jessica Valenti explains:

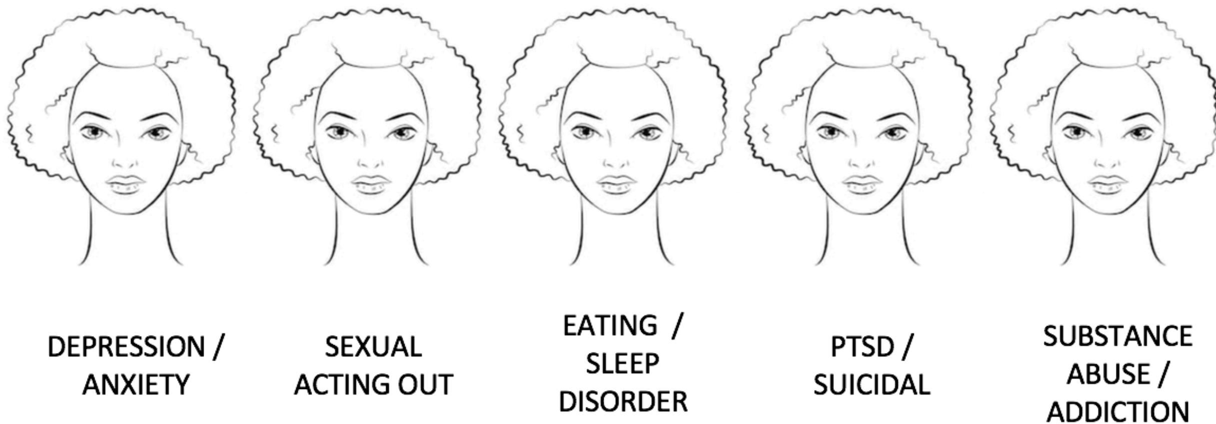
> Sometimes there is a time lag when it comes to coming forward and speaking what happened because identity needs to play catch up. Memory tries to purge it, but when memory is fully steeped, and you've relived it hundreds of times, and starts to take form as panic attack, anxiety, insomnia… the act keeps resurfacing and needs to leave the body and mind. Needs to be spoken in order to be gone. (279)

The cognitive dissonance between past, memory, and traumatic memory, makes it difficult to locate the experience in time as experienced in time. In *Not That Bad*, a compilation of personal essays about rape culture, Nora Salem's essay "The Life Ruiner," authentically describes this feeling:

> My biggest fear is that I'm not actually real. Of all my nightmares, the absolute worst are the ones that wake me in a panic and force me to pace my bedroom in search of some undeniable proof of my existence. I riffle through drawers and shelves, pull out pieces of jewelry that my mother passed down to me, look at books in whose margins I've written. *Yes, there you are*, I tell myself. Perhaps the most horrifying thing about non-consensual sex is that, in an instant, it erases you. Your own desires, your safety and well-being, your ownership of the body that may very well have been the only thing you ever felt sure you owned-all of it becomes irrelevant, even nonexistent. (151)

Here we read how Salem's inability to integrate the experience in consciousness, or in real life, transfers to her feeling as though she herself is not real. She has to remind herself upon waking from distressing nightmares that she is real, she is there. The disembodiment that strategically allows you to flee in the moment of sexual violence is the exact disembodiment that severs your bodily connection every moment thereafter. The only thing we all know for certain is that we exist – I look down, I see my hands typing these words, and there I am. I consciously know this, because I physically feel it and vice versa. However, the prolonged, almost irreversible, feeling for someone who has been raped, is that she no longer exists. It is true that the person she was

prior to the incident no longer exists. Even when she finds her way back to her body, the person who experienced the rape will never exist as she previously knew herself. And, until she reclaims that body (which we'll explore in chapter four), the connection between body and mind will remain severed, leaving room for symptoms to manifest in that unhealed gaping space.



In *Sharing Our Stories of Survival*, there is a section that compares Fact versus Myth about sexual violence. One fact is demystifying that there is one stereotypical 'perfect victim' as well as one way to respond to trauma:

> FACT: There is a continuum of response to sexual violence, ranging from a very expressed response to a very controlled response. How a person responds to a traumatic event such as a rape depends on many variables such as her socialization, how she generally handles crisis situations, the type of support she's receiving, the length of time that has elapsed since the rape, and other factors. There is no right or wrong way to respond to such a violent assault as rape. The fact that a survivor does not have visible injuries may be due to the fact that she cooperated with the perpetrator in order to minimize the physical trauma or the possibility of being killed. Whatever the victim did in order to survive the rape was the right thing to do. Cooperation in order to survive is not the same as consent. Consent is not possible when there is fear, force, or coercion. (183)

One response that seems to be ubiquitous across the board (although in varying degrees), is silence. The silence that blankets her experience, during the act and after, can be explained by

her lack of fully comprehending what occurred and therefore cannot be articulated. Like a secret she keeps, the trauma finds ways out of her mind and body and manifests in a plethora of ways. In the literary analyses, we will explore the physical, emotional, mental, behavioural, and interpersonal symptoms that arise, and how there are a few common factors in how the body and mind of someone who has lived through a traumatic experience communicates said trauma. Trauma is characterized by its inarticulability, inexpressibility, unrepresentability, because trauma defies conventions of reality and thus the codes of language. We know from trauma theory that when the traumatic event occurs, significant information of the trauma bypasses the frontal lobes so the experience of exactly what happened cannot be named or ordered through words, because our language centre has been compromised. The trauma—without language—is stored as memory, fragments, body sensation, images, emotions, and so on. It is as though the mind disperses and so, essential elements of the story get separated, floating around without any presumed common meaning. We lose the full story and we never complete the healing. But the pieces aren't 'lost,' they are simply rerouted arbitrarily, and they surface unconsciously. This is the verbal and non-verbal trauma language that we will explore through literature.

Trauma in Cereus Blooms at Night by Shani Mootoo

Every moment happens twice: inside and outside, and they are two different histories – Zadie Smith

Like most traumas, the rape experience is triggered and iterated anachronistically throughout both the real-life experience and the literary representation. The protean nature of time shows how memory of the act is subject to modification, and *Cereus Blooms at Night* offers both a synchronic and diachronic account of the act, as the narrative goes back and forth in time, layered upon Mala's memories and imaginings of going back in time and changing the past as a

more confident, self-determined Pohpoh. Her constant reliving of the past confirms that there is no past trauma, but rather a compulsively reiterated ongoing trauma, taking on multiple forms. She relives her childhood trauma recurrently as the past presents itself time and again. The present simply an iteration of the past. The line between past and present is indistinguishable, they meld together. She can't decipher between the two, because one continuously and anachronistically waits for her to relive it.

In order to confirm the complexity of the trauma, memory and time continue to reveal its circuitous and perceptual quality, and so, the layering of past and present show the long-term effects of rape on the wiring of the brain as time is transformed into a subjective experience that allows trauma to penetrate and time to warp. In *Cereus*, Mala's memory and imaginary journeys backward act as literary tropes to show the diachronic quality of the traumatic experience. The significance is twofold as Mala's inner monologue, which corresponds more to awakened dreams, marks how her silence is not only her inability to speak the unspeakable, but also how a voice must go somewhere, in Mala's case, her voice is directed inward, haunting her thoughts. Because the experience is interiorized, repression begins, subjectivity is lost, and the iterations start as the reverberations of trauma must be manifest somewhere.

Theorizing rape as a process, Caruth explains in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, that: "If traumatic experience, as Freud indicates suggestively, is an experience that is not fully assimilated as it occurs, then these texts, each in its turn, ask what it means to transmit and to theorize around a crisis that is marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness" (5). Marked by the knowledge that her father raped her, Mala was unable to assimilate the severity of trauma that was endured in the act. However, years later, when Ambrose visits her in her garden, she is compelled to show him

where she hid Chandin's body. As she re-enters the house for the first time in many years, she catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror:

> There was a long mirror, the largest she had ever seen, in a carved gold frame on the wall, and as she hurried by she saw a tiny, ragged girl. Pohpoh stopped. She had never really thought of herself as tiny or mangy before. Her confidence slackened. She looked closely at sunken eyes. She had never noticed that they were so large and set so far back in her skull, shadowed in comparison to the rest of her features. Pohpoh wondered which was her true self—the timid, gaunt, unremarkable girl staring at her, or the one who dared to spend nights doing what no one else dared to do. The image of her father about to lower himself on her body charged at her suddenly, complete with smells and nauseating tastes. She gasped loud enough to startle herself and pinched her arm hard, an admonishment that she dare not lose her concentration. (158-159).

Mala, in a dream-like memory, revisits herself walking through the house, but time eclipses, and there, she experiences disembodiment as she sees Pohpoh, the unremarkable "ragged girl" with sunken eyes staring back at her. She witnesses, in her mind's eye, the scene of her father bearing down on her, and her heightened senses startle her, she must pinch herself to half-awaken, and steer back on her path of reconstructing a more palatable past. The fluidity of the past, as well as Mala's ability to change it, demonstrates that the traumatic event can never fully be defined, there is movement to and from memories that will add information and memories that will subtract: "Long into the morning, Mala remained in the yard […] She kept her eyes closed. Fortified by the night's display she wove memories. She remembered a little and imagined a great deal…" (142). When the police finally arrive to demarcate a crime scene in her home, Mala re-enters the past yet again: "Fear was breaking her, was unprying her memory. She was reminded of what she usually ignored or commanded herself to forget: her legs being ripped apart, something entering her from down there, entering and then scooping her insides out. Her body remembered. Mala remembered. […] it had always been this way for her," (174). She can usually command herself to remove parts of her memory that are too unbearable to remember,

like her father entering and scooping out her insides. The engraving of these fragmented memories is what continues to cause flashbacks—the sudden intrusive re-experiencing of a fragment of a traumatic, unverbalized memory—Mala splits her experience off from her mind, known as "emotional numbing," to avoid the gigantic feelings that accompany actual integration of the experience, however, as the narrative continues, Mala's memory illustrates that even though her mind attempts to further fragment the past, and re-assimilate in a manner that would allow her to digest it, "her body always remembers."

Mala's memories are impossible to erase, and so the images that replay in her mind, transform into bodily sensations like smell, touch, taste, and even pain. They transform into heightened, uncontrollable emotions. When Mala is brought to the Paradise Alms House, Tyler, her nurse, describes: "She opened her eyes and seemed now to be almost afraid to close them again. Tears rolled from her face. I began to talk to her, to tell her where she was and who I was, but on hearing my voice she began a deep, fearful moaning. It did not take me long to realize that my movements, no matter how slight, terrified her," (13). All those years of childhood trauma, compounded by years of neglect in her garden, manifested into a person who is terrified even by the slightest touch. She is later reminded of a smell reminiscent of "the shrill severity of soured secretions" of her father's genitals, as well as the heightened sensations she exhibits as she transformed into a more animal-like being capable of communing with nature. Tyler notes that she has begun to "understand some things about her and I think she does not like things in nature to be hurt. To her, the flower and the plant would be both suffering because they were separated from each other," (69), which picks up on a theme Pohpoh learned as a child: "even plants could show signs of trauma." As Tyler fills in the lapses of Mala's memory to transcribe her story, he traces a line from past to present that marks how the trauma of repeated sexual violence left a

blueprint on her body, both in heightened sensation as well as her “devolution” into nature, a sign of her inferiority, madness, and non-human status (per chapter two).

Mala has lost all capacity to speak. She has auto-muted since the day she murdered her father, left her home and blocked herself off in her garden for the subsequent couple of decades. When she enters the Paradise Alms House, Tyler begins to transcribe her story in an effort to find her long-lost sister Asha. Although she cannot speak with words, she still communicates with Tyler through grunts and groans, and bodily gesticulations (all of which we will revisit in chapter four). Her inability to speak with words is yet another example that demonstrates how her traumatic memories were not assimilated consciously through the psyche with language, but rather imprinted on her body as sensations, strong sensations that could not be cognitively understood in the moment, but with the passing of time, leave their effect on the mind:

> Unlike the body, however, the barrier of consciousness is a barrier of sensation and knowledge that protects the organism by placing stimulation within an ordered experience of time. What causes trauma, then, is a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind’s experience of time. (Caruth 63)

Mala’s childhood experience of violence has been written as a trace into the fabric of her being, beyond her cognitive grasp, but, “time warps, curves in the emotional space, as unpredictable as the shock that created them” (Venable Raine 55). “What returns to haunt the victim […] is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known” (Caruth 6). Living in atemporality, the traumas that float around in her unconscious mind are not bound to chronology, but rather are perpetually repeated, unaltered and independent of external reality.

