FEMINIST ENCOUNTERS

A JOURNAL
OF CRITICAL STUDIES
IN CULTURE AND POLITICS

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Founded in 2017, Feminist Encounters is a journal committed to argument and debate, in the tradition of historical feminist movements.

In the wake of the growing rise of the Right across the world, openly neo-fascist national sentiments, and rising conservative populism, we feminists all over the world are needing to remobilise our energies to protect and advance gender rights.

Feminist Encounters provides a forum for feminist theorists, scholars, and activists to communicate with each other, to better educate ourselves on international issues and thus promote more global understanding, and to enhance our critical tools for fighting for human rights.

Feminism is an intellectual apparatus, a political agenda, and a programme for social change. Critical analysis of how gender discourses produce cultural identities and social practices within diverse lived realities is key to this change. We need to think more sharply in order to strategise well: as the discourses of conservatism renew and invigorate themselves, so we as feminist scholars need to be refining our amazonic swords in order not just to respond effectively but also to innovate our own ideas for equality and social justice.

We are, of course, committed to intersectionality, a vital lens through which to see the contours of race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, age/ability, and explore how gendered scripts get lived, and filtered through these specificities of cultural organisation. Lived experience is never codified in terms of gender alone, and so our research will always be sensitive to the nexus of lived oppressions.

The journal has a large editorial board and journal team, consisting of over forty scholars in twenty countries. This is deliberately inclusive in order that we can promote diversity and engage with different concerns from across the world. Our aim is not to simply talk to ourselves, reconfirming our localised assumptions, but to generate feminist encounters across regions, even if this is sometimes uncomfortable. Globalisation has been a triumph of neoliberalism, but digital technologies have also flattened and reduced the distance between us in dramatic ways, so that now we can talk to each other with unanticipated ease.

This new access to each others' voices has also brought challenges to the way we think and do things, so that being a feminist today might be quite a different prospect to a person living in China, Iran, Norway, South Africa or the UK. Second Wave Feminism used the idea of 'sisterhood' to invoke solidarity between women. I've always rather liked Andrea Dworkin's claim, though, that: "Feminism is a political practice of fighting male supremacy in behalf of women as a class, including all the women you don't like, including all the women you don't want to be around, including all the women who used to be your best friends whom you don't want anything to do with anymore." The notion of sisterhood was challenged by Black feminists in the 1980s as being too conceptually white, thus bell hooks' trenchant critique that: "the idea of 'common oppression' was a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality". In the 1990s and 2000s it has been fair to say that feminist theory and Feminist Studies since have engaged more intentionally and deliberately with intersectionality - though Jennifer Baumgardner did caution us that: "Sisterhood was never about everybody agreeing ....".

For our journal, sisterhood must expand and embrace our transgender allies and our men friends, reminding us that sibling relationships are rarely straightforward or inevitably blessed by golden moments of total affinity. Thus, **Feminist Encounters** welcomes the opportunity for new kinds of international discussions in the spirit of collaboration and critical intellectual enquiry. We hope for productive agreement and disagreement, and the shared struggle of fighting gender oppression, with our minds, hearts, and bodies, as the times demand.

Sally R Munt, University of Sussex
Founding Editor

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VOLUME 6 ISSUE 2
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Feminist Encounters
General Issue:
with theme of Gender and Embodiment in Narratives of Displacement

Editors

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Book Reviews

Feminist Encounters
General Issue: with Theme of Gender and Embodiment in Narratives of Displacement

Sally R. Munt [1]*, Rose Richards [2]

Published: September 12, 2022

The eleventh issue of *Feminist Encounters* comes in two parts: Part 1 consists of a selection of General Articles that have been submitted to the journal, and Part 2 consists of a selection of articles that have been selected on the basis of a theme, that of 'Gender and Embodiment in Narratives of Displacement.' We will go on to introduce the two halves of the issue separately.

PART 1

Our first article in Part 1 is a beautiful, clever and moving video essay by Mary Harrod. In 'Heightened Genre and Women's Filmmaking in Hollywood: Twilight (Catherine Hardwicke, 2008) as Teen Gothic', Harrod shows how women filmmakers have used cultural knowledge cinematically to simultaneously engage both the viewer's intellect and emotions. This creates a specific type of heightened sensory experience that challenges dualistic understandings of mind and body as separate. In her commentary that accompanies the video essay, Harrod describes the creation of this experience as a feminist gesture as it offers an alternative way of reading the world to the more common dualistic way of excluding women and other 'minority' groups. The video essay itself is a sensory and aesthetic delight. It is a cinematic rendition of the theories that Harrod discusses in her commentary— and as such, a feminist gesture of its own.

Next, in 'The Rise and Normalisation of Blessee/Blesser Relationships in South Africa: A Post-Colonial Feminist Analysis' Ruvimbo Zawu explores a South African phenomenon, that of the blesser/blessee. Some young women in contemporary South Africa enter into transactional sexual relationships with older men. Zawu uses Stoebenau *et al.*'s three paradigms of transactional sex to analyse what may motivate such relationship if the 'blessee' is not living in deprived circumstances. She uses a continuum of deprivation, agency, and instrumentality to challenge some preconceptions about such relationships where often women are seen as non-agentic.

In the third article, '"[I]f I am Alone I Feel Like a Target Sometimes": The Making and Unmaking of the Vulnerable White Woman in Strange Encounters with the Black Man in the South African (Post)Colony', Azille Coetzee shows how the gender logic of the colony/apartheid regime perpetuates the regime's racial logic in current day South Africa through choices of women. Coetzee traces the causes and effects of the seemingly small and often largely unconscious choices through a discussion with a white woman who describes her life in a small town. Through this Coetzee links the individual's actions in her own space to larger actions in the spaces of broader society.

The final article for this section is 'A Discussion of *Mr. Housewife* in Relation to the Social Construction of Masculinity in South Korean Society' by Beste Alpay Jeong. Jeong introduces the reader to Yoo Sun-Dong's film, *Mr. Housewife* (*Miseuteo Jubu Kwizeuwang*, 2005). This film addresses Korean masculinity in subversive ways that allow the audience to see possibilities beyond the gender binary hegemony and thereby question how masculinity is in fact constructed in Korea.

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PART 2

In Part 2 of this issue, we present eight articles that each in their own way is concerned with forced migration, displacement, and the experiences of embodiment/disembodiment that bear the marks and scars of those journeys.

In the twenty-first century, migration has become a key obsession for growing right-wing populisms across the globe, as they seek to mobilise popular *ressentiment* against 'invasion' in feelings of justice and revenge. Polls that were conducted following the Brexit vote in the UK in 2017 cited sovereignty and 'control of immigration' as the chief reason for voting Leave. Notoriously, 2016 saw the election of Donald Trump in the USA by the Electoral College (although as we know, Clinton won the popular vote by nearly 3 million). Trump, once in office, immediately whipped up a frenzy concerning a supposed existential threat facing America, that of a migrant caravan from Central America that crudely exploited racist and nationalist fears in order to bolster his image as a Strong Man/White Saviour. The miserable and discredited French fascist theory of the *Grand Remplacement* (Great Replacement) (of white Europeans, by Muslims) has gained ideological traction across several western democracies during the past decade, seeping into general discourse, and the routine Islamophobia it stirred has in part resulted in the fascist politician Marie Le Pen gaining 89 seats in the 2022 French Parliament. In Hungary, in Brazil, in Myanmar, in India, and in many other countries - right-wing governments have galvanised mass fear, martialised their publics, and created a festering outrage about immigration. Social conservatism and economic nationalism have resulted in a nativist protectionism, which is especially obsessed with 'external threat'. Even in usually stable, liberal countries such as Sweden, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia or Canada, neo-fascism has gained political hold. In countries like Pakistan, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan, right-wing populism has come in a wave, and with that wave is a concomitant suspicion of minorities, especially those perceived to be 'incomers'. In some nations, notably the USA, this has led to mass shootings and a more geographically diffused but noticeable rise in racist violence. These are powerful movements fuelled by social media that rise up in petty outrage against the persistent myth of the dark stranger coming to steal and pollute the national imaginary, it mobilises nostalgic sentiment for a mythical, eugenical purity in the body politic that has of course, never existed.

'Anti-elitism' claims to speak for ordinary people who feel (rightfully) cheated by neoliberalism and the subsequent escalation in the polarisation of wealth, since the 1980s. In a discursively clever initiative, right-wing populists have linked anti-elitism to liberalism in their rhetoric. Ironically of course – as most right-wing populist leaders have emerged from out of the international ultra-rich elite. Nevertheless, these mendacious charlatans have pronounced themselves to be 'protectors of traditional values'; all too often this is doublespeak for fomenting civic revulsion against those persons who are seen to be planning a vanguard of dissolution, spearheaded conspiratorially by those phantasmagorically powerful migrants, together with fifth columnist snowflakes who are perceived to be the 'enemy within'. Racist fears of immigration are mobilised cynically by all kinds of governments, to detract and displace internal political dissent and frustration, in order to redirect this energy against what is perceived to be an external/internal existential threat.

In the West such paranoid fears have been historically directed at the brown body, or at othered white ethnicities who are collapsible into the category of non-white, or perhaps the dirty-white (the Irish, Jews, Travellers); these phantasmagorical projections are suffused by illusions of disease, suspected of undifferentiated contagion, and are met by nested state dehumanisation. The imagery of racism deployed against migrants is full of the bodily imagery of penetration, and dissolution, of a kind of virginal national purity being threatened and subsequently lost. Fears of miscegenation also invoke a kind of theft, a deception that something pure and unsullied is being spoiled and destroyed, 'taken from us.' The imagery used is somatised and expresses fears of uncontrolled movement – of a nimble fluidity that is threatening precisely because a weak national body seems unable to see it, control it, and expel it. Those undifferentiated, anonymous, black-robed would-be terrorists that pierce the nation's boundaries in cheap plastic inflatable boats, in order to enter and pollute the 'safe space' of the nation, are identifying the supposed porosity of the national body. It is a quintessentially paranoid fear of infiltration – a terror that the fragile national body has been breached. Anti-immigration racism is suffused by a fear of rape. Public attitudes to migration have been manipulated to reject multiculturalism as 'political correctness' or 'cancel culture', epitomised in the social media memes that reoccur with grim predictability every winter that maintain that schools are 'cancelling Christmas', that Easter eggs will be banned, or women on the beach will be made to wear burkhas. These memes speak to a fragile cultural consensus that is easily pitched back into nostalgia, and then backlash.

The illogicality of these fears, and the vicious social backlash they provoke, is because there is a palimpsest in our unconscious: that the national body is somehow 'our' body, and it is vulnerable to attack. This mechanism of psychic projection, in which the national body is transposed onto my body, is instilled from childhood by invoking the imagined community of nation (Anderson, 1983), an identification that is also a projection and introjection. Primitive fears are mobilised by racist governments intent on deflecting social unrest, inequality, and perceived injury. Tapping into such fears and galvanising them is a contemporary evil which destroys compassion and the common understanding of human collective responsibility. This neoliberal denial of identification with others has

become a feature of 'late' capitalism. And by using 'late' we are also suggesting its other, older meaning: death. Capitalism has become the proverbial snake eating its own head, as it relentlessly denies and defers the reality of death standing before us all – that of the climate emergency and the knowledge that fossil fuels (the engine of capitalism), are burning the planet and all of its creatures, to death. In the next few decades, the destruction of the earth will mean ever spiralling human migration, as people flee from extreme hunger from land that is either burnt, thirsty and barren, or swamped, choked and drowned. Global migration is about to dramatically increase. Let us challenge the idea that this is somehow an individualistic 'economic migration' which is characterised by a selfish lust for improved living conditions – labour migration is of course also the market in human trafficking. Governments in the global north are able to deny sanctuary and dismiss the claims of asylum made by refugees on the basis that those seeking asylum 'are just seeking a better life.' Well… yes, but… Recently the Conservative Government in the UK has evidently briefed politicians when talking on broadcast media to prefix the term 'asylum seeker' with the adjective 'illegal'. In doing so, politicians infer that asylum seekers are criminals, deviants, security risks that pose a threat to the sanctity of British culture; criminals of course being a group of people that have been long denied their human rights. These days, economic migration is largely the result of climate migration: people are leaving their land because they have no water, or are starving.

Thinking more about embodiment, one of the co-editors of this issue has worked for 8+ years with refugees and asylum seekers, by providing complex trauma treatment using Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapy (CBT), Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) – which are the recommended clinical methods in the UK National Health Service (NHS) protocol for treating Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Munt is the Clinical Director for the Brighton Exiled/Refugee Trauma Service, a charity which works with the NHS to provide treatment for asylum seekers and refugees with serious mental illness. Years of work in this field has reinforced to our therapists the enduring and inevitably long-suffering connection between trauma and embodiment. Following the pioneering work of Bessel van der Kolk (2014) in *The Body Keeps the Score*, Munt has encountered in clinical practice many of the diverse ways in which trauma becomes somatised; there is of course a cultural dimension to how pain – both emotional and physical – is manifested in the body. So, migrants forced into relocating often express the physical trauma they have experienced before fleeing (often from torture), and during the privation of their refugee journey, typically characterised by hunger, injury, terror, and violence, in order to articulate their mental distress. In many cultures, emotional pain is traditionally expressed through physical discomfort; western doctors can sometimes be dismissive of this physical pain when articulated by refugees, and explain it away as somatisation, implying it isn't 'real'. Disclosure of torture history and being pressured to explain the long-term injuries and wounds caused, can cause acute shame - and feared consequences including reprisals - in the patient. We frequently get patient referrals to our service which parenthetically express: 'we have done loads of medical tests that have come back with negative results so we think this is a mental problem'. Such clinical work is complicated because asylum seekers can also externalise their torturer and 'hear voices' in order to expel their unbearable histories of psychic and physical damage. Trauma-induced psychosis presents fairly commonly in serious mental illness, and can represent a kind of splitting off of such unbearable histories. The embodiment endured by forced migration can produce many kinds of brokenness.

Perhaps those of us on the feminist Left have a duty to think about migration more urgently. Migration Studies has existed for less than 30 years, and draws on an interdisciplinary framework which varies from institution to institution. Migration Studies has emerged as a humanitarian project that seeks to engage with the growing awareness of the social crisis that forced migration, refugee and asylum seeker movement provokes. Studies on migration have focussed on issues such as empire, colonisation and diaspora and have been informed by critical frameworks drawing from Orientalism, Postcolonialism, and Black Studies. There are evidently many sympathies between feminism and Migration Studies, both are relatively young, ethically-driven disciplines working across intellectual traditions, and whereas there is evidence of a lot of feminist research on gender and migration, perhaps there is less evidence in Gender Studies/Women's Studies/Queer Studies/Trans Studies of research on forced migration, refugees, and projects on asylum (although largely based in the USA there is a growing subdiscipline of Queer Migration Studies, which we are glad to support).

So, our small contribution to this urgent research is presented in the current issue of Feminist Encounters. We start this section with a creative reflection on displacement: 'Boxed: Exploring Containment and Resilience in Times of Crisis' by Heaven Crawley and Laura Nyahuye. Crawley and Nyahuye's narrative, composed during the Covid 19 pandemic, uses poetry, story and images in a dialogic, feminist style that encourages the reader to participate in the growth of a friendship, and also to think more about our own strategies to manage displacement. 'Confined, Controlled and Violated: The Rohingya Women in Bangladesh Refugee Camps' by Ena Tripura is a classic and important piece of sociological research on the emplacement and restriction of Rohingya women in refugee camps in Bangladesh. The encampment of the Rohingyas in the camps in Bangladesh has become an entrapment, and reinforced the continuum of male dominance and violence carried out on women's bodies. By drawing from Judith Butler's concepts of precarious life and frames of recognition Tripura identifies three layers

of violence against Rohingya women: the humanitarian regime controlling their movement, Rohingya men expressing their anger and frustration, and local Bangladeshi men demonstrating their superiority over the Rohingya intruders into the national space, in her powerful analysis. We then move onto Asha Jeffers article, 'I Was Certain I Saw My Future in Him': Coming into Intergenerational Empathy and Escape in lê thi diem thuy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (2003). This powerful literary analysis of a novel examines whether it is possible for second generation immigrants to escape their parents' trauma of forced migration, and critically examines the formation of that identity with its troubling heritages. Similarly turning to creative writing to explore such heritage, Lamiae Bouqentar's 'Homing and bodies: Arab queer encounters,' uses autoethnography in order to examine the researcher's embodied encounters with the other Arab migrants located in Montreal. Kristen Starkowski's article, 'The Body at the Borderlands: Applying a Feminist-of-Colour Disability Studies Lens to the USA-Mexico Refugee Crisis' examines both the voluntary migrant workers' and the involuntary refugees' forced migration, as it is experienced at the United States-Mexico border, by using an intersectional framework of disability, migration status, and gender. Soyeon Kim's analysis 'Reclaiming a Space in American History with the Collective Voices of the Japanese Picture Brides in Julie Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic'* follows Julie Otsuka's 2011 novel *The Buddha in the Attic* documents the history of 'picture brides' who were some of the earliest Japanese female immigrants to the USA and whose narratives remain unwritten, forgotten, and erased. This article argues that Otsuka uses a collective voice as a tool with which to inscribe the shared experience of loss, carving out narratives of the picture brides as a subversive alternative to mainstream versions of American history and further claims that such collectivity can become a significantly powerful means of occupying a narrative space. In 'Immigration Detention, the Patriarchal State and Politics of Disgust in the Hands of Street-Level Bureaucrats', Alethia Fernandez de la Reguera shares the results of her ethnographic research conducted in the southern border of Mexico from 2017 to 2019, at the *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI* [XXI Century Immigration Station], located in Tapachula, Chiapas, which is one of the biggest and most important detention centres in Mexico. She analyses the functioning of an immigration detention centre as a 'total institution' where street-level bureaucrats enforce practices of biopolitics through daily deprivation of access to vital resources and the protection of the law. The article demonstrates the dehumanisation practices in immigration detention that are deployed as a deterrence policy through operational strategies. Finally, Catherine Evans' article 'Embodied Selves/Disembodied Subjects: Homing the Body in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names'* is a new reading of the novel that focusses on the gendered aspects of displacement and home. The reading follows the central character, Darling, through her journey from Africa to the west and considers how her somatic disassociation is only relinquished once she comes to terms with her displacement, and her new home in the USA.

We commend this excellent issue to you.

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Heightened Genre and Women's Filmmaking in Hollywood: *Twilight* (Catherine Hardwicke, 2008) as Teen Gothic

Mary Harrod [1]*

Published: September 12, 2022

ABSTRACT

In this video essay I explore intertextuality in *Twilight* as a marker of cinephilic female authorship. I aim to show that the film relies for much of its gripping effect on overtly re-engaging overdetermined structures of feeling established by earlier texts, in other words by invoking genre memory. Considering the key genres with which the film engages – notably Gothic horror and romance as well as the teen film – I demonstrate how *Twilight* repeatedly appeals to cultural knowledge at not only an intellectual but also an emotional level. I suggest that apostrophising the mind and the body simultaneously and in a way that cannot be parsed demands to be read as a feminist gesture, since the mode of address adopted by what I call heightened genre films such as this one forecloses the viability of Cartesian dualistic understandings of human experience on which patriarchal exclusions of women and other groups have often rested.

Keywords: affect, genre, women's filmmaking, intertextual pastiche, popular cinephilia

Video link: https://vimeo.com/726107982/2da9a83b06

ACCOMPANYING COMMENTARY

Deriving from my book on *Heightened Genre and Women's Filmmaking in Hollywood* (Harrod, 2021), this essay is planned as the first in a series staging its key claim: that a significant group of female filmmakers in Hollywood have since around 1990 been making films that are at once highly self-conscious yet highly emotionally affecting.[1] Since the argument rests on the felt impact of generic echoes, the video essay format provides the ideal means to demonstrate claims about the power of clichéd audio-visual situations to move the viewer even as we are aware of their well-worn history in representation[2] – or, in the words of filmmaker Agnieszka Piotrowska paraphrasing Catherine Grant, to 'explor[e] what visual intertextuality can produce in terms of new knowledge' (Piotrowska, 2020: 1).