“Kierkegaard said somewhere that life can only be *understood* backwards. Perhaps he should have said life can only be *lived* backwards. It seems to me we live backwards because we

remember. But remembering is not a return to a fixed point. Remembering is a re-creation that gives meaning to the present, itself a moving point" (Venable Raine 36). In its most holistic definition, trauma is described as: "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 12). In *Cereus*, Mala is subject to many anachronistic fits of memory where she witnesses Pohpoh running through outdoor gardens and escaping the imminent threat of violence. What readers understand as madness or loss of reliability as Mala blurs the lines of reality with imagination is in fact a subjective remembering as the trauma lives inside of her, the past undermining the present, re-enacting her experiences emotionally and visually with horrific, nonsensical fragments that turn the past into the present, because her memory is not only being remembered, it is being relived. Mala's unconscious mind relives the trauma in the reiterative appearance of hallucination: "the experience of an individual traumatized by his own past—the repetition of his own trauma as it shapes his life" (Caruth 8).

Trauma in *Memories of the Future* by Siri Hustvedt

When I pronounce the word Future, the first syllable already belongs to the past. When I pronounce the word Silence, I destroy it. — Wisława Szymborska

S.H. inhabits two temporalities throughout *Memories of the Future*. Her journal is a fixed record of the past and her physical body—the narrator—inhabits the present. Notably, the space between the two times also exists as a temporal mode: a space for memories in an anticipated future. Her present self reads her past self with a certain sense of uncanny recognition:

> I greeted it as if it were a beloved relative I had given up for dead: first the gasp of recognition, then the embrace […] the little book of two hundred pages has been

> invaluable for the simple reason that it has brought back, to one degree or another, what I couldn't remember or had misremembered in a voice that is at once mine and not quite mine anymore. (11)

Actively witnessing her assaults as written by her former self in her journal from 1979, brings an added element to S.H.'s traumatic experience. She plainly states that throughout her narration, she is "turning around and following the timeline in the other direction because I can't imagine time without spatial metaphors—without backward and forward…" (29). Aware that time is subjective and can be experienced forward and back, S.H. also uses time as a way to suggest that her narration, her memory, is not reliable, but where her memory is potentially faulty, the journal—the person she once was but is no longer—has a record of true events as experienced in time (even those, she suggests, are subject to the whims of choice in the moment of recording said 'truths'). But, S.H. also wrangles with the concept of time as she poignantly reflects that "if the past is not somewhere we can visit, then to wring truths from it is like squeezing nothing from nothing," (173). Although S.H. explains that the entries about her few experiences of sexual violence were recorded immediately after the fact, she also admits that she is liable to produce gaps in knowledge that can only be understood as the effects of time on memory, "and remember time, as you know, is shot through with imagination," (277).

The unconscious is not subject to time as the conscious mind is: "The processes of the system Ucs [unconscious] are timeless; *i.e*. they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time, in fact bear no relation to time at all. The time-relation also is bound up with the work of the system Cs" (Freud 135). Although her narrative is located in time (the past, the present, and the past recorded to be witnessed in the present), the relationship S.H.'s trauma has to time is bound to fragmentation and atemporality, as the occurrence continues to be lived statically in the writings of her journal, unconsciously in her nightmares, and viscerally through

trembling hands as she relives the memory (as S.H. reads her journal she narrates: "[w]hen I reached the words 'Aaron reaches across from his table and grabs my wrist,' I began to tremble. I do not mean this figuratively. My hands shook as I read. What made this asshole think he had the right to seize my wrist," (37). The traumas that float around in her unconscious mind are not bound to chronology, but rather are perpetually repeated, unaltered and independent of external reality. However, her journal is a frame, it is a boundary that contains, defines and delimits historical reality; the past tells us the limits of our knowledge. "The attempt to gain access to a traumatic history, then, is also the project of listening beyond the pathology of individual suffering, to the reality of a history that in its crises can only be perceived in unassimilable forms," (Caruth 156), the precise act of trying to articulate this incomprehensibility is where the rupture of knowing the past (deriving at a singular truth) occurs. S.H. is severed in time, she lives the past and the present concurrently, both separate realities. Due to the fact that the past has yet to be fully assimilated, her present body and mind boomerang back and forth in perpetuity.

S.H. experiences multiple instances of sexual violence, from grotesque barkings in the street, arms grabs, and almost-rape. Incapable of fully integrating each experience, her body receives and manifests the pain:

> the ache just beneath my rib cage I carried around with me everywhere, although I never knew what had caused it—a physical reminder of my vulnerability and never-ending guilt, I suppose, a physically implanted token of innumerable nameless hurts inflicted on me in the past and which I had inflicted on other, hurts that would surely return in the future. (26)

This pain under her rib cage that she refers to several times throughout the novel, is a physical reminder, as well as a physical symbol of transplanted memory into the body:

> Freud is curious to know how the subject becomes cognizant of thought processes and what the distinction between thought and perception is, given that endogenous sensations are not received by various sense receptors in that way exogenous stimuli are. How is consciousness of our own thoughts possible? … If internal processes

> such as thinking are to become conscious, they must first of all function like external perceptions. This occurs through memory traces. … We must discriminate between endogenous and exogenous stimuli, that is, between reality and what, being internal, passes as reality. (Grosz 29)

Elizabeth Grosz continues:

> By being expressed in language, thought processes can become perceptual contents available for consciousness. It is only through such a mode of externalization that these thoughts have any 'reality,' […] Freud is really asking about how to distinguish the 'objective' from the 'subjective,' veridical perception from hallucinatory states, mind from body. As he makes clear, however, this kind of definitive separation is never possible: the psychical cannot be unambiguously separated from the perceptual. (30)

Regardless of the truth behind the way she recorded the events from the almost-rape that occurred the night before in her journal, it is virtually impossible to distinguish endogenous from exogenous, subjective from objective, there is no possibility of definitive separation. What we experience and what we perceive as experienced are impossible to separate.

When S.H.'s arm was grabbed by Blinderman in the coffee shop, she initially perceived it as a microaggression, an invasion of bodily space and integrity, but as time unravels, and S.H.'s consciousness is raised, the sequence of traumatic events folds into itself, and this arm grab that was first felt on her body, is later triggered by that elevator and again at the dinner table. Repressing the initial impact of the event, the shock is absorbed by her body but seeps into her mind. The recurrent pattern of violence and abuse that fills S.H.'s life is a form of repetition of the same in which, according to an uncanny principle of similitude, dissimilar persons and events turn into versions of each other. The repetition of the same is based upon the similarity between differences: one event is experienced as repeating another from which it differs but which it also strongly resembles (Freeman 73).

The unconscious paralysis and her passively waiting by the elevator later haunt her as the catalyst of trauma. The fact that S.H. was violently thrown into a bookshelf and almost-raped in

her home haunts her doubly as she focuses on the stories that led her to become the person who waits by an elevator. Obsessing over her complicity is her unconscious way of repressing the full violence of the occurrence. However, as the nights pass, the nightmares tell the story that her mind refuses to acknowledge. “What returns to haunt the victim […] is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known” (Caruth 6). As S.H. suppresses the magnitude of the violence she experienced, nightmares begin to haunt her:

> For seven nights in a row, she will **wake in terror** after a dream. It is always the same **dream with no images**, just the **explosive sensations** of her head against a hard surface and **no wind inside her**, and a **malevolent presence** moving toward her. When she has calmed herself, she understands that **she is reliving the assault**. […] Years pass, and one night, **it returns**. Years go by again, and she dreams the terrible dream for a second time and then after more years, **it strikes again**. Three times. As far as she can tell, **there is no rhyme or reason for this revenant**. The **ghost’s meaning lies in what she can’t know, buried in the speechless truths of her body that have no one to narrate them**. (172, emphasis mine)

For a week following the almost-rape, S.H. wakes in terror from a dream that has no images but rather is a visceral force of violence that feels like explosions throughout her body. She feels the terror of evil pursuing her, and only when she brings consciousness to this unconscious dream, will she be able to remind herself that she is reliving the assault. After a week’s worth of fitful nightmares, the haunting dreams subside, however years later, with no explanation, they return. She cannot understand the relevance of their return, as they seem to come and go without her ability to control it, but she does acutely reflect that her body is communicating a truth, it is expressing the meaning of the event, in a way she could never consciously express with words. “More than anything, I want to banish him from the landscape of memory, annihilate his presence in my mind, but that is not possible,” (176). Try as she might to rid herself of the

trauma, to forget his face and his name (as she began to solely refer to Jeff as her Almost-Rapist to refrain from saying his name), her body remembers.

These dreams are a fitting example of trauma that has not yet fully been understood, and so, transforms into fear or anxiety which triggers her unconscious mind into reliving the trauma in the reiterative appearance of hallucination: "the experience of an individual traumatized by his own past—the repetition of his own trauma as it shapes his life" (Caruth 8).

> 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' (PTSD)—in which the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them. This singular *possession by the past*, as we have seen […] extends beyond the bounds of a marginal pathology and has become a central characteristic of the survivor experience of our time. Yet what is particularly striking in this singular experience is that its insistent re-enactments of the past do not simply serve as testimony to an event, but may also, paradoxically enough, bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred. (Caruth, 1995, 151)

S.H. experiences both the few instances of molestation and almost-rape with great intensity; these memories float to the surface of her mind unexpectedly and trigger fear, anxiety, and nightmares. These moments exist independently of her, waiting for her subject to relive them. She, in the atemporality of trauma, can go back to the memory as though it lived in suspended animation. S.H. surmises the traumatic trace the abuse has left on her psyche and body; one that is triggered (in)voluntarily and which defines her as she looks back at her past to construct her identity. The incident of Martin's misogynistic heavy hand comes back to haunt her: "I close my eyes and feel the hand on my shoulder. I feel the large fingers squeeze the bones beneath my shirt and skin, and I cannot breathe. It is a gesture of authority, of correction, of superiority, of condescension, and I cannot breathe, and I want to kill him," (261), and this memory acts as a trigger of iterated trauma, one that has been repressed but surfaces time and again. The trace of his phantom hand touching with authority and condescension is felt on her skin squeezing her bones. Incidentally, Martin's large fingers never touched her shoulder, he squeezed the shoulder

of his wife Sarah. However, the transference of misogynistic aggression felt on the collective woman is enough to make S.H. not breathe.

S.H. notes that “one story leads to another and another becomes another story and many stories are somehow the same story,” (305), because the trajectory of time for someone who has experienced trauma is a constant reliving of iteration upon iteration upon iteration.

In an attempt to gain control over her nightmares, S.H. plays with a switchblade, the Baroness, that Fanny gave her for self-protection. In her apartment, she feels the residual evil ghosts and evildoers. She rehearses simple gestures of stabbing the would-be-rapist “whom she had stopped naming even in her own mind.” She plays the scene of almost-rape over and over, but this time, she would have a switchblade on her:

> This time she backed him against the wall, knifepoint at his Adam’s apple […] she watched the tall man shake with terror, and his fear filled her with happiness. And this time she slashed him right along his ugly shaving cut… and imaginary crowd of villains whom she stabbed with her knife as she rehearsed. […] She took vengeance on the disembodied phantoms of her past. (247)

In her imagination, she would have watched him shake with terror and she would’ve been filled with happiness. This fantasy of reliving the past but avenging her perpetrator is her way of doing away with the phantoms that haunt her dreams. However, like most people who wish to be confronted by the same traumatic event, so they could have a do-over, this fantasy shows more of how the event affected her so profoundly than it does her potential bravery should it recur. “We are all wishful creatures, and we wish backwards, too, not only forward, and thereby rebuild the curious, crumbling architecture of memory into structures that are more habitable,” (38). This notion of reconstructing a more inhabitable past is precisely where we will pick up in chapter four.

Trauma in *In My Own Moccasins* by Helen Knott

You must go on. I can't go on. – Samuel Beckett

Helen Knott's account of trauma comprehends a lifetime of abuse which manifested into lifestyle symptoms such as substance abuse and addiction. There are so many instances of trauma we could focus on, however, since her story has been recollected in form of memoir, I believe it best to use Knott's reflections on her own trauma with part of a poem she has in her book. The following is a fragment of Part Two of her poem:

No more time lapses,
and moments stalled in recollection.
No more recycling of
apprehended seconds.

No more trying to scrub clean
where soap just can't reach.
No more sleepless nights,
and post traumatic dreams

No more pointing
fingers back at ourselves
No more playbacks of
how it felt.
No more donning loose clothing
and dimmed-down smiles.

No more feeling like bodies
and mere spaces waiting to be defiled.
No more being afraid to be yourself
and attract the wrong attention.
No more given over to
these ill intentions…

No more girls.
Women.
No more spreading of stubborn legs,
and breaking of brave hearts.
No more smashing strong souls,
or torches or trauma being passed on.
No more telling little girls to be strong,
and being raped by men we know.