The essay opens with a prologue adumbrating the stakes of embracing the heightened genre framework, as symptomatic of a refusal to separate thought and feeling, for feminist film studies and feminism as such. This is achieved audio-visually partly through an excerpt from another exemplary film: Greta Gerwig's 2019 *Little Women*. This film intradiegetically references the deployment of discourses of rationalism to side-line women, when protagonist Jo March (Saoirse Ronan) describes her desire for intellectual as well as romantic fulfilment. I link this

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[1] Relevant filmmakers in addition to Hardwicke and Greta Gerwig, both discussed in this video essay, include Kathryn Bigelow, Amy Heckerling, Sofia Coppola, Nora Ephron and Nancy Meyers (who have received some limited critical attention) as well as Kimberly Peirce (who has received almost none). For a fuller discussion of *Twilight*, including extended analysis of the heightened generic power of a single shot and reflections on how the film's status as adaptation, serial narrative and object of fan cultures consolidate and expand claims about it, see pp. 117-134.

[2] See also Dyer, 2007.

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recognition to more recent iterations of the condescending tendency to relegate women to the status of over-emotional fools, reproducing the example of UK Prime Minister David Cameron's 2011 gendered jibe to a female colleague in Parliament, 'Calm down, dear', as an emblematic case among myriad manifestations of the nefarious effects of such tenacious discourses on cultural attitudes in even the most public of fora. Indeed, Cameron's comment is succeeded by a gallery of drawn and photographic records of the inhuman treatment to which 'hysterical' women have been subjected in the name of science – a point whose larger significance becomes evident when we recall the etymology of *hysteria* in the Greek term for the uterus, such that the pathologised over-emotional woman stood for woman *par excellence* in classical Western patriarchal cultures. I further show that *Little Women* formally exemplifies heightened genericity by incorporating an intellectual tease into its potentially most rousing emotional scene: a romantic kiss between Jo and a French professor. It interrupts the swelling score and deadline structure, which has Jo chase her departing suitor to the train station and beg him not to move away, in order to reveal the scene to have been added to her own novelisation of her life, in a Russian doll figuration that reaches out to the extratextual female author. However, the romance moment is still played out for effect (rather than spoofed by foregrounding parodic elements) and comprises the film's climactic high in terms of affective trajectory.

The main body of the essay then analyses *Twilight* as a more subtle but also more thoroughgoing example of heightened genre. Considering the key genres in which Hardwicke's film can be situated, with a view to probing its knowing yet participatory relationship with these, the Gothic emerges as a master category in its defining referentiality to past forms (Spooner, 2006: 9-10). Further, just as the Gothic is given to 'revealing while shrouding' (Branch, 2010: 64), *Twilight* epitomises heightened genre because it underscores the artificiality of generic elements while fully inviting the viewer's willing multi-sensory 'seduction' (Wilson, 2011; 2014: xii) by these, in a manner that simultaneously resonates with Pamela Craig and Martin Fradley's (2010: 87) description of teen horror in terms of an enduring stress on 'heightened subjective experience and psychological perception, appealing to *emotional* rather than objective realism' (original emphasis).

To instantiate the film's reliance on Gothic conventions in the video essay, I first juxtapose images of Gothic architecture and art with shots from *Twilight*, before reading from classic Gothic poem 'Goblin Market' alongside moments from the film with which it bears not only narrative but also remarkably strong visual, aural and altogether sensory comparison. *Twilight*'s similarity to historical vampire films specifically is then drawn out, emphasising such texts' status as already situated at the interface of intellectual appeal – cult fan cultures that catalogue references – and an emotive address in which implied violence engages an erotic register. This apprehension tallies with the way in which not only have vampires become associated with an urgent drive to signify discursively in general (Williamson, 2005: 2), but Anne Morey's examination of *Jane Eyre*'s influence on *Twilight* illuminates their specific aptness as signifiers of romance, as an ideology based on extreme gender difference. Accordingly, the essay moves next to considering *Twilight*'s debt to nineteenth-century Romantic-Gothic literature, notably as adapted for cinema, with excerpts drawn from versions of *Lady Chatterley* and *Wuthering Heights* as well as *Jane Eyre*. The resulting medley of dialoguing scenes articulates the fact that a female concern with the natural world, theorised as purely haptic in relation to art cinema, also addresses representational memories.[3] It thus evokes the way in which, just as the Gothic takes in both surface and depth, *Twilight* works the interrelated seams of sensory-emotive evocation and cognitively produced signification together, to suggest that there is no meaningful way to separate these scenes' sensuous qualities from their history of connoting (female-accented) sensuality: our sensory-emotive 'insides' are acted on and shaped by outside forces unavoidably embedded in culture and the discursive.

Noting the overlap between romantic desire and the death drive in such textual situations, not to mention the variety of historical representations of vampires, a related, secondary discursive thread of this section of the essay focuses on *Twilight*'s thorough scrambling of gendered conceptions of genre itself, given the historical associations of horror with masculinity and romance with femininity. In this way, Hardwicke's movie is revealed to preclude binaristic understandings at all levels: just as for Christine Gledhill (2017: x) analysis of genre storytelling can expose 'the genericity of social gender', here, likewise, probing the aporias of social gender tags goes hand in hand with exploding the myth of total generic coherence.

After illustrating the intermittent degree of explicitness in *Twilight* about its own fantastical status, the third part of the essay then looks at how the film achieves its blurring of categories in relation to the teenpic. Part of the objective here is to demonstrate the way in which participation in various genres can be one means to throw the codes pertaining to each into relief. Cross-cutting between clips from Hardwicke's film and other teen or related movies shows how choices of setting and dialogue in particular, as well as specific stylistic features such as the use of slow-motion, wink knowingly at overdetermined teen (and sometimes other, more generalised, narrative) cinematic conventions – and very often their gendered nature, especially in teen horror (Driscoll, 2012; Clover, 1992) – while still situating the viewer in the affectively saturated world of adolescents and tapping into our own

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[3] For a famous and influential example of haptic criticism on Jane Campion's *The Piano*, see Sobchack (2004: 61-66).

(cultural) memories of highly charged teen experiences. [4] Importantly, it is here that the essay gestures implicitly back to the place of the film director in heightened genre filmmaking and analysis, indicating through a comparison between *Twilight* and quintessential auteur Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1965) that extremely overt, metafictional knowingness can be equated to direct to-audience address usually (though not exclusively) associated with auteur and art cinemas:

> A text that thematizes its own self-conscious awareness of the process of its own construction unavoidably thematizes the importance of its creator (Worthington, 2001: 118).

Further, drawing on Torben Grodal's claim that moments of self-consciousness in cinema are 'more emotional than cognitive, as [they] provide[s] a "feeling" in the viewer' (Grodal, 1999: 216), the essay points to a relation of felt complicity between the viewer and the filmmaker, which has important implications for orienting us positively towards the cinephilic mainstream film director. Such a championing of Hardwicke as a skilled artist – including noting some of her original contributions to adapting *Twilight* from its book form in terms of costume and styling – is important given her widespread denigration in criticism disavowing the movie's spectacular success, which included attaining the record for the highest-grossing opening for any film directed by a woman (Kapurch, 2012: 183).

The final moments of the video essay acknowledge *Twilight*'s relation to a recent trend for representing young women on screen as agentic if not violent, especially in female-authored films. However, I choose to frame the work with a quotation from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1998: 186):

> To be a poet is to have a soul so quick to discern, that no shade of quality escapes it, and so quick to feel, that discernment is but a hand playing with finely-ordered variety on the chords of emotion, a soul in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge.

The inclusion of this detail here takes the final emphasis away from representational politics to recentre questions of aesthetics choice in film practice. Specifically, it foregrounds the way in which many female authors' work exemplifies what Jane Gaines (2012: 18) has described as women filmmakers' 'highly developed social expertise in the ways and means of feeling'. It is the central claim of this first instalment of the present series of video essays that recent heightened genre filmmaking by Hardwicke in *Twilight*, like other women working in contemporary Hollywood, manifests particularly clearly how such expertise leads to 'the codification of emotional knowledge in genre' (Gaines, 2012: 18). Such a recognition elevates the status of the typically decried female director of contemporary mainstream cinema, resituating her as a powerful author of collective subjectivities.

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[4] The essay also illustrates how Hardwicke' film engages yet stakes out its distance from the commodified, 'shiny' aesthetics of girl teen films specifically. On this topic, see also Colling (2017: 68), building on the work of Mary Celeste Kearney and Marina Warner.

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The Rise and Normalisation of Blessee/Blesser Relationships in South Africa: A Post-Colonial Feminist Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Since 2015, young urban black women in South Africa have been posting images of luxury items on social media platforms such as Instagram. These women claim that their luxury items are gifts from their 'blessers'/wealthy men in exchange for sex and companionship. This has led to the rise of the 'blesser culture' on social media and the prevalence of transactional sex for upward mobility and status. This article provides a post-colonial feminist evaluation of 10 young black women from northern Johannesburg. It examines their motivations for engaging in these relationships. It draws from Stoebenau *et al.*'s (2016) theoretical framework that describes the three paradigms of transactional sex, 'sex for basic needs,' 'sex for upward mobility and status' and 'sex and material expressions of love' as a continuum of deprivation, agency, and instrumentality. This analysis challenges research frameworks that limit transactional sex to matters of HIV/AIDS transmission, and the framing of women as powerless victims of men. The article reveals these women seek blessers based on relative deprivation, to access a more high-status lifestyle and upward social mobility and from a position of agency. They view blesser relationships as a mutually beneficial exchange that allows them to give sex to access the commodities of modernity.

Keywords: sex work, transactional sex, post-colonial feminism, blessee, blesser

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, marriage in various societies in Africa was regarded as a marker for adulthood. This understanding of marriage is now shifting, a shift in which women are agents. Today, modern women in African societies[1] in their quest for self-fulfilment and economic independence tend to choose well-established married men, also called 'sugar daddies', 'business' or 'donor' for material benefits while maintaining their social independence. This differs from Western norms where romantic love and sexual desire are viewed as the 'proper' motive for engaging in sex, while deliberate material-orientated uses of sex and sexuality are viewed as taboo (Helle-Valle, 2004).

In South Africa, women are increasingly opting not to marry, and function instead rather in the independent role of an extra-marital girlfriend (Arnfred, 2004; Helle-Valle, 2004). This decline in marriage can be traced back to South Africa's 19th-century mineral revolution which dismantled traditional patriarchal systems whereby the head of the homestead sustained the institution of marriage by assigning livestock for their son's bride's wealth expenses (Hunter, 2010: 107). Consequently, new sexual norms which normalised sexual relations outside of marriage emerged in both rural and urban areas. By the start of the 20th century, the rural economy had weakened, and the market economy overtook the homestead patriarch as the custodian of masculinity through marriage (Hunter, 2010: 107). In addition, South Africa's entrance into the world economy and the culture and processes of globalisation normalised sexual relations outside of marriage governed by the exchange of gifts to demonstrate love and commitment (Molokomme, 1991 and Jochelson, 2001: 55).

For young women, neoliberal globalisation created jobs and educational opportunities and provided them the means to decide whether to marry or postpone marriage plans indefinitely while still benefiting from material gifts

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[1] The use of terms such as 'African women/woman', 'Black women/woman' and 'women/woman' in this study is not a universal representation of all women. Therefore, the argument outlined in this article about black women and women in general must be read within the boundaries of data generated for this research.

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from men (Hunter, 2010: 107). Today, these casual sexual relationships comprising the exchange of economically valuable commodities from men to women are known as 'blessee/blesser' relationships. These transactional relationships occur between young, educated women who already have necessities such as accommodation and food and older married men who are financing the lifestyle of multiple young women at the same time. This type of sexual exchange has led to the rise of the 'blesser culture' on social media and highlights the prevalence of transactional sex for upward mobility and status amongst young urban black women in South Africa and reveals different reasons for young black women's involvement in transactional sexual exchanges beyond the longstanding transactional 'sex for survival' discourses (Checkpoint Blessed Part 1, 2016).

This article focuses on blessee/blesser relationships in northern Johannesburg, South Africa. It argues that blessee/blesser relationships are not always motivated by absolute deprivation or sought out by impoverished young women at risk of sexual mistreatment by their older male counterparts. Transactional relationships can also be pursued to acquire a high-status lifestyle, gain some upward social mobility as well as for fun and entertainment. Arguably, young women fashion themselves as blessees to satisfy their wants rather than needs. They seek luxury items such as designer clothes, expensive cars, and overseas trips which they regard as "needs" because they are central to their construction of a sophisticated lifestyle, status, and success associated with northern Johannesburg.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study combined Stoebenau *et al.*'s (2016) conceptual framework with post-colonial feminism to present the nature and intricacies of transactional sex and the drivers for its practice (Ranganthan *et al.*, 2017: 2). They argue that the three paradigms of transactional sex: sex for basic needs, sex for upward mobility and status, and sex and material expressions of love were seen instead as a continuum of agency, deprivation (absolute or relative), and instrumentality, and not as three discrete paradigms. Firstly, the continuum of deprivation depicts the level to which transactional sex is shaped by poverty (absolute deprivation) in comparison to economic disparity (relative deprivation). This continuum brings focus to the idea that transactional sex occurs throughout a variety of social and economic statuses while recognising that women in rural areas are not secluded from modern-day materiality (Wamoyi *et al.*, 2010). In the agency[2] continuum, the degree of power a woman has determines her role as either 'victim' or 'agent' in transactional sex. Therefore, a woman's agency changes and mutates in different scenarios and between relationships, from excesses of powerful agent to powerless victim. In addition, a woman's agency might fall anywhere along the continuum between these two poles at any given time. Consequently, even in the context of absolute deprivation women can still possess 'thin agency' in areas such as 'partner selection', 'first timing of sex' and 'termination of relationship' (Stoebenau *et al.*, 2016: 192).

The instrumentality continuum addresses the degree to which a relationship is driven by money or love. The level on which a relationship is determined by instrumentality may change because it is independent of a woman's agency or the economic environment in which the relationship occurs. In this continuum, transactional sex occurs in the middle space of the continuum of instrumentality, such that the relationship varies from being driven by either monetary gain or love. However, the extent of both instrumentality and emotionality can differ from one relationship to another and over time. This theoretical outline of transactional sex captures their various motivations to seek transactional sex as well as the interplay and complexity of exchange relationships.

DEFINING TRANSACTIONAL SEX

Transactional sexual relationships are complex, ambiguous, and highly contested (Ranganathan *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, there is a tendency within social science to portray the categories of prostitution, sex work and transactional sex as having self-evident meanings (Ranganathan *et al.*, 2017: 2). This oversight has resulted in the conflation of transactional sexual relationships with sex work or prostitution and has led to conflicting meanings of the term 'transactional sex.' Strictly speaking, prostitution and sex work are not the same concepts. Prostitution is regarded as the gendered nature of the female condition under patriarchy, where male dominance is exerted through the medium of sexuality (Kesler, 2002: 19). This position stems from scholarly work by radical feminists such as Millet (1975), Barry (1995, 1979), Pateman (1988), MacKinnon (1987, 1990), and Dworkin (1987) who regard prostitution as violence against women, violence not only in the act of prostituting but also in the idea of 'buying sex' which is related to the system of heterosexuality and male power and signifies 'the absolute embodiment of patriarchal male privilege' (Kesler, 2002: 19). Therefore, prostitution is viewed as the ultimate

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[2] For the purposes of this study 'agency' is viewed as a person's capacity to enact deliberate choices to reach a specific end. However, while agency is enacted by the individual, it is also structured by the person's socially shaped internality and is limited in the expression by economic and social conditions (Ranganathan *et al.*, 2017:3).

reduction of women to sexual objects that can be sold and bought, thus creating the basis of female subjugation (Jeffries, 1997: 2).

On the other hand, sex work results from agency and therefore permits women's decision-making power within capitalist systems (CGE, 2013). This liberal feminist view of sex work considers choice, women's power, the contradictions, and complexities present in analysing sex work, and the structuring roles of class, race, money, and culture (Scoular, 2004: 354). It critiques radical feminism's approach to sex work as entrenching images of sex workers as sexual subordinates, while sustaining views in the sex industry of dominant men and submissive women, instead of altering these views (Shrage, 1994: 134). Therefore, liberal feminists argue that, although sexuality and gender play a crucial role in determining roles in sex work, sex work should not be constrained to either sexuality or gender because doing so reduces women's characters to a single trait while ignoring the intersectional roles of class, race, money, and culture (Zatz, 1997: 279).

Contemporary scholars such as Kapur (2001) have also challenged radical feminists' understanding of sex work by rejecting the monolithic, victimised, and linear framing of third world women as 'repressed subjects' or 'injured bodies.' Post-colonial feminists such as Mohanty (1984) seek to dismantle the framing of black women as always financially and politically reliant on men, and the regressive stereotype of prostitution being the logical form of work for black women. For these scholars, rejecting the universalising of black women introduces new ways of understanding sex work which emphasise that sex work is not always forced, harmful, lacking consent from the sex worker, and does not gratify the sex worker (Overall, 1992: 717). Based on this distinction, this study defines transactional sex as a sexual relationship or act(s), outside of marriage or sex work, structured by the implicit assumption that sex will be exchanged for material benefit or status. While driven primarily by instrumental intentions, transactional relationships may also include emotional intimacy (Stoebenau et al., 2016). This definition offers a more nuanced description of non-marital, non-commercial[3] exchange relationships in Africa.

SOUTH AFRICA AND TRANSACTIONAL SEX

In South Africa, the practice of transactional sex and its association with high-risk behaviour has undergone various transformations that have been shaped by political and historical processes such as colonisation, apartheid, and globalisation in the post-apartheid era (Zembe et al., 2013: 2). In the apartheid era, the migrant labour system changed the nature of sexual relationships by limiting black women's migration to urban areas and resulted in men being separated from their partners for longer durations (Hunter, 2003). This created an opportunity for the emergence of commercial sex in urban areas, destabilised marital ties and increased the presence of multiple concurrent sexual relationships and created gender inequalities linked to transactional sex (Jochelson, 2001: 55). However, during this period, premarital sexual relationships were not key drivers of sexual behaviour. Instead, girlfriends and boyfriends exchanged gifts and men understood male accomplishment as their capacity to save finances for the bride price (Zembe et al., 2013: 2).

Nevertheless, apartheid laws gradually side-lined black Africans from significant economic contribution by racially and geographically establishing wealth inequalities and high rates of unemployment which reduced men's ability to afford the bride price/*lobola*[4] (Hunter, 2003). In the post-apartheid era, the adoption of the neo-liberal Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) policies propelled South Africa into the world economy and the culture and processes of globalisation (Zembe et al., 2013: 3). This resulted in an influx of foreign products and increased the consumption rates of South Africans. Furthermore, the transformation processes of globalisation moved black South Africans from socio-economic isolation and exposed them to commodities and a global lifestyle.

This increase in commodity/consumption culture occurred against the backdrop of the country's unique history of economic restrictions on black Africans because commodities were now afforded greater importance amongst black people (Zembe et al., 2013: 3). However, in the post-apartheid era, historically established wealth inequalities and high rates of unemployment continue to limit black South African's access to global lifestyles. Therefore, men have resorted to other ways of showcasing masculine success through transactional sex.

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[3] Although exchange relationships have several similarities with sex work, young women who engage in transactional sex are not regarded as sex workers because neither party involved view the exchange as sex work. On the contrary, participants in these relationships view their partners as 'boyfriends' and 'girlfriends' as opposed to sex workers who identify their partners as 'clients' (Hunter, 2010).

[4] The bridewealth system in Southern Africa is varied and cannot be read as identical. However, in many African communities *lobola* (the provision of livestock or money to the parents of a bride) also holds symbolic value in the way it is viewed as the transition into adulthood by both the bride and groom while sealing the exchange of a woman from one lineage to another (Ansel, 2001).