[…]
No more acting like it hasn't happened,
doesn't happen,
isn't happening now,
to the women that we know. (197)

In the first stanza, Knott invokes a metaphor of time lapsing and seconds being recycled as a way to attribute iterative memory to the condition trauma presents. She brings this image of repetitive time through the cadence and rhythm of line, the almost lyrical feeling of echoing words. Throughout the poem Knott uses a language of traumatic sexual violence that conjures an image of a sullied girl; she is so dirty she can't be scrubbed clean, stains left behind on the fabric of her being where soap can't reach. The nightmares she conjures bring in the common theme of restless sleep, haunted dreams and terrors that infiltrate the sleeping mind.

The second part of the fragmented poem speaks of rape culture, silence, and shame. Knott tells the story of fingers pointing back at ourselves because of the way we dress, adducing victim blaming and being objectified as "bodies / and mere spaces waiting to be defiled." As though a woman's lot in life is determined by her body. She goes on to show the long-lasting effects of erasure, of having the life beat out of her not just as a metaphor, but as a literal abuse of her identity being pounded out of her body, leaving just a shell of her former self. However, with a certain sense of resistance, she uses words like "brave hearts" and "strong souls" to speak of these girls who have been brutalized. This sentiment of resilience and resistance is echoed in her use of the words 'no more' at the beginning of each sentence. Knott takes an active stance with her choice of words and portrays a woman whose state of mind will no longer comply with silence; no more letting these things happen, no more pretending not to see it, no more making this world a space where this is normal, no more being silent. By stating no more, she creates a sense of fact that it once was the norm and she is actively calling upon a change.

There are a few scattered poems woven throughout the last section of Knott's memoir to mark the healing she's done through her creative writing. The act of self-narration, creative writing and reconstructing her past are all forms of decolonization we will revisit in depth in chapter four.

Knott experienced several types of sexual violence throughout her lifetime, some of which she remembers, some of which she forgets, some of which she was conscious for, some of which she consciously chose unconsciousness. But, more than halfway through the memoir, Knott reveals that she learned of an instance of sexual abuse she had endured unknowingly. Upon questioning her mother as to why she hadn't set Helen up with counselling when she found out that she had suffered childhood abuse at 13 years old, her mother responds: "That's not the first time I found out." She continues to tell Helen that the first time she was abused she was two years old. "I noticed some irritation around your privates so I took you to the doctor immediately. Sure enough the doctor confirmed that someone had done something to you. Rough rubbing and stuff happened." She explains that they watched her closely to make sure it didn't happen again, but sure enough, it did:

> The *him* was my uncle […] He still came to family functions until I was in my early twenties. He'd always force his hugs on me and made my skin crawl when he held me for too long. I had forgiven him for his trespasses and for making my childhood a place from which I couldn't retrieve good memories. I was too scared to venture into my sexually warped childhood to find the good parts. Only when another family member became suicidal and drowned in addictions because of all the abuse they suffered as a child did he finally get banned from family functions. It took years of unwanted hugs and forced silence for him to go away. (222)

Adding yet another episode of sexual trauma to her repertoire, the thing that is most emphasized in her learning about this abuse is how she "learned the dysfunctional pattern of keeping quiet." She learned that we must "Forgive your sexual abuser and let him eat at family dinners," (223). Each trespass, each abuse kept the pain fresh as Knott learned that her silence was part of the

deal, her sense of justice could not be restored within her family. Being abused by someone you know, a family member, would not be enough to keep him from being invited to family dinners. The pain inflicted through trauma is further exacerbated by the betrayal of having to see him again and again, knowing that your family would rather ignore the situation than rectify it, and feeling unsafe in the intimacy of your own home and family.

Normalized in her community, rape is a part of the history of her Indigenous people. Rape was a colonial tool used to objectify the body at the weaponized hand of the oppressor. His body against her will, speaks to the intergenerational trauma that is passed along from mother to daughter. In her poem she says: no more "torches or trauma being passed on," no more teaching girls how to simply comply with the system. Knott reflects how: "Most of the women in my family have battled with depression. Most of the women in my family have lost this battle at some point in their lives and vanished somewhere deep inside themselves," (36). It is part of the gendered teachings within her community that violence will find her, she must learn how to deal with it and bury it, "be strong, and act like it doesn't happen." The memory of these shared traumas is explained in Zapata's article on *Decolonizing Mental Health*:

> I feel like so much of the depression, of the anxiety, of the constant state of trauma that we are going through, this complex, developmental trauma, this concept to fight, flight, or freeze response that we're in are due to systems of oppression — are due to these overt and covert acts of racism and colonization and the effects of colonization on our minds, bodies and spirits.

Explaining that the micro/individual traumas are part of the collective quilt, part of the larger makeup of colonial trauma which demonstrates how Knott's community members, both male and female, have internalized this system of oppression. The men have turned it on their own and the women conform to it. Like Lugones explains in "Hablando Cara a Cara / Speaking Face to Face: An Exploration of Ethnocentric Racism":

> one's affirmation of, acquiescence to, or lack of recognition of the structures and mechanisms of the racial state; one's lack of awareness of or blindness or indifference to one's being racialized; one's affirmation of or indifference or blindness to the harm that the racial state inflicts on some of its members… (44)

Being victim to the system hardly absolves a perpetrator of his actions. However, it is of note that Knott's personal history of oppression and violence run in tandem with her ancestral history of oppression and violence. There is an inextricable link there that Knott acknowledges, notwithstanding, her refusal to continue to be part of the system that worked to systematically oppress her and the generations before her is yet another form of resistance and decolonization we will pick up on in chapter four.

Trauma in *The Apology* by Eve Ensler

We cannot end sexual abuse with the same silence that has enabled it to become an epidemic – Adrianne Simeone

Eve Ensler's account of her traumas is a composite of physical, emotional, mental and sexual abuse. Her body was traumatized repeatedly from a very young age, and so to make a distinction as to what left which trace would be virtually impossible. However, the effects of trauma played out despite the lack of traceable cartography, as Bassel A. van der Kolk explains in *The Body Keeps the Score*:

> Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort. Their bodies are constantly bombarded by visceral warning signs, and, in an attempt to control these processes, they often become expert at ignoring their gut feelings and in numbing awareness of what is played out inside. They learn to hide from their selves. (107)

Living in an unsafe space, in a constant "fight-or-flight-or-freeze" stance, makes the body an inhospitable place. Constantly overwhelmed by impending catastrophe, it is easier to numb oneself to the pain, grow indifferent, and basically, disappear. Ensler learned to stiffen her body,

rigid like a corpse, no breath, no movement. It was her coping mechanism to stare off into another universe and "will yourself dead so he could take no more life," (52). The reality Ensler lived works as a disappearing device, as she cloaked herself with invisibility and becomes completely anaesthetized to the pain. Her father would beat her at will, throw her down a flight of stairs, smash her head against a wall, or anything else he felt like doing in any given moment. But one time, after he beat her with a ping pong paddle, Eve looked at him and said: "Thank you. I look forward to you doing that again." She had become a new entity. Regardless of how much pain or how intensely he hurt her, she wouldn't cry. "It started to consume your personality. You changed. A powerless girl that became dangerous because now you were out to consciously destroy yourself. You were more violent to yourself than my worst imaginings," (79).

> People subjected to prolonged, repeated trauma develop an insidious, progressive form of post-traumatic stress disorder that invades and erodes the personality. While the victim of a single acute trauma may feel after the event that she is "not herself," the victim of chronic trauma may feel herself to be changed irrevocable, or she may lose the sense that she has any self at all. (*Rethinking Rape* 194)

As Catherine MacKinnon explains in *Only Words*, "You learn how to leave your body and create someone else who takes over when you cannot stand it anymore," (7).

In the writing of *The Apology*, Ensler both endows her father with the humanity to acknowledge her own humanity, a task he had never completed in his living life, while she simultaneously reconstructs her past and acts as her own witness to it. Caruth explains: "The phenomenon of trauma, as they suggest, both urgently demands historical awareness and yet denies our usual modes of access to it. How is possible, they thus ask, to gain access to a trauma history?" (151). Because she is the person who has been traumatized, access to the objective history of her own story is hard to retrieve. However, by taking on her father's voice, she can witness what she lived through and validate her experience from his point of view. She says in

his voice: “I recognize what I have done as a crime. Face how deeply my actions and violations have impacted and devastated you. See you as a human being. Attempt to experience or feel what it felt like inside you.” She continues: “And I know that so much of who you are was not so much about constructing but reconstructing, piecing back the fragments of self that I forcibly and strategically (whether consciously or not) splintered and disassembled,” (103). Ensler is giving herself the apology she needs in order to move on, but more importantly, she is endowing herself with the humanity that he choked out of her. She reimagines her father as someone who is capable of seeing his evildoing, as well as someone capable of regretting it.

> I am reeling now imagining the tsunami of fright you were pushing back in your little body and being since you were five. How this daily and extraordinary exertion taxed and tore your muscles and blew out the fragilely webbed fibers of your nervous system. Your violent death was ever present. And each murderous episode escalated the stakes and the brutality. (76)

Ensler lived in a constant state of fear of danger, an omnipresent death, coupled with the psychological manipulation and gaslighting that had her doubting her own sense of reality, both of which split her life into two. She lived the night as a numb receptor of pain, and the day in secrecy. This dual reality exacerbated an already volatile and traumatic life.

The less we understand about mental and emotional health, the more focus we place on the physical dimensions, which will only help to treat the symptoms not the root. Ensler had a slew of symptoms from physical to psychological to addiction and worse. Her father notes: “but the after-shocks were everywhere. It began with night terrors. You would wake the house with terrifying screams, thrashing, babbling madness in your sleep. […] Darkness and terror had seized you. You were haunted,” (48). He goes on to explain that she lost her appetite and suffered from sleeping disorder. She cut her hair to “look like a boy” and her face lost all its pretty; “the signs of my ghastly pedophilia were beginning to bleed through.” He then notes that

she started to get infections, burning sensations and chronic UTIs. “Nothing could soothe you. You were hysterical,” (49). “I felt a sickening dread. I had done it. I had killed you, murdered the soul of the being I most adored, the one who had given me life. I had violated her body, betrayed her trust, I ripped the burning wick out of the brightest candle,” (52). The picture that is drawn depicts a person with a range of symptoms including chronic and acute, neurological, psychological conditions and so on. He blatantly remarks that all of these symptoms were direct results of having beaten her out of her own body, she was a tangible expression of his brutality. It is in the writing of this post-humous letter that her father acknowledges that these are all symptoms of his actions, the constant trauma and sexual violence he forced on Eve was the disease that was never admitted in his waking life.

Conclusion

Ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have – James Baldwin

In this chapter we explored the symptoms that arise from sexual violence and trauma. We narrowed our study to the specific effects on time and memory. There is an objective experience of time, to which we all adhere, a 24-hour clock that is dictated by the sun and moon. However, trauma supposes that there is a subjective experience of time which identifies its malleability. Objective descriptors include, but are not limited to, hours, minutes, days, and so on. Subjective identifiers can be understood as viscerality, sensations, emotional memory, and so on.

As trauma manifests in a myriad of ways, many people who have experienced traumatic events are affected on deeply profound levels that are beyond our vision and understanding (withdrawal, substance abuse, eating disorders, depression, etc.). Constantly under the haunting weight of imagistic memories – these incomplete, fragmented pictures that recur in the mind –

one is overwhelmed by sensations felt in the body as inexplicable memories are triggered spontaneously.

There is a stereotype of what trauma looks like, however the dimension that is often all too hidden, is the polarization that unfolds within. The disconnection of the body and mind, which once was a survival strategy employed to protect the person experiencing sexual violence, is now a disembodiment that requires reconnecting. As the body is uninhabitable at the site of the act, it continues to live prolonged effects of being inhospitable, as the person relives the horrific trauma time and again, the only way to escape is to stay outside of oneself. This disembodiment is where the journey of true healing can begin. It is where agency was lost, identity erased, and a toxic relationship with the self was entered.

In chapter four we will look a lot more in depth at the effects of trauma within the framework of healing. By investigating the trauma from a decolonial perspective, we will unhinge the locked relationship of trauma and sexual violence, and learn ways that we can decolonize medical practices, decolonize history (and History) and writing, and decolonize language.

CHAPTER 4 – DECOLONIZING PRACTICES

I think I was hoping to discover myself in him. […] As I wrote, I was also being written – Siri Hustvedt

During the process of colonization over five-hundred years ago and the imposed colonial ontologies that continue to dictate and dominate everything from our economic and political to social and cultural ways of being and knowing to date, a configuration of our global relations has been established in hierarchical and categorical order privileging the centre—west, white, male, civilized, and so on—which further marginalizes already-structurally inferiorized peoples—non-west, non-white, non-male, non-civilized. This coloniality of power and coloniality of gender continue to be an omnipresent matrix of power that pervades today as the colonized people are still being stripped of their culture, language, ways of being, and given a cognitive perspective that produced an imaginary "other." The mere belief that colonial practices are a thing of the past is a mythical fact established by hegemonic powers so as to further render the Indigenous people invisible:

> Too often, the consideration of Indigenous peoples remains rooted in understanding colonialism as an historical point in time away from which our society has progressed. Centering settler colonialism within gender and women's studies instead exposes the still-existing structure of settler colonialism and its powerful effects on Indigenous peoples and settlers. (Arvin, Tuck, Morrill, 8)

This enduring process of domination is executed through violent acts of brutality, oppressive knowledge production, objectivizing models of expression, erasure of autonomy, and a creation of a dominating system that persistently and implicitly denigrates the perspective and subjectivity of the colonized people. Their sole material existence was to counter the privileged, for there could be no dominant without a subordinate, no superior without an inferior, no civilized without a savage. By creating this knowledge of the self, the colonizer cast its shadow

and in it stood the Other. The only view: western-facing. In order to disentangle over five-hundred-years' worth of knowledge production, oppression, appropriation and erasure, we must look within the established heteropatriarchal systems that continue to enforce the adherence to binary categories (such as mind/body, civilized/savage, language/silence), the illusory concept of unidirectional, linear *H*istory, the naturalization of categories (race, gender, and so on), which all work within a system to delegitimize the colonized experience and continue to oblige that she be the object of study. Exclusionary practices of oppression deny self-governance, self-identification, agency and autonomy to the colonized. By rupturing these oppressive practices, we make space to unlearn centuries of violent beliefs, re-centre the body as a valued contributor of knowledge, dissolve categorical oppression, give audibility to the marginalized voice so she too can speak about her own experience.

The Indigenous Social-Justice Movement

The Indigenous social-justice movement is an active resistance and fight to gain independence from matrices of colonial power. Leanne Simpson, in *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence and New Emergence*, states:

> Decolonial thought and practice, most associated with Indigenous voices in the Americas and other settler colonial contexts, seeks to denaturalize this dehumanization intrinsic to colonial and settler colonial logics and all the violences arising from them while aligning with 'processes and forces of regeneration, revitalization, remembering, and visioning' drawn from Indigenous ways of being, thinking and connecting. (148)

In regaining independence, the process of decolonization and decolonial thinking is an act of re/membering and revitalizing Indigenous ways of being and thinking, and reclaiming not only their geographic/physical land, but also their metaphysical experiences.

By not actively standing with the decolonial mission, anyone outside of Indigenous communities is in some form complicit in participating in:

> colonial logics and failing to recognize how deeply, extensively and painfully colonial logics permeate all aspects of life, undermining full expressions of selves, transformative relations with human and non-human others, and ethical solidarities. The ultimate cost is reproducing and extending the coloniality of power and gender. Contributions also exhibit different ways in which decolonization can be exercised from identifying and resisting the most overt and the more covert violences of ongoing colonization to seeking modes of remembering, recovery and rejuvenation often informed by Indigenous approaches to struggle and healing. (Runyan 5)

In order to ally with the decolonial objective, we must bear "witness to these past and continuing traumas, and particularly the still unacknowledged torture and murder of sexual minorities in the national imaginary, can have the effect of healing 'fragmented' bodies and subjectivities through the process of 'decolonial re/membering' that offers alternative approaches to transitional justice," (Runyan, 7).

In Aníbal Quijano's essay "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," he explains that all cultures outside the west are studied from a western perspective. So entrenched in this paradigm, knowledge production has exclusively been constituted from a western point of view. By suspending these modes of knowing, we can dissolve categories that will allow the object of knowledge to be extricated, clearing space for the object to become the subject. This subject formation permits self-identification, an interchange of experiences, meanings, other ways of knowing, intercultural communication, and so on. These procedural unlearnings all form a part of an epistemological decolonization.

> The liberation of intercultural relations from the prison of coloniality also implies the freedom of all peoples to choose, individually or collectively, such relations: a freedom to choose between various cultural orientations, and, above all, the freedom to produce, criticize, change, and exchange culture and society. This liberation is, part of the process of social liberation from all power organized as inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and as domination. (178)

This highly operant matrix of coloniality begs that we "unmask gender and race as social constructions, with often devastating material effects for women and non-white people, respectively, these fields expose various mythologies about gender and race, including the myth of misogyny and racism as to-be-expected characteristics of human nature," (Arvin, Tuck, Morrill, 9). This is where María Lugones expounds upon Quijano's theories as she disentangles his argument in several of her essays, weaves gender, heterosexuality, and heteropatriarchy into his logic of the matrix of power. Lugones asks questions that will inspire resistance to oppression. She questions the indifference of white feminists, grounding her work on feminists of colour or Third World. She posits:

> how do we understand heterosexuality not merely as normative but as consistently perverse when violently exercised across the colonial modern gender system so as to construct a worldwide system of power? How do we come to understand the very meaning of heterosexualism as tied to a persistently violent domination that marks the flesh multiply by accessing the bodies of the unfree in differential patterns devised to constitute them as the tortured materiality of power? (Lugones, "Heterosexualism," 188)

In her first question, Lugones seeks to understand how hetero-centrism has constructed a global system of power, followed by her query to comprehend fully how the construction of this category acts as a persistently violent system of domination by creating a dimorphic way of apprehending the colonized body, constituting that same body as a material of oppression. She puts forth a concept of the third gender, which ruptures this heteronormative, ethnocentric belief that there are simply two genders, two possibilities. She explains that there are multiple combinations that break this binary understanding of sex and gender by simply invoking the term third gender.

In "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," Lugones states that "decolonizing gender is a necessarily praxical task. It is to enact a critique of racialized, colonial, and capitalist

heterosexualist gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social" (746). She goes on to explain that to decolonize woman from this category of gender, is to enable her to understand her situation without succumbing to it. This will liberate her both inward and out, as well as allow her to express her resistance as a maximal agent with full subjectivity both in relation to others and to herself. This subject forming and informing agent resists oppression and unveils her that which has been obscured (747). This self inhabits a fractured locus. As she has been imagined to exist as a being in relation split over and over "in hierarchically and violently ordered fragments," (755). She lives a space of multiplicity and under colonial conditions has created a fractured enunciation of her perspective. Her locus is a "response to the hegemonic discourse" and "from decolonization, and, therefore, from a new epistemological terrain where border thinking works," (745). This border acts as a metaphoric fracture, her Self on either side, fragmented.

> And thus I want to think of the colonized neither as simply imagined and constructed by the colonizer and coloniality in accordance with the colonial imagination and the strictures of the capitalist colonial venture, but as a being who begins to inhabit a fractured locus constructed doubly, who perceives doubly, related doubly, where the 'sides' of the locus are in tension, and the conflict itself actively inform the subjectivity of the colonized self in multiple relation." (748)

It is from this fractured locus that she succeeds in retaining her creative way of thinking and behaving. By listening to and learning about the experience of the oppressed from the point of view of the oppressed, only then can we truly begin to understand the logic of oppression. Speaking from the dark and looking out to the other side, her experience is from the space in-between: "a place of pilgrimage, of liminality; place of resistance, place 'within,'" (Lugones, "Cara a Cara," 46).

It is here that the concept of germinating the borderlands is put into discussion in Lugones' essay on Gloria Anzaldúa's book *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Anzaldúa's theories on

borderdwelling, resistance, and the self in-between, very much inform the framework I propose here in understanding the woman who experiences sexual violence and how she might heal from the act and move forward to a future of possibilities. However, before we begin to look at the expansiveness of the theory, we will first flesh it out within the context put forth by both Anzaldúa and Lugones.

The Space In-Between

There is a psychology of resistance that is elucidated in *Borderlands/La Frontera* that offers an interplay of reconstructing her oppressive past in order to perceive herself in the process of being oppressed. By witnessing the oppression, she can revisit it with from a place of resistance. This space in-between oppression and resistance, this spatial suspension, is where the new Self exists. Focusing on the being who is oppressed in the precise moment of oppression allows her to understand her own history of oppression through the lens of a being who is actively resisting said oppression. This is both a process and an act. Resistance is both a social and collective activity. Anzaldúa's theory is based on the mestiza experience. As she explains the two states of being oppressed, it is important to understand this context of domination. She explains that there are two states of self being oppressed: the state of intimate terrorism and the Coatlicue state. Experiencing these two sides of being oppressed is to experience multiplicity (and we will later see this concept of multiplicity in relation to the body she has been reduced to). The state of intimate terrorism is the: "lack of ability to respond, the very movement of life, swifter than lightning, frozen," (Anzaldúa 43). The state of Coatlicue is understood as the "state of stasis, state of making new sense," (43). By unlearning old meaning and creating new ones, she understands herself anew. It is important to discern these two states, as the state in-between marks the distinct site of resistance. It is in the space in-between that she (self-)creates. As she

germinates the border in-between she creates her "new identity, a new world of sense, in the borders," (43). She permeates this space as a path to something else, transforming the borderland "from a nightmare into a numinous experience." Not only does this way of thinking counter-intuit a dimorphic and dualistic way of thinking, it also presents a third space, a third possibility; one of multiplicity, a plural self. It also ruptures hegemonic ways of thinking and knowing, tolerating ambiguity, the unknown, and transgressing conceptual notions of boundaries: "then she is a hyphenated being. She must live in both, both are her reality. She must live in her two spaces, enact both worlds. She is a plural self: self-critical, self-animated plurality, a hybrid, a new breed," (Lugones 35). It is the space in-between from which she creates. Anzaldúa describes the borderland as a constant state of creation and transition; one she can pass over, go through, move into, push beyond. She can permeate, germinate, create, this unnatural boundary as it is the site of the continual process of resistance.

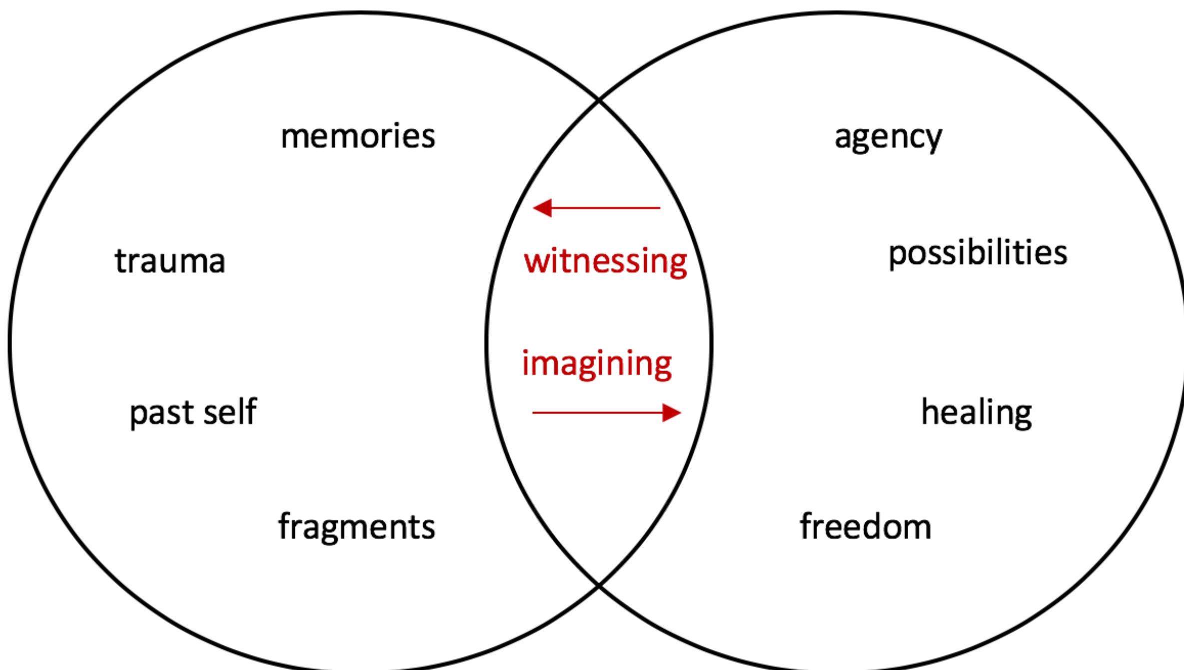
> But it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like a cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence. The counterstance refutes the dominant culture's views and beliefs, and for this, it is proudly defiant. All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against. Because, the counterstance stems from a problem with authority—outer as well as inner—it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life. […] Or perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory. Or we might go another route. The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react. (100-101)

She is the point of origin in her story, the one she writes, the one she creates, as she imagines her Self, forms her identity, her subjectivity, from this space in-between, this space of resistance.