Recent studies on the characteristics of transactional sex in South Africa challenge notions that transactional sexual exchanges are primarily based on 'poverty-induced economic survival strategies' (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003: 216). According to a study by Chatterji *et al.* (2005), poverty is not the principal cause prompting young women to reciprocate money or gifts with sex. Most women who seek transactional sexual relationships do not consider themselves as victims, instead, they seek out these relationships to gain control and access material gifts in a manner that confronts and reproduces patriarchal systems (Hunter, 2003). Furthermore, studies conducted in urban and semi-urban areas identified 'sex for upward mobility and status' linked to modernity and aspirational lifestyles as the dominant reason young urban women seek transactional sex.

According to Hunter (2010) and Leclerc-Madlala (2008), the drop in formal marriage and an increase in temporary partnerships expressed by financial gifts has led to young women seeking and maintaining a relationship with one or multiple older men. This shift in transactional sexual relationships is influenced by global images of modernity reflected in how women now actively 'choose men' and maintain transactional relationships for consumption purposes (Hunter, 2003). Moreover, in urban areas young urban women seeking consumption-based relationships identify themselves as active decision-makers (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008: 28). For these women, attracting and maintaining sexual relations for consumption is an act of cleverness and assertiveness, and contributes to their self-perceptions of expressing their sexual freedoms.

In the peri-urban and urban South African location, media images of luxury and affluent lifestyles have become a vital influence in moulding young urban women's dreams, and goals. Consequently, young urban women form relationships with older men to attain globalised images of glamour by actively navigating their sexuality to acquire products that reflect high-social positions and lifestyles and to satisfy 'wants' as perhaps opposed to meeting 'needs.' For these women, being seen exiting from luxury vehicles or dressed in luxury clothing as well as owning a valued commodity is a status-boosting activity. Beyond the social benefits, young women claim that these relationships boost their self-esteem and self-confidence and assist them in the attainment of long-term ambitions and goals of social success.

Leclerc-Madlala (2003) argues further that, by engaging in transactional sex for material gain young urban women seek to attain 'new needs'- the commodities of modernity - to present themselves as being successful, sophisticated, and sexually appealing. These young urban women view the pressure to acquire luxury goods that reflect a modern lifestyle, normally understood as 'wants', as being similar to seeking basic needs such as shelter and food (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003: 224). This conceptualisation of 'needs' and 'wants' creates a continuum, whereby sexual exchange for subsistence, identified as 'needs', and sexual exchange for consumption, known as 'wants', are both expressed as 'needs.' Leclerc-Madlala (2003) describes this continuum using the concept of 'urban survival' whereby women seeking luxury items use the vocabulary of survival sex and locate their attempts to attain luxury goods in the context of exchanging sex based on survival.

Selikow and Mbulaheni (2013: 89) caution that, in this 'wants-needs' dichotomy, a 'need-want slippage' may occur when young women require an actual need which can diminish their agency. Lastly, in South Africa, men who can assist with the social mobility of young urban black women have acquired colloquial terms such as 'ministers', 'investors' (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008: 22), and most recently 'blessers.' It is also crucial to note that, in sexual exchanges for material gain, love and affection can be motivating factors for transactional sex. However, few studies have explored this paradigm in transactional sex.

POST-COLONIAL FEMINISM

The core aim of post-colonial feminism is to make visible the various socio-economic, political, and cultural experiences of postcolonial subjects (Young, 2001: 1-11). It examines how women are represented in colonial and postcolonial contexts while challenging long-standing assumptions about Third World women in both literature and society. It seeks to contribute to the production of knowledge within feminism, that is inclusive, representative, and accommodates voices of Third World subjects (Tickner, 2011: 607-628). Post-colonial feminism critiques Western feminism(s)'[5] depiction of African women as one-dimensional, homogeneously powerless, poor, and vulnerable. Regarding gender and sexuality, post-colonial feminism critiques Western feminism's dominance in feminist theory.[6] According to post-colonial feminists, Western feminism fails to adequately represent the

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[5] Western Feminism(s) broadly divides into categories such as Liberal, Radical, Marxist and Socialist feminism (Friedman et al., 1987: 3). It is not monolithic but speaks to the political and methodologies used. Therefore, a woman from the geographical Third World can be a Western feminist in orientation, in the same way, a European feminist can use a Third World feminist analytical lens (Mohanty, 2003: 502).
[6] It is important to note that since the early 1990s most feminist theory has embraced Black and Queer feminist theory and perspectives via intersectional analysis.

experiences of black women because its arguments on women's oppressions focus primarily on the private sphere and heterosexuality.

Based on this understanding, Western feminists challenge patriarchy's regulation of women's sexualities, the constitution of sexual difference, and women's limited power over their bodies in matters of procreation and sexual pleasure (Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974; Rubin, 1975; MacKinnon, 1987; Fraser and Bartky 1992). This analysis of sexualities limits gender disparities to women's sexualities and biology and how they have been legitimated by patriarchy. In doing so, it disregards the experiences of black women and leads to a representation of all women's bodies as objects of men's pleasure and whose drive has been subdued or sanctioned (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005: 265).

For Mohanty (1984: 337) this assumption that all women face the same oppression constructs a view of African women as being repressed based on their gender. Therefore, Western feminism's assessment of gender and sexuality in Sub-Saharan Africa results in a portrayal of African women as sexual victims of African men who are framed as inherently savage and violent. Post-colonial feminist scholars such as Mohanty (1984), Arnfred (2004), Helle-Valle (2004), Oyewùmí (2005) and Nfah-Abbenyi (2005) challenge this representation of women by advocating the systematic transcribing of black women's collective and individual histories to remove African women from the shadows of discussions about their own lives and sexuality (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005: 268). For post-colonial feminists, this can be achieved by exploring the different contexts of women's subjective lives influenced by social, economic, cultural, and political circumstances while acknowledging the intersectionalities of class, race, as well as gender (Mohanty, 1984). Consequently, this study will utilise the work of these post-colonial feminists to analyse the rise and normalisation of the blessee/blesser phenomenon amongst young urban black women in South Africa.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

This qualitative study used non-random sampling, snowballing, and semi-structured in-depth interviews to gather the perceptions of 10 young urban black women who identify as blessees. Non-random sampling was used due to its emphasis on homogeneity and high level of detail consistent with the use of a smaller sample size (Padgett, 2008: 14) which allows the researcher to accurately explore characteristics of a population from a representative sample (Bless and Higson-Smith, 2000: 166). This study also relied on snowball sampling that is used to compare and contrast a phenomenon of interest within a homogenous sample while accommodating re-sampling to draw an appropriate sample until saturation occurs (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 88).

Most importantly, snowball sampling was used because it is a valuable approach for producing a sample of a populace or a group that is usually difficult to reach (Burnham *et al.*, 2008: 108), such as blessees. Therefore, through sampling young urban black women recommended other young urban black women in similar circumstances. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to seek 'deep' information about an individual's lived experiences, ideologies, decisions, cultural knowledge, and perspectives (Johnson, 2011: 2). This allowed for the retrieval of focused information on specific issues from the respondent and the flexibility of semi-structured in-depth interviews permitted the researcher to elicit opinions of young urban black women's subjective world and pursue new ideas and issues that emerged during the interviews (Hesse-Biber, 2011: 4).

The women interviewed in this research were between the ages of 20-30 years old from northern Johannesburg (Sandton), a demarcated suburb in South Africa. Out of all the 10 participants in this research, two of the young women admitted to having primary partners outside of their blesser relationships. All participants displayed adequate levels of education, as all participants had a tertiary education or were in the process of completing their university studies. Most of these young women were also employed either part-time or full-time, and those who were not employed were either completing their tertiary studies or job-seeking graduates.

The in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted in one seating and in a location and time chosen by the participant. The researcher alone administered the interviews, using a research guide to navigate the direction of the interview. All interview questions were prepared beforehand and were asked in an open-ended manner. The researcher accordingly went with the feel of the participants such that some of the questions were not posed chronologically and were restated when necessary. The interviewer also jotted down notes throughout the interview sessions and, after finalising all interviews, the semi-structured in-depth interviews were digitally recorded to ensure the reliability of the data generated.

Thereafter, a record of the interviews was finalised through transcripts and the transcribing of interviews occurred in a private location to protect the identity of participants.

The data generated from this study was analysed as a continuum of deprivation, agency, and instrumentality, according to Stoebenau *et al.*'s (2016) conceptual framework which argues that motivations for engaging in transactional sex should be analysed as a continuum rather than as three discrete paradigms.

Limitations

The data generated in this research and its findings are class-specific and limited to the perceptions and accounts provided by the 10 young urban black women in this study. Therefore, generalisations and conclusions cannot be provided on a macro scale because black women are not a monolithic group with shared lived experiences.

FINDINGS SYNTHESISING BLESSEE/BLESSER RELATIONSHIPS: A CONTINUUM OF DEPRIVATION, AGENCY AND INSTRUMENTALITY

A post-colonial feminist analysis of blessee/blesser relationships amongst 10 young urban black women in northern Johannesburg using Stoebenau *et al.*'s (2016) conceptual framework was synthesised and categorised into a continuum of deprivation, agency, and instrumentality to illustrate the nuance and complexities of blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa. This analysis revealed that transactional relationships are not always motivated by absolute deprivation or sought out by impoverished young women at risk of sexual mistreatment by their older male counterparts. On the contrary, young women engaging in blesser relationships seek out blessers due to relative deprivation. A 23-year-old blessee expressed that:

> Let's be very clear, most blessers will approach you and not the other way around. My blesser approached me and offered me a job. I am self-employed, I do ok for myself, so I rejected his offer. He then pursued a [romantic] relationship with me for about six months but it was only after I went on a date with him, I realised he is rich, and I decided to go for it.

These women pursue blessers to acquire a high-status lifestyle, upward social mobility as well as for fun and entertainment. This was demonstrated through young women's ability to meet their basic needs such as shelter and food. Consequently, young women fashion themselves as blessees to satisfy their wants rather than needs. They seek luxury items such as designer clothes, expensive cars, and overseas trips which they regard as 'needs' because they are central to their construction of a sophisticated lifestyle, status, and success associated with northern Johannesburg. A 26-year-old blessee stated:

> [before the relationship] I was only able to take care of my basic 'needs'. OMG! my life was basic, I couldn't buy designer clothes, or nice things you know. I could just do the basic things, make my car payments, and buy groceries. But since I started dating this man, now I can have the finer things in life, Brazilian weaves and good quality clothes.