Gloria Anzaldúa's framework has an integral role in understanding the liberating process of the woman who has experienced sexual violence, and in borrowing her theory I show how there is space in-between can be applied to sexual trauma. Working toward this same notion of

the person she was prior to the act versus the person she becomes because of it and what that third space represents on her journey.

This past/present understanding of herself includes ruptures of her former self in counterstance to a present self who wades in existence without fully yet being, as she has not yet fully integrated parts of that past. The self in-between, pastSELFpresent, stands between the world as she once knew it and the world as revealed to her by her assault; the self in-between recreates the world that makes sense, reclaims her agency, her autonomy, her identity. She looks back as she witnesses and reconstructs her story, seeks justice, locates her voice, and gains visibility, and she looks forward to create herself anew while imagining all the possibilities her freedom will allow her.



The decolonial process offers possibilities of new, innovative approaches to liberation. It is both a withdrawal from existing hegemonic systems as well as a movement toward

independence as determined by the oppressed. It is with the preamble of decolonial theory as well as the resistance theory of the borderland that I frame the following analysis.

Decolonizing Practices in Rape Theory

The masters tools will never dismantle the masters house – Audre Lorde

Decolonization is not a performance. To decolonize is to actively participate in the delinking of the self (and subject formation) from the violent act that ceased and erased her identity in the first place. In reclaiming her experience, and therefore her identity, she creates her own intellectual contribution to knowledge and her female experience. Up until now, the impossibility to express this experience has been delimited by a male-centric language system codified and created to represent the male experience, or the male-perspective on the female experience. This intervention is as much a social and cultural project as it is a political one. By giving voice to the female experience, we can begin to interpret the communicative power of silence, emotional knowledge, the act of reconstructing one's past through the act of writing. Breaking with established discourse about the female body (and her reduction to it), we break with a binary approach that privileges the mind over the body. We also work to recenter the body as a site from which we produce knowledge:

> Representing women as intellectual, social, moral, and sexual agents. It would involve producing new discourses and knowledges, new modes of art and new forms of representational practice outside of the patriarchal frameworks which have thus far ensured the impossibility of women's autonomous self-representation, thus being temporally outside or beyond itself … a framework which acknowledges both the psychical or interior dimensions of subjectivity and the surface corporeal exposures of the subject to social inscription and training; a model which resists as much as possible, both dualism and monism; a model which insists on (at least) two surfaces which cannot be collapsed into one and which do not always harmoniously blend with and support each other… (Grosz 188)

It was Audre Lorde who said *I feel, therefore I am*. It is from this sentiment that we depart from the favouring of the mind as the sole producer of knowledge. "In contending that the body is the place where cultural truths concerning men and women are written," (Cahill 7), because if we recenter the body as a central site of power, we reveal the "possibility of resistance, women's agency—and therefore the validity and efficacy of their choices with regard to sexuality," (4).

But what does it sound like when a woman speaks? Incorporating her discursive practices is an exercise in liberating all previously held notions and conventions of communication, representation, speaking and listening. As she articulates her gendered experience of sexual violence, she breaches the constricting limitations of phallocentric language:

> and thus to extract from our enfleshed memory the repertoire of available image for self-representation. It is not a mere voluntaristic switch of identifications and it could not be further removed from wilful self-naming. I would rather describe it as a process of peeling off, stratum after stratum, the layers of signification that have been tattooed in the surface of our body and – more importantly – in its psychic recesses and the internalized folds of one's sacrosanct 'experience'. Like a snake shedding an old skin, one must remember to forget. (Braidotti 170)

She plays with meaning as she reconstructs it with her arsenal of (non)verbal weaponry. Her prolific silence is at once comprised of voice, emotions, power and resistance; her words have their own meaning coded by her experience. Her locution is a rhetoric for transformation. As she writes her story and reconstructs her past, she contributes to the collective memory and to the archives we call "H"istory.

Deriving at one indivisible universal truth is a mythical western invention. There is no truth where the past is concerned. There are experiences, there are memories, there are versions, but there is not one singular truth. Reintegrating and privileging the imaginary—the cultural, the creative—her (the collective she) experience is recollected simultaneously as she (re)creates herself. Legitimizing, validating, discovering, recovering her "truth," her experience as it has

been written all over her body allows her to shift objectification of her body to the objectification of the text. This acts as an exorcism of the malevolence of sexual violence as she extricates it from her mind and body.

The act of writing, understood as an act of self-creation, subject formation, and act of resistance, an act of liberation, is also her active contribution to the archives, that collective memory—that until now has neglected to include her experience—told from her point of view. Cixous explained that as women reject a male, rule-bound language in favour of connecting with the language of the body and text, it is there that a woman writes herself. Writing the past endows her with the agency to give voice, authority, and control to her experience as well as Anzaldúa explains, allows her to witness the oppression from a site of resistance. Writing acts as the thickening agent allowing her past to consolidate into a future filled with possibilities. No longer othered, she forms her Self.

There is no one universal decolonizing method – no one perfect approach to emancipating from rape and sexual violence. Each one of these stories elucidates its own unique approach to decolonizing her Self from the past and moving forward toward healing: from disavowing language, metamorphosing and flying away, to writing a post-humous apology letter, to forgiving oneself and relinquishing the self-hate, to rewriting the past, piecing together fragments to reconstruct a past that gives meaning and helps imagine a future filled with possibilities, each story is distinct and self-determined.

Decolonizing Practices in *Cereus Blooms at Night* by Shani Mootoo

I know all those words, but that sentence makes no sense to me – Matt Groening

This leads to the third modality of silence which breaks open heteronormative notions of what is understood as the oppressive nature of silence. Turning the implicature of time on its head and transforming the fragmented self into a powerful multiplication of being, *Cereus* once again offers a paradigm whereby decolonization is possible if we disassociate with hegemonic norms and make a new space for understanding the self. Mala reclaims her past and rewrites her story; with a metamorphosis into a free bird, she emancipates herself from physical pain and psychological oppression.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains that to decolonize a people is to dismantle a deeply rooted way of thinking and doing that has been violently imposed through domination and oppressive forces for centuries. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, she states:

> For colonized peoples this is important because the cycle of colonialism is just that, a cycle with no end point, no emancipation. The material locates us within a world of dehumanizing tendencies, one that is constantly reflected back on us. To imagine a different world is to imagine us as different people in the world. To imagine is to believe in different possibilities, ones that we can create. Decolonization must offer a language of possibility, a way out of colonialism. (203)

Reclaiming one's History is a crucial factor of decolonization as Smith explains that History (with a capital H to signify "official" and recorded History) is important for understanding the present. She goes on to say that "Part of the exercise is about recovering our own stories of the past. This is inextricably bound to a recovery of our language and epistemological foundation" (40). The decolonization of a people can be achieved through various means, such as resistance, transformation and reclamation "partly because we perceive a need to decolonize our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity" (24). Attending to the individual experiences as well as the community collective voice allows for the impact of the past to impress upon the present (and future) from a decolonized viewpoint. As Franz Fanon alludes to in *Wretched of the Earth*, one central element of decolonization is the

transformative nature of the process. He states that decolonization "fundamentally alters [a] being" and that the "'thing' colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation" (2). The thing here refers to is the colonized being, an object transformed into agentic subject through the process of decolonization. The transformative nature of decolonization provides opportunity for the being in question to achieve personhood and have the subjective, agentic power to create his or her own identity in the process.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith picks up on this process and states that in order to decolonize, we must first reimagine the world and new possibilities. The centre can be shifted, pulling margins in closer to the middle, offering a way out of oppression and colonial rule. Freeing herself from all colonial weapons, Mala engages in a dismantling of hegemonic practices by first disengaging with language, demolishing hierarchal law of man over animal, and finally rewriting her past through imagination and repossession of herself. Her ultimate decolonization is read through her transformation, or metamorphosis into a bird she releases in her memory or imagination, freeing her younger self, Pohpoh, into the sky to fly away.

As Mala retreats to her garden, she disengages with language completely and through this purging of intelligible sound—her father's tongue and English language—her body swells with a heightened sense of awareness; an acuity and intuition that allows her to see in the dark, understand animals, communicate with plants, and experience the world with enhanced perception. When she is brought into the Paradise Alms House and ignites fear in those who are there, we learn that this fear comes from the nursing staff's inability to understand her as she no longer uses language to communicate: "Eventually Mala all but rid herself of words" (Mootoo 126). However, she continues to communicate through her gestures, expressions and body movements. She makes "sounds that are natural expansions and contractions of her body" (127).

Most notably, she takes part in the recording of her story, as Tyler, the nurse appointed to her care, records Mala's story as a way to put forth testimony and potentially find her sister, Asha, who had run away many years prior. He is able to understand her wordless language and pull meaning from her twitches and gesticulations: "To everyone else, Miss Ramchandin appeared to have a limited vocabulary or at least to have become too simple-minded to do more than imitate. However, I knew for a fact she was able to speak and had volumes of tales and thoughts in her head," (99). When Ambrose and Otoh come for a visit, Tyler says: "see how she is swinging her legs? You might not be able to tell, but I can. She is happy," (102). In her silence, Mala finds new ways to communicate, using her sensory input and output as a way to interact with the world. Tyler comments that "she actually began to whisper in my direction, that I had become her witness […] There was little doubt that I was being given a dictation, albeit without punctuation marks or subject breaks" (100). In *The Laugh of Medusa*, Helene Cixous explains "She doesn't 'speak,' she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice. She lays herself bare. In fact, she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body. In a certain way she *inscribes* what she's saying." This power of movement is as a part of the decolonizing exercise. Mala recovers her own story of the past, and reclaims her memory, she *inscribes* what she means to say with her body, because her body can speak what her words cannot. Wondering through an imagined, almost dream-like, version of her past, Mala ascribes new physical forms onto her child self, allowing her to see the version she chooses: Pohpoh flying free, soaring like "an elegant V" in the sky.

Although language is a tool of domination imposed on the colonized by the oppressor, Mala cuts herself off from her father, from his tongue (figuratively and literally), freeing her mouth from his subjugation (from the language he taught her) and seeks solace in the silent

world around her. Disenfranchising language through linguistic noncompliance, Mala dismantles the totem pole of colonial power, and in so doing, she dismantles the heteronormative concept cognitive and cerebral function as superior to the physical, psychic and sensorial world.

Most of the characters in the novel understand her silence as her having lost her mind or as "her mind having flown from her head," as Ambrose describes when he sees her violently swinging a cleaver at him. However, her silence is not a mental breakdown, but rather it is the noise of a woman who rips herself from the imposed colonized way of being and lives in alterity. She no longer adheres to language, and its constricting mode of describing feeling or time:

> She did not ascribe activities to specific times. When doziness pawed at her, she responded regardless of the time of day or night, curling up in the yard or on the verandah. If she awakened in the height of the night's darkness, she did not force herself back to sleep but arose as though it were daytime. She fed herself when she needed to, voided when and where the impulse knocked. (127)

She lives with a highly connected awareness that allows her to be one with nature, one with her body, and fully immersed in her own body's internal clock. This, according to Mignolo and Walsh, "opens up coexisting temporalities kept hostage by the Western idea of time and the belief that there is one single temporality: Western-imagined fictional temporality." (3) Turning heteronormative practice on its head, Mala abandons institutionalized behaviours and lives in complete isolation from society. However, her "silence is not an absence of sound, but rather an 'archive of alterity and difference, of loss and violence'" (May 126), silence is her new *modus operandi*; her retreat from a colonized way of life.

Mala disengages from economic practice in Lantanacamara. She sustains herself fully off the bounty of her garden, which she cultivates without domination. Eliminating impositions such as harvesting cycles from the way she gardens, she allows her crops to grow naturally and without human intervention. There is no pecking order of human, animal, plant life, as Mignolo

and Walsh express, the dismantling of hierarchy can be understood with the term *vincularidad*, "*Vincularidad* is the awareness of the integral relation and interdependence amongst all living organisms (in which humans are only a part) with territory or land and the cosmos. It is a relation and interdependence in search of balance and harmony of life in the planet" (3). Mala begins to "resemble her garden both in look and scent—her body and her landscape intertwine in a nonhierarchical organic relation" (May 123). Her fecund landscape symbolizes Mala's capacity to imagine alternatives. A physical horticultural space that defies the scientific purpose of white, male colonizers.