Young women view blesser relationships as a mutually beneficial exchange that allows them to give sex and access commodities of modernity in a gendered and racialised South Africa. They argued that seeking out blessers is motivated by societal pressures to acquire luxury consumer goods and the 'need' to attain markers of modernity. This is because the desire to acquire symbols of success driven by the increased visibility of consumer goods occurs in an environment of growing economic inequalities in South Africa that marginalises black women. Therefore, young women seek out blessers for material gain and exchange sex for financial gifts because they regard it as the 'easiest' way for them to gain luxury items and achieve their desired social status. This was expressed by young women who stated that:

> All blessers want someone young, fun and entertaining, so that they can live out their 'Trophy fantasy' [as one blessee puts it]. They have reality at home, so they want women who meet their fantasies. Such women want luxury items, they want to be taken on overseas trips. These women are fun and outgoing and keep these men young. Blessers don't want women who remind them of their wives or ordinary women. Blessers want to give you a luxury lifestyle and in exchange you must give them something in return, and sex is the easiest thing to give.

Furthermore, these women also seek blesser relationships to enhance their status, to maintain lifestyles otherwise unaffordable to them, and to differentiate themselves from their 'poorer' peers. This increase in commodity/consumption culture can be linked back to the processes of neoliberal globalisation in the post-apartheid era which resulted in an influx of foreign products and increased the consumption rates of Black South Africans (Zembe *et al.*, 2013: 2). For young women, this transformation led to the development of new needs, wants, and desires that reflect modernity, sexual equality, and relationships that reflect global images of luxury amongst their peers (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003: 216). However, although commodities are now afforded greater importance amongst black people, young black women remain relatively economically disadvantaged. This was expressed by a young woman who stated:

> Listen here, money makes the world go around, we all need money to survive. It's even worse for us black women, nobody cares about us [in what ways?]- you know what I mean, we are excluded from real money, not these peanuts we get from our jobs. So, in a sense it makes you use what you must get what you want, and for us women the gold mine between our legs is what can give us the life we want and deserve. On my own, I could never live in the apartment I am staying in or drive the car I am driving, but thanks to my boyfriend, I can live a good life.

As a result, South African women are now actively using their sexuality to acquire commodities that reflect a high-status lifestyle, while satisfying their wants rather than their needs (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003: 216). Simply put, neoliberal globalisation has led to young women developing new needs and desires for modernity and aspirational lifestyles and this has resulted in a rise in blessee/blesser relationships for material gain because young women view these relationships as the easiest way to achieve social upward mobility in a society that economically marginalises black women.

Regarding agency, these young women perceive themselves as powerful agents who engage in blesser relationships by choice by arguing that their relationships with blessers are from deliberate action, emphasised through their ability to 'choose' a blesser. From this standpoint, these young women distinguish themselves from sex workers whom they portray as having no choice, and whom exchange sex for money motivated by absolute deprivation. A young woman expressed that:

> Blessees are not the same as sex workers, because blessees have a choice, whereas sex work is a hustle [hustle?]- yes, sex work starts from hustling, motivated by a need to survive, to eat. So, blessees are different to sex workers because blessees do not sell their bodies, their basic needs are taken care of. They are mostly motivated by choice, enjoyment and wanting nice things. Sex work on the other hand is a job and not for entertainment. You do not become a sex worker because you want to upgrade your car to a fancy car [as one participant puts it].

This sentiment was acknowledged by all respondents in this study who emphasised their choice by describing the temporary nature of blesser relationships. They focus attention on their educated status as guaranteeing them future opportunities for upward mobility and economic independence from their blessers. Therefore, they regard blesser relationships as a temporary lifestyle choice motivated by a 'need' for a high-status lifestyle which they state is different from sex work, a 'hustle' for survival. This was further explained by one 22-year-old:

> You know for me, I am realistic, I know what we have is not love. So, my end goal is to just to get as much money and experiences from him until I am ok [ok?]- yes, until I reach a certain status as a successful and independent woman. You cannot live this type of lifestyle forever, you get in, get what is yours and get out. So, I try very hard to avoid romantic or love things. I am focused on getting a good life for myself and that's that.

Young women also express agency by utilising their sexuality to attract wealthy blessers and access socio-economic power in return. These women see their ability to sustain relationships with blessers while simultaneously choosing the initial timing of their sexual encounters as an act of cleverness that contributes to their self-perception as sexually liberated women. They showcase their agency through their ability to avoid or delay sex in the initiation stage of the relationship to see what the blesser can provide financially. This ability to navigate their sexuality leads them to self-identify as active decision-makers and empowered modern-day women who reciprocate sex after receiving financial and material gifts from wealthy men. A 24-year-old blessee revealed that:

> I met him at a club with my friends, he invited us to the VIP section and spent a lot of money on us. I knew he really liked me, so I was in control of whatever was happening between us. He was chasing me [pursuing a relationship], not the other way around. So, he had to spoil me and do a lot of things to show his seriousness and commitment, before I agreed to date him.

However, despite having high levels of agency in blesser relationships, their accounts of blesser relationships also revealed that the young women's agency fluctuates within a given relationship and over time. Therefore, their agency was evident in the initiation stage of the relationship, diminished in the maintenance phase, and resurfaced in the termination of the blesser relationship. Young women expressed that most blessers approached them in the initiation stage of the relationship. Forming a relationship with a blesser happened at their own pace which allowed them to feel in control. This control and agency diminished in the duration phase of the relationship as 'compromising' becomes vital to the sustenance of the relationship. According to young women, receiving material gifts and money from their blessers diminishes their power in the area of sexual decision-making. Due to their blesser's ability to manipulate their 'need' for money by exerting sexual dominance within the relationship, the

respondents provided reasons such as 'fear of being replaced by their blessers', 'trust', 'love' and 'substantial material gifts if sex is unprotected' as factors that further limit their agency. A 24-year-old explained that:

> The condom thing is a big issue he doesn't like them. Honestly, it doesn't sit well with me, but I think because we have built trust, and he does give me everything I want, I just let it go because giving him what he wants, means I get everything I need.

Their agency was also undermined when their wants converted into actual needs and created a 'need-want' slippage. In this scenario, young women were prone to giving in to their blesser's requests for unprotected sex. However, their narratives of engaging in unprotected sex with blessers mostly revolved around the transactional nature of their relationships that is rooted in their internalised self-pressure to give sex after receiving material gifts. For example, a 25-year-old expressed that:

> If I am honest, the fact that he gives me money, it gives him power. I obviously need the money, so I play along sometimes he will give me an expensive gift or money and then he will want unprotected sex, I end up doing it because I have to keep him happy.

In the termination stage of the relationship, young women's agency resurfaced. According to these women, a blesser's ability to provide is central to the maintenance of the relationship. Therefore, if a blesser is unable to provide financially the blessee will end the relationship. Young women rationalised this decision using gendered cultural norms which dictate how 'a woman cannot give sex for free' and how 'it is a man's duty to provide'. Therefore, while some women expressed feelings of love for their blessers, all women emphasised that sex without compensation is a sign of low self-worth and is understood as a signifier for low levels of care and appreciation from their blessers, a notion which was extended to their primary partners. A 24-year-old revealed that:

> … my last blesser went broke or whatever, I entertained it for a week, and I couldn't do it anymore. I can't just give sex for free and listen to problems. I just had to sit him down and explain that our agreement was over, but I still cared for him as a friend.

Secondly, young women revealed that they may terminate their blesser relationships if they achieved their desired social status or realised economic independence. This rationale was linked to the temporary nature of blesser relationships as well as young women's educated status which they view as guaranteeing them future opportunities for acquiring jobs and economic independence from their blessers. In addition, reasons such as 'losing interest in the relationship' and 'the need for more material gifts' were also provided as motives for terminating a blesser relationship.

Young women also demonstrated that blesser relationships are more intricate than a simple exchange of sex and materiality by illustrating how money and love are interlinked in complex ways. Their accounts of blesser relationships also revealed that there is a conflation of African tradition and Western culture in the urban areas of South Africa such that new ideas about love and relationships have emerged. Therefore, their experiences with blessers must be understood by looking at the interplay and the structuring roles of money, race, and culture. Firstly, their accounts of blesser relationships are influenced by cultural understandings of love that normalise gift-giving in African sexual exchanges. A 25-year-old explains that:

> Growing up my mum always emphasised the importance of marrying someone who can provide, it would be such a disappointment if I dated a broke guy. My actual boyfriend [not blesser], takes care of me. He obviously can't do a lot because he is not as rich as my blesser. But I think it is natural for men to just provide[7], it's not even something to discuss. And on the other side sex is something you give men to show your appreciation, for them it is how they judge if you love them.

Young women also believe that it is normal for partners to exchange gifts in sexual relationships because demonstrations of romance and love are connected to gift-giving. Consequently, these women argue that love and money are a crucial part of forming, maintaining, and sustaining a relationship. Because they view their blessers as boyfriends, they state that a loving and supportive boyfriend provides financial support. Beyond financial support, some women expressed how they expect love and emotional support from their blessers. A young woman expressed that:

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[7] This understanding of sexual exchanges reflects institutionalized heterosexual social relations maintained through African cultural scripts whereby women must demonstrate love by 'giving' sex after receiving material gifts and men feel required to allocate their financial possessions with their sexual partners to show value and gratitude for sex (Leclerc-Madla, 2009:108).

> In exchange for sex, a blesser should take care of the blessee's every need, which includes emotional support. [And] a blessee receives gifts or an expensive lifestyle from an older man who promises to love her and take care of her in exchange for sex. Because generally, a man will not give you anything without sex.