Living a nonviolent life, Mala treats all beings as living and valuable. When Mr. Hector brings her a flower, Tyler says "I am beginning to understand some things about her and I think she does not like things in nature to be hurt. To her, the flower and the plant would be both suffering because they were separated from each other" (Mootoo 69). This attests to her belief that all living beings are on a continuum, lending itself to the further disassembling of the colonial rule that people are gendered and therefore can be hierarchized, a biological inferiority of women to men, animal to human, and so on. Mala is a human/non-human being who is not constricted to a single gender or discourse. She creates her own reality. Like Tyler, and Otoh, Mala knows that gender is a continuum. She doesn't question one's nature, she accepts it and affords its inherent freedom. Mala steals a nurse's dress for Tyler and has him try it on. When he has it on, she barely flinches or reacts: "the reason Miss Ramchandin paid me no attention was that, to her mind, the outfit was not something to either congratulate or scorn—it simply was. She was not one to manacle nature, and I sensed that she was permitting mine its freedom" (77). Allowing Tyler the freedom to express himself is not a celebratory moment for Mala, it is simply

a point of fact. Imposing the "logic" of gender on human form goes counter-intuitive to Mala's way of operating.

According to Lugones, "Decolonising gender is necessarily a praxical task. It is to enact a critique of racialized, colonial, and capitalist heterosexualist gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social" ("Toward a Decolonial" 745); Mala practices this epistemic notion by enacting a lived transformation of the social/gendered oppression she was once governed by. Mala becomes a sexless, amorphous non-man, non-woman, as she finds her metaphorization in the animal world. Identifying with the allegorical animal, she is at once a cat as she is a bird: "I learned that when she had pressed her cheek against the cat's body and called the name Pohpoh, it was not the cat she was calling" (Mootoo 47). Emancipating her physical body from heteronormative definitions, she frees her body in her mind and liberates herself:

> She pointed up into the sky and traced a distant flight pattern that she alone could see. She laughed as her eyes followed that her finger described and waved to whatever it was she saw. She trembled with joy. In a tiny whispering voice, she uttered her first public words: 'Poh, Pohpoh, Poh, Poh, Poh'. (248)

Emancipating her mind from mental slavery, Mala retraces her memory and transforms old, painful memories, with liberating ones; memories that free her from the oppression of reliving the violence. Closing old wounds, she delivers unto herself the omnipotence of unrestrained possibilities. In her mind, Pohpoh has strength, bravery, the ability to "to survive in the dark" (156). At moments her concentration is interrupted, and the fear seeps back in, but, she is determined to continue her dreaming:

> Fear was breaking her, was unprying her memory. She was reminded of what she usually ignored or commanded herself to forget: her legs being ripped apart, something entering her from down there, entering and then scooping her insides out. Her body remembered. Mala remembered. […] it had always been this way for her: just as she was about to succumb, an irrational strength would surface, taking control, propelling her toward feelings of invincibility. (174-175).

Memory, like History, are tools of domination; inventions of the colonizer to impose systemic and structural violence through hegemonic ideologies. Recording factual and concrete stories is what is considered "History", however, according to Mala's version of *herstory*, her personal memories are considered as true and factual as any other version of the past. She goes back into her memory frequently as a way to imagine new possibilities, blurring fact with imagination, creating her own narrative; one that will allow her to be at peace with her past. Revisiting her past, she rewrites herself as a strong and liberated person: "She gasped loud enough to startle herself and pinched her arm hard, an admonishment that she dare not lose her concentration… she felt triumphant. Avenged. The image of her face in the mirror was forgotten. A smile of triumph lit up Mala's face" (175), and for that she is both avenged and triumphant; liberated and decolonized.

Mala never had a life pre-colonization. Her life was always in one form or another that of a colonized being. First, she is the daughter of two Indians, although converted, she is still the colour of their skin (non-white, therefore essentially Indian). Second, from the moment her mother leaves her and her father first rapes her, she is the oppressed victim of sexual colonization. Never capable of being a full and complete being, her life was always fragmented, divided. "Colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world. It was a process of systemic fragmentation" (Smith 29). Through her subjective remembering of her past, she connects with her own personal history, in her own non-verbal language, relating to her thoughts and feelings with her own agentic power, and interacting with the world through the power of her mind.

The colonized "is a being who inhabits a fractured locus constructed doubly, who perceives doubly, relates doubly, where the "sides" of the locus are in tension, and the conflict itself actively informs the subjectivity of the colonized self in multiple relations" ("Toward a Decolonial" 750). As Mala decolonizes from her oppressor, her fragmentation is no longer a scattered division of herself but rather a multiplication of her identity. Through each double construction, the self, in this case Mala, is informed by the tension of her two selves. Mala is both Pohpoh and Mala—child and old lady, little girl and free bird—each of these two pairs culminate into the punctuated moments that shift Mala from colonized to decolonized.

Tyler and Otoh, Mala and Pohpoh, Otoh and Ambrose, are all characters who have are paired to mirror one another in doubling form. In one way or another, each one of these characters are continuations of one another; a device used to show the "subversive potential of splitedness" (May 120). Mala's in-between nature is one of double self, and her going back and forth between the two, both by name and locus, shows how her subject resists interstitially. Mootoo does not bind nor cure Mala's split subjectivity, rather she uses it to expose another level of the colonized who is: "a being who inhabits a fractured locus constructed doubly, who perceives doubly, relates doubly, where the 'sides' of the locus are in tension, and the conflict itself actively informs the subjectivity of the colonized self in multiple relations" ("Toward a Decolonial" 748).

In Mala's case, this fractured self is a multiplication that offers her the freedom to resist and subvert colonial rule. As mentioned earlier, Gloria Anzaldúa explains that, "There are two sides of being oppressed – in this experience – she thinks of the self as multiple (being oppressed at the time of being oppressed – for my purpose, this works as well, because in the moment of rape act and the process of how it is internalized afterward throughout lifetime). The self

oppressed during the act, the self oppressed after the act and the self-in-between" (35). The only way of mitigating that duality is to understand that the borderland is a space of constant transition, the victim must shatter the self that was formed and sustained in relation to her oppressor, but that self will continue to live inside of her, reconciled as a double self.

Throughout the novel Mala has two names that are used in what seems to be an interchangeable manner. However, at closer inspection, her multiplied self is affirmed through the power of her name. Unlike Chandin, whose name is a signifier for his essentialist nature as a colonized being who cannot change by nature, Mala's name has emancipatory power. Reunited with her childhood crush, Mala and Ambrose begin to spend time together again as adults. He endearingly refers to her by her childhood name, Pohpoh. Mala contemplates telling him to stop calling her that as:

> [she could] no longer bear the name. Pohpoh was what her father has lovingly called her since she was a baby, long before the crisis in the family. But when Chandin Ramchandin started touching her in ways that terrified and hurt her, she hated the way he whispered, 'Pohpoh, my little Pohpoh, you must never leave me, eh?'" (200).

She decided it might hurt their relationship if she asked him to refrain from using her nickname. However, directly prior to the final violent rape, Mala and Ambrose are discussing his time abroad, and she asserts herself through the epistemic practice of (re)naming herself:

> 'Ah, Pohpoh, my sweet, sweet Pohpoh.'
> Mala looked into his eyes. 'Please don't call me by that name,' she whispered. 'Don't call me that. You remember my real name?'
> Ambrose was taken aback.
> 'Which one? I am mortified. Tell me which name and it shall never be uttered again.'
> '*Pohpoh*. That is not my name.'
> After a quick joggle of his memory, Ambrose smiled, pleased with himself. 'Mala! You are right. Mala is indeed a name more fitting. The other shall never be mentioned again.' (215)

At first unable to contradict him, her sense of self-worth is asserted in this moment where she reclaims herself, transforms into her new person, and claims authority over her domain. There is

a genitive matrix in naming that indicates possession or close association. Mignolo and Walsh state that “to name ‘her,’ he possessed her,” (23) and so, the take-back naming practice—whereby Mala takes back both her name and its signification, which afford her the opportunity to release from the familial claim Chandin had over her, therefore delinking her from any connection to him. Mala obtains decolonization in this case by asserting her identity through the practice of renaming.

Knowing herself as a person who has experienced sexual violence (a victim) would be to continue living under the violent and threatening oppression of her father’s colonial rule. Identifying herself as a defenseless object would render her powerless:

> [W]omen are defined consistently as the *victims* of male control—the ‘sexually oppressed.’ Although it is true that the potential of male violence against women circumscribes and elucidates their social position to a certain extent, defining women as archetypal victims freezes them into ‘objects-who-defend-themselves,’ men into ‘subjects-who-perpetrate-violence,’ and (every) society into powerless (read: women) and powerful (read: men) groups of people […] Sisterhood cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete, historical and political practice and analysis. (Talpade Mohanty 339)

Mala’s ability to revisit her past and reclaim it, is her stake in creating a new world where a counter-history is possible. Mala is not part of a sisterhood of defenseless rape victims, instead she is the creator of her own *her*story; a praxical task that transforms her from the inferior female gender to the non-conforming anthropomorphic bird that flies free.

In the *Cannibalist Manifesto*, Oswalde de Andrade explores the brutal colonial force into which his Brazilian indigenous people were absorbed. He packages the thought quite neatly when he says: “But we never permitted the birth of logic among us” (39). Although Mala had a very short existence before she was first (sexually) colonized, she has the ability to go against imposed logic and challenge personal domination. Andrade explores the notion that certain Histories, Memories and forms of Logic were imposed on an already existing people. The only

true question left to ask is: "Tupi or not tupi, that is the question" (38). By playing on Shakespeare's canonical line, Andrade theoretically devours dominant culture, absorbs it and repackages it as his own; exactly what the western conquest did to the indigenous people when they "discovered" Brazil. Asserting his right to practice his culture against hegemonic tyranny, "tupi or not tupi" is an iconic question that echoes a dominant logic and then releases it from its power. Heteronormative logic disallows Mala's ascension to self-assert and transcend to personhood. In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mala is categorically described as a crazy woman, an old lady gone mad who refrains from proper speech practice and grunts and groans like an animal instilling fear in those around her. It is plain to read that Mootoo does not draw any commonalities between a healthy woman of sound mind and the Mala we read in the story. Distorting our perception of what is truly, and logically, emancipatory, Mootoo confronts and contorts heteronormative logic, bequeathing unto Mala an internal logic that requires a suspended understanding of what has become the heteronormative definition of decolonization: "to think that we are in possession of a decolonial universal truth would not be decolonial at all but modern/colonial" (Mignolo and Walsh 1). There are explicit moments whereby Mala's freedom is articulately pronounced. These signifiers are blanketed by her strange behaviour, fear-inducing conduct and unidentifiable practices. However, it is these very behaviours, conducts and practices that shift the margin a little closer to centre as they resound with Andrade's "tupi or not tupi" – Mala decolonization challenges the coloniality of gender, of silence, of the body, and of memory. Mala takes western "canned consciousness" and cannibalizes it; she creates her own way of being, free of hierarchy, free of binaries, free of physical boundaries, free of colonial ideologies. As Mala roams through her memory, she imagines new possibilities:

> Over the last few years Mala had grown fond of this particular Pohpoh. She had rather disliked her many years before when they were one and the same. But these

> days she wished that she and that Pohpoh could have been two separate people, that they could have been best friends… She would certainly have lifted her up in her arms, held her, hugged her and protected her as well as Pohpoh had protected Asha. […] Mala will take care of you, Pohpoh. No one will ever touch you again like that. I will never let anyone put their terrible hands on you again. I, Mala Ramchandin, will set you, Pohpoh Ramchandin, free, free, free, like a bird (173).

Remembering herself as Asha's protector, Mala separates herself from Pohpoh and finds a way to go back in time, be her own protector and save herself. Emancipating herself from the mental slavery of trauma, and perpetually reiterating a past of violence, she hugs herself and sets herself free. She repurposes furniture, which can be read as maniacal behaviour, or can be understood as a deliberate intention to create new space for herself.

The coloniality of gender presupposes a hierarchy of gender, however Mala is a dimorphic "sexless" animal; she is free from the normative practice of female inferiority and gendered objectification. Occupying a dream space that offers her the freedom to fly free, Mala dismantles notions of Western imperialist civilization, and decolonizes her mind and body. Mootoo demonstrates the manifold levels of colonization: through text, silence, language, representation, sexual violence, and strategic ignorance. She celebrates the achievement of decolonization as she takes apart each element of colonial power and demonstrates the infinite expressions of freedom that are possible once colonization is torn to shreds.