However, their understanding of love and support is based on the number of material resources provided by their blessers. This intricate linking of love and money also stems from cultural understanding where the strongest indication of a committed partner is measured by a man's ability to offer gifts and material support. Therefore, to show love is to give presents, and the bigger the gifts, the more the love. Consequently, young urban women seek out blessers based on this perspective and will only provide sex if a man lives up to this expected role of the provider. Blessee/blesser relationships are influenced as well by cultural norms that require men to share their resources with women and for women to reciprocate with sex. Young urban black women view men as exploiting them if sex occurs without compensation because they view their sexuality as being worth something. A 22-year-old reveals that:

> No black man will take you seriously if you just give them sex without having some form of expectation. For me, it means you don't have values and you don't care about yourself. I could never just have sex with someone, without some form of benefit, even if that person is my real boyfriend.

Simultaneously, this notion of exchange in blesser relationships reproduces men's sense of entitlement to women's bodies because, when material gifts are provided by blessers, young women are expected to give sex in return. These accounts of blesser relationships demonstrate how instrumentality is linked to emotional intimacy, as men's provision is linked to love. It is important to note that just like agency the amount of instrumentality and emotionality varies in blesser relationships and over time and for young urban women this was highlighted through experiences surrounding condom use. It was acknowledged that unprotected sex with blessers yielded more material benefits. The respondents revealed that condom use was reduced by feelings of love and trust which limited their power to negotiate sexual terms in the maintenance phase of the relationship.

According to the young women, they consent to unsafe sex because their blessers view it as a sign of faithfulness and trust. In addition, some women highlighted the dangers of falling in love with a blesser. For those women, falling in love with a blesser (if the blessee's feelings of love are not reciprocated by the blesser) not only leads to non-condom use but may result in a blesser losing interest after engaging in unprotected sex. Furthermore, if a blessee falls pregnant it might lead to the premature termination of the relationship by the blesser. This is because blessers have primary partners and engage in blesser relationships to have sex with beautiful women or 'trophies.' Consequently, falling pregnant 'ruins' the 'trophy fantasy' because it reminds blessers of the reality they have at home (wife and children) which leads to a loss of interest in the relationship or the replacement of the blessee with someone else. As a 25-year-old blessee explains:

> I fell in love with my blesser, and I ended up getting pregnant…he lost interest…he asked me what kind of life was I going to live with a child…he distanced himself from me…I tried to fix things by terminating the pregnancy but he replaced with me a younger girl…I knew then it was over, and it forced me to end the relationship with him.

The accounts provided by the young urban women demonstrate that blessee/blesser relationships can be understood as being contingent, temporary, and based on fluid modernity and consumerism. From this perspective, love in blesser relationships is based on receiving emotional and financial provision from blessers in exchange for sex and entertainment. Therefore, if one party can no longer fulfil their obligations within the relationship, it may lead to either party terminating the relationship, or the relationship transitioning to another form such as a friendship.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I highlight how young women's engagement in blessee/blesser relationships demonstrates their agency and challenges one-dimensional representations of transactional relationships. I also illustrate that; these relationships are based on mutuality and the acknowledgment of sex through financial and material gifts. However, their engagement in blesser relationships also challenges and reproduces patriarchal structures in the following ways. Firstly, their beliefs that men must provide and take care of their needs, while simultaneously attempting to

achieve financial independence from their blessers, uphold their emphasised femininity[8] in blesser relationships, and reproduces gender inequality over time. In addition, it entrenches hegemonic masculinity and reinforces the idea of men as breadwinners and that men have 'uncontrollable' sexual appetites which make them prone to sexual risk-taking (Leclerc-Madlala, 2009: 105). Consequently, pleasure in sex is then understood as being found outside of marital relations.

Secondly, young women's involvement with blessers entrenches patriarchal cultural scripts that men must demonstrate commitment, love, and affection to their sexual partners through gift-giving that is equal to a man's wealth and status. In exchange, women must demonstrate commitment, love, and affection by 'giving' sex after receiving material gifts because a woman cannot 'give sex for free'. This understanding of African sexual relationships results in men feeling obligated to allocate their finances to women as a way of showing respect and appreciation for sex (Leclerc-Madlala, 2009: 108). Therefore, if men are not able to achieve these status markers of masculinity, they might compensate by over-emphasising other aspects of their masculinity to 'prove' their masculinity through multiple partner relationships, lack of condom use, and intimate partner violence (Walby, 1990).

Therefore, while young women engage in blesser relationships to challenge gendered economic inequalities, their relationships with blessers sustain notions that men seek out transactional sex to portray an image of success and women engage in transactional sex for economic reasons. This upholds women's subservience to men because blesser relationships perpetuate the view that 'men believe women seek out multiple partner relationships because they have no money' (Maganja *et al.*, 2007: 974). It also preserves problematic stereotypes that young women seek out blesser relationships due to absolute deprivation and that African men are suspicious of women who have low interest in monetary exchange for sex as they perceive them as being 'loose' and possibly infected with HIV/AIDS (Nyanzi *et al.*, 2001). Therefore, by seeking out blessers for upward mobility and status, young women entrench unequal gender power relations where men use their economic power to gift women with material and financial goods in anticipation of sex. This uneven power dynamic is then sustained due to the gendered socio-economic environment found in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa that allows men to monopolise their resources and gain access to women to satisfy their sexual desires while undermining their marital relations (Luke, 2005: 6).

Consequently, there is a need to move beyond Stoebenau *et al.*'s (2016) framework for analysing transactional sex and broaden the understanding of African sexualities, the motives for engaging in transactional sex, and the multifaceted nature of transactional sexual relationships in Sub-Saharan Africa. Secondly, it is crucial to capture the accounts of young urban black women in different regions of South Africa. In doing so, it will reveal experiences that are unique to those contexts and will help broaden the understanding of African women's sexualities beyond Western simplistic views of African women as one-dimensional, poor, and powerless victims. Furthermore, expanding the scope of this study might generate data for comparative analysis that will broaden the understanding of transactional sex while giving voice and agency to young urban black women engaging in blessee/blesser relationships.

Lastly, there is a need to detail blesser perspectives from a post-colonial lens. This is because post-colonial feminism acknowledges the importance of men, based on the logic that for African feminism to succeed it cannot be detached from the opposite sex, since post-colonial feminism does not reject men but encourages men to be conscious of women's subordination which differs from the general subjugation of all Africans. At the same time, postcolonial feminism acknowledges the importance of men and women working together to combat racial and gender oppression. Its inclusion of men is a defining feature that separates it from Western feminism (Mekgwe, 2006: 16) making it appropriate for exploring men's roles in transactional relationships. By researching the subjective narratives of men engaging in transactional sex it will allow for both intervention and scholarship to move beyond narratives of young women as purely victims of older men.

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[8] Emphasised femininity is viewed as the subordinate 'other' to hegemonic masculinity (the formation of gender practice that includes the currently established answer to the issue of the legitimacy of patriarchy that safeguards the dominant position of men and results in the subjugation of women). Therefore, emphasised femininity is performed particularly to men and is focused around an internalised subservience and subjugation to dominant masculinities (Connell, 1987: 183-187).

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'[I]f I am Alone I feel like a Target Sometimes': The Making and Unmaking of the Vulnerable White Woman in Strange Encounters with the Black Man in the South African (Post)Colony

Azille Coetzee [1]*

ABSTRACT

In research about South Africa and its troubled past it has now been well established that the devastating systems of racial categorisation and oppression of colonialism and apartheid were deeply and thoroughly gendered. Colonial/apartheid logic constructs white femininity as highly vulnerable, passive and private, specifically in relation to the imputed hypersexuality of the Black man – a contrast that historically justifies and consolidates hetero-patriarchal control over the white woman (as 'protection') and control and surveillance over Black people (and specifically Black men) as origin of danger. Using Sara Ahmed's theory on strange encounters, this article provides a close reading of the story of Helena Marais, a young white woman from a South African town (as narrated by herself to researchers of the Centre of the Afterlife of Violence and the Reparative Quest) with a particular interest in how colonial/apartheid gender logic continues to condition the terms on which she inhabits her body and the world, which in turn, renders her both instrumental to and complicit in the reinscription of colonial/apartheid racial logic and spatialisation decades after the formal ending of apartheid. In conclusion, the article will ask what is at stake if the white woman should attempt to encounter the Black man differently.

Keywords: gender, South Africa, decolonisation, Ahmed

INTRODUCTION

After the democratic transition in the 1990s in South Africa, many white South African scholars, writers, artists, and thinkers have been reflecting on what whiteness could still mean in a non-racial post-apartheid landscape – what is left of and for an identity after its symbolic architecture had been revealed to be so thoroughly saturated with violence and lies. 'How do I live in this strange place?' asked Rian Malan in his international best-seller *My Traitor's Heart* (1990), which was followed by white Afrikaans poet Antjie Krog's strikingly titled trilogy of non-fiction prose: *Country of my Skull* (1998), *A Change of Tongue* (2003) and *Begging to be Black* (2009); also works of fiction such as (among many others) J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) and, most recently, Damon Galgut's *The Promise* (2021). The conversation took root at an academic level as well, perhaps most famously with Melissa Steyn's '*Whiteness just isn't what it used to be': White Identity in a Changing South Africa* (2001) and philosopher Samantha Vice's controversial 2010 article repeating Malan's question two decades later: 'How do I live in this Strange Place?'

These works all share the point of departure that the dismantling of the apartheid regime created an opening for the reimagining or remaking of whiteness in South Africa, and that it is up to us to make sure that we end up with something more liveable, ethical and sustainable. These thinkers and writers approach the matter in different ways, but what all of their reflections have in common is a (uncertain and open-ended) faith in or commitment to hybridity and relationality. In different ways they express hope that South African whiteness can drop its guard, soften its lacerating edges and dissolve into something bigger. Today it is almost thirty years after the ending of apartheid (which is perhaps not a long time) and this has not happened; the extent to which white South Africans have collectively managed to unravel their racialisation[1] remains questionable. Although many white people are genuinely and publicly committed to a multi-racial South Africa, racial inequality and segregation endure because of the surviving structures of white privilege, apartheid spatial politics and the racial logic of global neo-liberal

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[1] Melissa Steyn's poetic formulation, see 2001: x.