Decolonizing Practices in *Memories of the Future* by Siri Hustvedt

If he wrote it, he could get rid of it. He had gotten rid of many things by writing them – Ernest Hemingway

Recognizing the prescriptions that we adhere to—cognizant or not—is the first step toward dismantling them. Silence is as much a part of speech as the words that make up language, in fact, it is integral to it. Within western convention, punctuation is a sign that marks pauses,

breaks, breaths, and gaps in speech. Looking beyond the west, toward a new understanding of silence, it represents that which is unsayable, beyond words. By writing a multi-genre fiction memoir—detective novel, journal, fiction, illustrations—, Hustvedt breaks with literary and linguistic conventions in all forms. She calls it all into question. She stylistically employs various fonts to convey through typography a sense of temporal metaphor (each genre within the story is typed with different fonts). She weaves fiction into journal writing and she reads the story of a hero she wrote yet distances the character from her real self by ironically naming her S.H. (to be confused with her affection for Sherlock Holmes, the man of mystery that inspires her detective novel, as well as her own initials). There are gaps in the story, there are moments called into question as the reliability of both the character and authors are constantly being investigated, and there are grammatical -*isms* she plays with as she endows her characters with initials that mark imperative from conditional to show the instability of truth when touched by mode and time. As she reads through the fragmented compilation of her multi-genre, we, the reader, notice the layers and observe her multiplicity. As S.H. pieces the fragments of her past together, she pieces herself together, regaining completeness, agency, personhood. As she reads her journal at the present moment in time, she fills in partial thoughts, fragmented memories and incomplete stories, while also speaking directly to the reader. She invites us to grow conscious of our integral role in the construction of her past and the act of reading her 'memoir.'

The authority writing carries is that of authorship and history, as well as control over the narrative, i.e., her truth. Records of the past all committed to the public archives that transmit our collective history have been notoriously and exclusively written with what S.H. calls 'Western Amnesia.' "Remember the battle of the books. And remember that we forget. We forget. *A Study in Western Amnesia* is about the forgotten, those pushed out of the story, the muffled, the

gagged, the raped, the beaten, the killed," (307). She asserts that their stories are not written, not recorded, not part of the public archives that is known as History. However, as S.H. traverses her own historical landscape, she discovers how "truth" in history is not possible, all that is possible is the quilting together of subjective histories, as she "reclaims a collective history and a cultural past which was denied in the official records of western colonial powers" (69). Facticity and truth are often confused to be one in the same. It is here that S.H. calls that blurry line into question. She reflects on how "telling all the facts of the story make it oddly remote from the actual story," (277). She continues her reflection in saying that life inside and outside is full of misleading characters, it requires a discerning mind to follow the right character through the narrative to find the true meaning of the story. This is precisely what she attempts to do as she reads her journal and attempts to pull out meaning as an active producer of her life. She challenges conventional notions of 'truth' as she consciously puts the fragments of her past into the narrative she chooses to construct. "I am interpreting the clues differently now. I am reading the stories differently. I am remembering differently. I am changed. […] one has to be fully conscious to recognize that one deserves to ask," (295). She remembers the past differently, because from where she presently sits, she has changed; that is the power of truth and memory: it changes as you change, it transforms as you transform, it is not fixed in time, but rather can take shape as you endow it with the meaning you choose. Depending on the character or theme you follow, you can frame the memory to fit new choices, new meaning.

In the pivotal scene where S.H. sits at the dinner table across from Martin, watching him place his condescending hand on the shoulder of his obedient wife, something shifts inside of S.H. "The man could not have known it, but he had burst something inside of me. […] I had been buffeted and blown by a barrage of condescending smiles, instructive comments, and

seductive hints that came at me from all directions. […] No, it was over. I would not let this one pass," (235). S.H. stands up and in a show of intellectual acuity, she sets off on a witty monologue. "The words came fluently," she remembers. Her hands trembled uncontrollably as she spoke, and then, as if "someone other than I, some satirical demon had taken hold of me and was giving me dictation. I rushed onward […] I really have no idea what I looked like at this point in my tirade […] my performance was over. My face was hot. I felt the eyes of the whole table on me," (236), and then she fainted. Incidentally, her performative act of resistance is then transcribed word-for-word into her journal. Much like most of what she writes in her journal that year, a lot of what is recorded begs the reader to question its truth and validity, as she claims repeatedly that we cannot rely on the memory of a memoirist. However, in this moment of claiming her voice, neither her former self, present self, nor reader even question whether it matters that the scene unraveled the way she remembers. What is emphasized is her vindication, her insurgency, her refusal to be silenced or silent, and how this momentous speech after her long year in NYC has reached an apex, culminating in her final performance as she breaks from oppressive forces. As Brownmiller states: "A show of force is the prime requisite of masculine behavior that she, as a woman, has been trained from childhood to abjure. She is unfit for the contest. Femininity has trained her to lose" (360). S.H. has been trained to be "a good little girl," to "close her knees" for the camera. However, at this moment, when she speaks up, her training as a girl is tossed away. She is S.H. and she will not be tamed. It is a moment of *I feel, therefore I am*, and it is as much a fact as any other 'truth' ever recorded. The truth of the matter is, the only person that matters is S.H. and in her esteem, this moment changed her. Later in her life she remarks that whenever she speaks, people are surprised that "I do not faint anymore. If one is able to remain conscious and face one's adversary, what follows the looks of surprise and dismay

is the look of anger," (306). S.H. is no longer reduced to her body, her lot in life. She is a person who makes choices, claims her space, speaks (even if out of turn), and has the intellectual prowess to combat anyone who violates her sense of self.

In obsessively replaying the night of the almost-rape over and over in her mind, S.H. points the finger at herself for standing and waiting by the elevator for the almost-rapist who obnoxiously stated that a woman who goes with him, leaves with him. In re-reading her journal and revisiting her past, S.H. pauses in reflection of the person she used to be. She notes that she is no longer the same person, although at some moments, those imaginary beings may converge. As she reads herself, she creates a past character, a person who predates her future existence with the foreshadowing of hindsight (even the title of the novel evokes this sense of time play). Her play on time, her play on perspective offers a multiplicity as well as a fragmentation, a locus of resistance. It is from there that she sees herself fully in the past and extend forgiveness to former self: "I'm sorry I let you down. Back then, I mean.' I say, 'It's okay. We were young and foolish," (257). Earlier, she reflects that although she had once been laden with guilt, "I am kinder to her now than I used to be," (133). She abandons the self-hate, suspends all self-judgment, and relinquishes the shame she had turned inward; the present S.H. can finally let the former S.H. live solely on those pages. She can close the book and live in the present.

At the end of the novel, S.H. finally reveals the mystery of who holds the key. She says: "I will tell you who it is: your narrator, the author of this book. I am not waiting anymore. Hold out your hand. I am giving you the keys. One story has become another," (307). Every clue, every metaphorical key that has been placed throughout the novel, culminates in her revelation that the only real meaning-maker in this story is the reader. The reader's role is to take from the story whatever the reader is searching for. The narrative and words on the pages may stay fixed

and unchanged by time, but the meaning of the story changes interminably depending on who is reading it, when, and where. That is how one story about S.H. becomes a story about you.

Decolonizing Practices in *In My Own Moccasins* by Helen Knott

Forgiveness is the greatest gift you can give yourself – Maya Angelou

Whether aware or not, as a society, we tend to valorize speech: language is a sign of civilization. In order to convey the female experience of sexual violence, Knott constructs her story from her body, from a place deep within, sculpting her memoir with flesh. Through the embodied act of writing, Knott describes: "I have lived this story. I had to pull this story out of body, out of bone, out of a place so deep that it does not have a name," (xiii). She wrote from a place of emotion, from a place of bodily sensation, as she felt the story move through her. Shifting linguistic tools to describe the female experience, Knott uses language to communicate her experience, however, she also shows how her flesh contributed to the text she writes. As she (re)constructs herself through story, she (re)imagines a past that paves way for her future Self. "We gain agency and control when we use our voice and express and communicate. It is through this modality that we exist. Stake a claim in our physical world," (MacKinnon 7).

Significantly, her body was once a primary site of control, and by coming back into herself, she recenters the body as a site of resistance. Knott explains that she wrote her story by first erasing it from her body:

> I have spent a lot of time in a state of healing and retrieval to be able to write these words and give them to the world. I have also spent a lot of time in a state of reflection, examining my own intentions behind giving these words to the world […] I remember all the women who held space for me while I worked to erase the records of violence that my body held. I know there are women out there with similar stories, with records on their body that have not been erased yet. (xiv)

The words "erase the records of violence that my body held," speaks to the trace left behind, her body a text to be written on. In an effort to emancipate from the trauma, Knott must erase the text from her body and transfer her words to the page. Through the act of writing, she liberates her body; cleans the past from the record that had for so long left its trace, impeding her from moving forward. As she writes the violence out of her body, she speaks of the exorcism that takes place, the pushing out:

> this process was not just about allowing myself to have feelings about what these men have done to me but allowing myself to grieve for the pain and hate I directed toward myself at different ages. I was bravely coming to terms with all of the traumatic event in my life and allowing myself the space to feel. I was allowing myself to let go of the events and give them to Creator. The violence of men would no longer define my life for me. I wanted to be free. I wanted her to be free. (235)

She speaks of how she cried and howled into her pillow as she wrote her letter to herself. She grieved for herself, for the girl she had lost and blamed, and she made space for a new possibility; a new relationship with herself to take place.

> I was calling my spirit back into my being. I was pushing all of the shit out to make space for remembering who I am. […] I forgive myself […] From now on I will not punish myself. I will love myself and know that I am worth something. I am a good person and will not hurt myself anymore. After twenty-four years I finally did it.' I forgave myself and meant it. (237)

Allowing her the space to feel how her body had been altered by sexual violence was her first act of resistance from the space in-between. She looks back to her past with resistant eyes and reclaims the person from the memories that oppressed her. She sees herself, a strong, brave woman warrior, no longer from the outside, from the male perspective. She is no longer othered in her view of herself, she is Self.

> In other words, the subject of feminism is non-Woman as the complementary and specular other of man but rather a complex and multi-layered embodied subject who has taken her distance from the institution of femininity. 'She' no longer coincides with the disempowered reflection of a dominant subject who casts his masculinity in a universalistic posture. She, in fact, may no longer be a she, but the subject of quite

> another story: a subject-in-process, a mutant, the other of the Other, a post-Woman embodied subject cast in female morphology who has already undergone an essential metamorphosis. (Braidotti 11-12)

This transformative perspective is what allows Knott to purge so much of the rape culture she had internalized for so long:

> I have never been able to forgive myself. I have always felt that it was all my fault. I was sexually abused as a little girl and raped four times as a young woman. I have had family friends or men who dated my aunties try to seduce men. I always thought there was something wrong with me. There must have been something wrong with me. Some wrong part of me made all of those things happen. And even when I hear someone say it is not my fault, I can't believe them. I have hated myself for most of my life. […] The way I punished myself was to believe I was worth nothing. I would drink to numb everything, destroy my chances at happiness, and never let anybody too close to me. I was always afraid they would tell I was actually a bad person. I put myself in situations where people could harm me, hut me, and then I hated myself even more. Then I would say, 'Look, Helen—look at what you fucking did to yourself.' […] All of my emotions became tangible creatures trying to escape out of me. […] The shame, pain, and anger all manifested as actual physical pain. (237)

Before she was able to extricate the self-hate, she had to recognize the self-inflicted pain she endured over the years through substance abuse, addiction, and other choices that left negative marks on her body. She punished herself by treating herself worse than any other crime that had been committed on her body. It took many years and a lot of self-reflection, but she was able to finally understand that the things she was doing to herself were symptoms of her pain; she was numbing herself so as to be able to cope with being in her body, being conscious in her mind. The pain could not escape until she confronted it. Again, invoking this space in-between where Knott revisits her past and unlearns all the knowledge that was blanketing her, she removes the obstructions that stand in the way of viewing her true self.

She pushed out the self-hate, the blame, the shame, by stomping the floor, screaming, crying, and she watched as "the words escaped her mouth," liberating her from the pain. All the internalized shame that was once upon a time directed inward was let go. She looked back and

repaved the road to her past; she architected a present free from societal constraints and stigmas. This is where her true healing was able to take shape as she empathized with that "little Indian girl," hugged her inner self, and forgave her.

> The truth was that I had never allowed myself to feel the emotions surrounding the sexual abuse and rapes that I'd endured. Under all of that bravado I was a lost little Indian girl, secretly afraid that I was the source of all the trouble. It was the secret I wanted to take to the grave. Afraid that if I ever uttered it, someone would confirm my suspicion: *It is all your fault, Helen.* This was my great hypocrisy, my disconnection between truth and thought. In order to heal my warrior spirit, I would have to face the lies I told myself. I had been convincing myself of these lies for two decades. They fit on me like truths. They were a little uncomfortable and they rubbed me the wrong way, but they were the only things that I knew. The real truth is that I am a war-worthy woman and deserving of respect. But it was something I'd need to learn. (198)

Always believing that she was the source of the trouble, that she had brought it all on herself, is a contradiction in understanding the true crime that is rape. By connecting to herself and quieting the voices that contradicted her truth, Knott could heal her "warrior spirit."

In writing her memoir, as well as writing and speaking her letters and poetry at community gatherings, Knott's act exported her experience from the private into the public realm; from the metaphorical 'home' and into society; from the shadow into the light. She is no longer reduced to her experience; she is no longer reduced to her biological and racialized category. She dismantles the invisible power that has reigned over her as part of her essentialist makeup; she is no longer limited by the confines of her body as she enters the world of the imaginary. The Self is anchored in this imaginary space, where subject formation takes place, and in the act of writing herself as the subject of her own story, she is no longer the object of dominant views, but rather the subject that denounces them. Margaret McLaren explains in *Decolonizing Feminism: Transnational Feminism and Globalization*, that decolonial approaches "must attend to the complexity and richness of diversity and experiences and identities without

decontextualizing those identities from the processes of domination and subordination and exploitation that create and maintain identities as social locations in a matrix of unequal power relations” (7). Knott discovers herself without decontextualizing herself from her experiences. She recovers her identity, and, in the process, she reclaims her voice. She heals herself and finds liberation in contributing her narrative to the public archives. Bearing witness to her past, she invites readers and listeners to share in her journey as she decolonizes the minds of each person who witnesses her experiences through her words. She debunks the knowledge that once defined how she would know, think about, and see herself. A decolonial re/membering and a resistant (re)creation is issued forth as she reclaims her identity, in the public eye; the ultimate show of freedom.

Decolonizing Practices in *The Apology* by Even Ensler

The future is dark… celebrate the darkness – Virginia Woolf

In our physical world, there is a limit to the possibilities; a limit to what can happen. In *The Apology*, Eve Ensler goes beyond what is bound by flesh and travels to a world she imagines in order to get the solace and apology she needed to hear so that she could heal. Conjuring the ghost of her dead father, her letter is a confession of all the atrocious crimes he perpetrated against her. It is in the world of the imaginary that she is able to go back in time to create a narrative whereby even the most evil and unrepentant of men can be transformed into an apologetic human who writes a letter from beyond the grave from another realm (limbo, purgatory, somewhere not-so-settled) to confess and lay it all bare for her to witness. Ensler had to seek from deep within her own humanity, pulling all her strength, in order to endow her father with his own past to round off his character and make his apology seem authentic. She had to suspend her own judgment

and emotion in order to get in his head, the head of her assailant, her monster, to make his letter be one that she would read and believe; a letter that would free her from her past. It can be argued that if woman is body, Ensler endows her with heart. Ensler provides her father with empathy, which is then projected back onto her. She boomerangs the sentiment unto herself, she peels off any self-shame, self-recrimination, self-inflicted pain, and so on. As Tarana Burke, the pioneer of the #MeToo movement said, "use the power of empathy to stomp out shame." Empathy, and forgiveness, have the power to reframe experiences, and in so doing, Ensler can make peace with her past, making it slightly more articulatable. As she disseminates empathy by embodying her father and therefore humanizing him, as well as endowing him with the repentant capacity to humanize her in the process, she writes her own apology. In the preface, she writes:

> I am done waiting. My father is long dead. He will never say the words to me. He will never say the words to me. He will not make the apology. So it must be imagined. For it is in our imagination that we can dream across boundaries, deepen the narrative, and design alternative outcomes. This letter is an invocation, a calling up. I have tried to allow my father to speak to me as he would speak. Although I have written the words I needed my father to say to me, I had to make space for him to come through me […] This letter is my attempt to endow my father with the will and the words to cross the border, and speak the language, of apology so that I can finally be free.

It is significant to note, that this partial incarnation of her father is a transformation that can be achieved only through the literary and imaginary world. Although *The Apology* is a memoir, the letter format Ensler employed allows her to think beyond conventional literary practices in order to confront her thoughts, memories, consciousness as she reclaims control of her narrative and thus, reclaims agency. This letter can also be read as an act of rebellion, a final moment of resistance. Throughout her life, her father often describes her as someone he had erased, and so through this act of writing she rebels against his erasure and claims her voice and identity. Moreover, by writing in his voice, her insurgency is doubled as she changes his voice, his

opinions, his beliefs, and therefore, his identity. She has the final word, the final contribution of her story to the pool of knowledge, is told from her perspective. She reflects as she takes on his voice: "Am I writing in a language I never spoke or understood which you have created inside both of our minds to bridge the gaps, the failures to connect? […] Or I'm not writing this at all but simply being used as a vehicle to fulfill your own needs and version of things," (1). Finally, Ensler is both the You and the I in this letter writing-reading relationship. As Lugones states in *Pilgrimages*: "There is no 'you' there except a person spatially and thus relationally conceived through your functionality in terms of power. That you are understood as thoroughly socially constructed in terms of power […] And if 'you' (always the abstract 'you') are one of the dominated, your movements are highly restricted and contained," (9). So, in conceiving herself as both speaker and listener, writer and reader, sender and receiver, she reconceives this notion of power *in relation*. She breaks from her constriction, from his dominating power and creates a space where she is both, in relation to herself.

In present-day society, it is all too common that justice is not restored in cases of sexual violence. Moreover, even if justice were to be served, an apology is issued even less frequently. In order to find the full release she needs in order to heal, she gives herself what she needs to hear, words her father never said in his waking life. In a final note at the end of the letter, Ensler writes from her father to herself: "Let me be the father who mirrors your kindheartedness back to you. Let me lay no claims. Let me bear witness and not invade. […] I free you from the covenant. I revoke the life. I life the curse," (112). Bungeed to both her painful past, and therefore her father, she needed to hear the truth, as she remembers it, and by writing his apology for him, she hears exactly that. He becomes her father again, a father as a father should be in her

esteem, one that reflects safety and protection, showing her who she could be, all the possibilities. Her frees her. Essentially, she frees herself.

Where there was once nothing, now there is something. From silence comes power. Ensler's othered experience of her identity is kept her invisible and mute, on a margin. Incorporating her experience in the public discourse, her letter is a source of empowerment as it offers more vocabulary with which to speak of sexual violences. More possibilities of how to heal. All too often *her* experience is excluded. All too often she, like Sondra in "Rape Fantasies" or Mala in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, says nothing. How will anyone ever know how to speak of the experience, how to react to it, how to treat it, if *it* is not represented? Ensler offers a new, innovative, creative way to integrate the discourse of sexual violence, and healing, into our reality.

As she re-examines the past, as well as standard narratives, she centralizes her voice, her experience, and contributes her version to the archives of authorial history. As she stands in-between, she looks back at her oppressive past from a place of resistance. This is the site from which she writes. This is the site from which we bear witness. It is well known that Eve Ensler has had a successful career as a renowned author and playwright. Upon graduating from university, she gave a speech at her ceremony. She writes in *The Apology* how her father refused to acknowledge the incredible honour it was to achieve such a distinction. She writes how he stared at her with stoic eyes and an indifferent silence, refusing to show her that he recognized her accomplishments: "But I could not, would not give you that. I would not help you on your way. I needed to keep my claws in you. I needed to dominated and punish," (91) and then how "[e]very victory after that would be glazed with rejection. No accomplishment would ever be real enough, every achievement forever fraught with a dreaded sense of betrayal and

disappointment," (93). In writing this apology letter, she observes how his actions affected her and forces him to acknowledge that as well. More notably, he not only concedes and accepts, he also finally gives her the recognition and fatherly praise she wanted to hear: And I wonder now if that is why you continued to write, as a kind of passport to freedom," (3). He sees her. She finally sees herself. And now, she is free.

Conclusion

I believe in the resistance as I believe there can be no light without shadow; or rather, no shadow unless there is also light – Margaret Atwood

Rupturing the shackles of colonial power, each of the literary works represented in this paper severs the notion that women are limited to the essentialist parameters of body, woman. Each of these characters/authors is a storyteller, contributing her narrative to the world of pen and paper; a world of authority through authorship. Flipping the switch on this representation of the subaltern: "Cultural repression and mass genocide – turned previous high cultures of America into illiterate, peasant subcultures condemned to orality – rape and violence takes a woman as her full complete self into a fragmented, voiceless victim, turns her toward subalternity – deprived of their own intellectual or artistic expression" (Quijano 170). Transforming an otherwise subaltern woman into a storyteller, a literate and complete person with her own voice and story, these women are inducted into 'official' History, endowing the long-since deprived cultural, artistic and intellectual female story to be "true" and free. Notably, none of these novels/memoirs adheres to conventions of a linear, chronological narrative, nor do they belong to one recognizable genre, as they explore the multi-voiced, anachronistic, fantastical, objective and subjective history of the female experience. The complex structure is a layering of journals, letters, fiction, myth, fantasy, magic and mystery, all which circumvent the traditional linear

trajectory of a novel; the narrative styles of these works parallel the female collective identity by demonstrating the fragmented experience of each woman and how each one contributes to the collective whole. This method of writing can be read as a subversion of mainstream, heteronormative conventions.

Writing is that one commonality that brings all of these subjects of literature (characters and authors) together. Each subject forms her identity through the agentic act of writing. A reconstruction, a recovery, a discovery, writing her story is both a way to extricate the past traumas from her body and mind as well as consciously and meaningfully choose the narrative that forms her being. As she releases, she forgives herself; as she (auto-)creates, she starts anew. Piecing fragments of the past together, time, memory, history and truth are all transformed to speak to her experience. A second notable feature of writing is the witnessing it obliges. As she reflects back, she bears witness to experience and pain, a past self that is suspended in time. The creative witnessing that occurs as she shares her narrative with a public audience leaves no space for truth to be questioned. The concept of hierarchical pain and victimization is obliterated. There is no space to be believed or not, she produces knowledge that speaks to her experience; that cannot be denied. Her pain cannot be scrutinized, her participation or complicity, submission or symptoms made manifest are not dictated from the outside, she makes the meaning, she controls the narrative. That is where she locates her one-fractured voice. Incidentally, that is also where she learns to forgive herself and let go of the past that binds her. The final element of each of these written acts of resistance is the contribution they make to the public archive of our collective memory. The true healing that occurs in the process is all an act of decolonizing her Self as she looks to a future of possibilities.

As women, we have learned about ourselves from the exclusionary practices that have defined and confined us from the outside. Male-centric ideology teaches us about our bodies, minds, stories, experiences and ways of healing. Women have been indoctrinated with myths about ourselves, and this system of control has impeded our ability to truly express our pain. We can create change. Limited to a language charged with a masculine register, women have had to navigate a discursive silence to give sound to their story. By understanding how to negotiate a male language that structures their universe, each character/memoirist in this analysis travels into the past, sobering her mind as she write her story. Each of these subjects shares her story in a public space bridging the gap between silence and sound. As Quijano explains, "[r]epression fell above all on knowledge and production of knowledge of producing perspectives, formalizing objective modes of expression – imposed the rulers' patterns of expression, beliefs and images – served to impede the cultural domination of the dominated – also efficient means of social and cultural control" (169). Each of these subjects of literature uses her creative expression as a political intervention, cultural contribution, and ultimately as an act of resistance. Catherine Walsh, in her essay "Interculturality and Decoloniality" states: "we lived a colonized interculturality, seen and created from a Western and colonial logic. As such, we have the huge task of decolonizing interculturality, undoing Eurocentrism, and de-monopolozing life. […] It is a task that necessarily begins with un-learning" (76). Expressing her feelings, her beliefs, her experiences, her words, she (the plural she) inscribes herself into *her*story. Her silence—whether it is the quiet whisper or the loudest roar—echoes with profound depth as it provides a space for new possibilities. Showing the multiple self as a new identity, breaking open the constriction of binaries, renouncing the colonizers' language, reinterpreting fixed concepts such as time and memory, and showcasing infinite possibilities of metamorphosis pending the expansiveness of a

person’s ability to venture into the imaginary, silence is an unlearning of heteronormative, heteropatriarchal, Western/U.S.-centric ways of being; her story is told, and that is an empowered display of both resilience and freedom.

My contribution to that change is this project. Let us stop internalizing the oppression, let’s change the system from the top down, bottom up, and inside out. Change starts with one person, one step. Let’s unlearn and recreate. Let’s flood the archives with our stories. Let’s rewrite the past so we can give rise to the voices that have been silenced. Let’s unleash the pain, however it chooses to show up, so we can collectively heal.

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