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capitalism (see for example Mpofu-Walsh, 2021). Moreover, it is becoming increasingly clear to what extent white South Africa is invested in its own privilege – something that is seen most overtly in small resurgences of white nationalism, and more covertly in the way in which white South Africans can be seen to band together and insulate themselves from the complex realities of the young democracy (through, for example, what Ballard (2004) refers to as 'semigration' – the withdrawal into gated communities).

The aim of this article is to shed some light on the obstinacy of colonial/apartheid whiteness in the post-apartheid moment even despite our intentions to be better. I will do this through a feminist philosophical reading of the story that Helena Marais,[2] a young white Afrikaner woman of twenty, tells about herself. At the core of my reading is a point well established by feminist historians and thinkers, namely that race and gender are inextricably intertwined in colonial logic so that the ways in which we live our gendered bodies, structure our families and direct our desires are all key to the racial identities we inhabit and worlds we make. I will show how Helena's gendered/sexualised fear of Black men renders her both instrumental to and complicit in the reinscription of colonial/apartheid racial logic and spatialisation, decades after the formal ending of apartheid. I will highlight how the ways in which she understands and presents herself as innocent/victim and her fears as somehow pre-political or rational, are all part of an old colonial script fashioned by white supremacy for white women through which they/we continue to naturalise racial inequality and segregation. And I will show how a single-axis focus on gender when we consider sexual violence in a place like South Africa, obscures white women's implicatedness in the maintenance of colonial racial logic and Black death.

Helena's story was obtained by the researchers of the Centre for the Study of the Afterlife of Violence and the Reparative Quest at Stellenbosch University who conducted a series of interviews with residents of Worcester, Langa and Bonteheuwel about their memories of apartheid and their path to healing as part of the 'Trauma, Memory, and Representations of the Past' research project that examined the intergenerational repercussions of historical trauma and traumatic memory in the context of post-apartheid South Africa in 2016.[3] I am interested in Helena's story because it so powerfully illustrates many points made in contemporary feminist and decolonial thought about white women's particular positionality and unique complicity in historical and contemporary systems of racial inequality. Helena is one of the only two white women interviewed for this project (out of more than sixty participants), rendering all the ways in which her story conforms to the stereotypes of white femininity even more striking.

I begin in the next section by providing a brief overview of recent understandings of the intersections between race and gender in colonial and apartheid logic. I look at how colonial/apartheid logic constructs white femininity as highly vulnerable, passive, and private, specifically in relation to the imputed hypersexuality of the Black man – a contrast that historically justifies and consolidates patriarchal control over the white woman (as 'protection') and control and surveillance over Black people (and specifically Black men as supposed origin of danger). In the third section I present Sara Ahmed's work on how identity (of self and community) is constituted in encounters with strange others, as a theoretical framework that is particularly generative when trying to make sense of the tenacity of colonial/apartheid systems of identity formation in contemporary South African society. Finally, in the fourth section I turn to Helena's story. In my reading I focus on the ways in which Helena's subject position as a white Afrikaner woman remains constituted in relation to the imputed threat of the Black man, and how the fear she experiences is therefore not new or unique but conforms to the colonial prescriptions for white femininity made in service of the white settler nation. Accordingly, I read her positionality as a white woman as one that renders her silenced and exploited by, but also ultimately implicated in, the renewal of colonial/apartheid systems of spatial segregation and hierarchy in contemporary South Africa. In conclusion I look at the (symbolic and material) transgressive possibilities that exist within the encounter between the white woman and the Black man in the South African post-colony. I ask, in other words, what is at stake if the white woman should break the rules set for her identity and should attempt to encounter the Black man differently.

Like Steyn (2001: xxxviii), I do not pretend in my reading of Helena's story to have achieved an objective account of what is 'out there'. Rather, (and in Steyn's words) I am presenting my story about Helena's story of her whiteness, and my attempt to tie this story into the larger social story of South Africa. Because I too am a white Afrikaans-speaking woman, it is inevitable that on some level I am also reading myself.

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[2] This is not her real name.

[3] The project resulted in a book of printed interviews and photographs entitled *These are the Things That Sit With Us* (2019) by Gobodo-Madikizela *et al.* where extracts from the interview with Helena is published on pp. 120-123.

THE GENDERED LOGIC OF COLONIALISM AND APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA AND ELSEWHERE

In research about South Africa and its troubled past it has now been well established that the devastating systems of racial categorisation, exploitation, and oppression of colonialism and apartheid were deeply and thoroughly gendered (see for example Hyslop, 1995; Klausen, 2021; Gqola, 2015; and Abrahams, 1997). This is far from unique to the South African context; scholars like Driskill (2004) Rifkin (2016) and McClintock (1995) (among many others) show in different ways how discourses of sexuality are key to projects of racial formation in colonial situations everywhere. Referring to colonial situations generally, Ann Stoler argues famously that it is a misconception to think that there was a clear line to be drawn between white and Black, coloniser and colonised (2002: 42-43). Rather, racial boundaries were always tenuous: skin colour was too ambiguous, while wealth was too mercurial and education or religion were not clear enough (although all of those were important markers) (Stoler, 2002: 42-43). Ultimately then it was the sexual, domestic and conjugal arrangements of both European colonials and their subjects, which were regarded to reveal the 'truth' about someone's race (Stoler, 2002: 42-43). Whiteness in the colony was characterised by a strict heterosexual, monogamous and hierarchical gender binary; consisting of an active, rational masculinity set up against the foil of a passive and vulnerable femininity (see for example Lugones, 2007 and 2010, among many others). Alison Phipps (2021: 87) writes: '[t]he bourgeois white woman's capacity to cry was fundamental to her dominant status, as was the capacity of her male counterpart to respond to her tears with action' (see also Schuller, 2018). On the other hand, the absence of such binary gendered 'order' was regarded to connote the sexual 'primitivity,' wildness, and promiscuity that marked the colonised as Black and therefore less-than-human. Confirming Stoler's insight about the uncertainty of colonial racial categories, many scholars have shown how, in colonial South Africa, racial boundaries were not stable[4] or clear cut,[5] and that when it had to be decided who was white and who was not, the sexual and gendered lives of those involved were often regarded to be the determining factor. This was even more so the case for the Afrikaner who was continuously portrayed as being acutely at risk of sliding out of whiteness or 'going native.' Christi Van der Westhuizen explains that the '"Afrikaner" identity was historically forged in reaction to white Afrikaans-speakers' status of being marked as just-about-white in relation to hegemonic whiteness, represented by British colonialists and later white English-speaking South Africans' (Van der Westhuizen, 2017: 4; see also Steyn, 2001: 26; Keegan, 2001: 460, among many others). Whiteness was therefore a project very anxiously and determinedly taken up by Afrikaners, ultimately culminating in the formal establishment of apartheid.

In line with the work of scholars like Stoler and McClintock, South African historians and feminists have shown how the project of whitening the Afrikaner was thoroughly gendered from the start (see Brink, 1990 and Du Toit, 2002, among many others). A significant example of this can be found in the *Carnegie Report on the Poor White Problem* (1932)[6] in which an entire volume (based on research done by prominent white woman writer Maria Elizabeth Rothmann) is dedicated to an analysis of the households of white Afrikaner families. In this report, the restoration of whiteness in the face of poverty and consequent racial 'degeneracy' is explicitly made dependent on the subservient positioning of (sexually passive and pure) white woman in orderly heteropatriarchal families where it is the responsibility of the mother to instil and cultivate the values of white civilisation in the next generation. Accordingly, in the South African colony (and elsewhere) 'civilised' whiteness was performed through an orderly home with clearly delineated gender roles in terms of which the man stepped up as active political citizen, while woman as wife and mother is tasked with maintaining and purifying the symbolic boundaries of the white *volk*. The trope through which white Afrikaner womanhood consequently came to be represented in colonial and apartheid South Africa, is the *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation), with enduring connotations of feminine subservience, sexual containment, moral sanitation and middle-class domesticity.[7]

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[4] The white settler communities in the colony were always regarded to be at risk of sliding out of whiteness (see for example Stoler, 2002). With regard to the South African colony Marijke du Toit explains that the 'threat was poorer whites "forgetting" their true, Afrikaner-identity, "losing" a natural race-consciousness and assimilating with their black inferiors' (Du Toit, 2003: 173).

[5] Klausen explains that the Boers had a history of interracial marriage, concubinage, and extra-marital sex dating back to the earliest days of Dutch settlement in the Cape (Klausen, 2021: 220). By the early 1960s there were at least 20 000 people in the Cape Peninsula 'who still were uncertain whether they were officially to be White or Coloured' (Horrell, 1963: 66).

[6] A study of poverty among white South Africans, funded and published by the Carnegie Corporation.

[7] Van der Westhuizen explains that the trope was deployed in the South African War of 1899 to 1902 to shape an Afrikaner femininity of forcefulness and combativeness (Van der Westhuizen, 2017: 102). As the twentieth century progressed the *volksmoeder* was positioned to actively recruit subjects for Afrikaner nationalism in the 'feminine' spheres of (whites only) welfare and in politics (Van der Westhuizen, 2017: 102). By the 1930s the *volksmoeder* image was used to 'reorient Afrikaans white women towards self-sacrifice and domestic cloistering for God, *volk* (people or nation) and fatherland', this domestic

In the colony (South Africa and elsewhere), a completely different set of gendered narratives and consequences existed for those deemed Black (see for example Lugones, 2007 and 2010; McClintock, 1995; Gqola, 2015). As noted above, civilised whiteness (marked by the heterosexual gender binary) was constructed in opposition to the imputed gendered disorder or 'primitivity' of the colonised people, so that Blackness was connoted by a perceived sexual promiscuity, fluidity, and wildness. In her book *Rape: A South African nightmare* (2015) Gqola shows how constructions of Black African sexuality as 'primitive' and 'wild' resulted in the naturalisation and normalisation of the rape of the Black woman during colonialism and apartheid, forming the foundation of rape culture and the raging epidemic of sexual violence in contemporary South Africa (see also Abrahams, 1997).

Where the Black woman was made unrapable (see for example Gqola, 2015 and Srinivasan, 2021: 12), the white woman's constructed vulnerability rendered her what could then be termed hyper-rapable, and this hyper-rapability was instrumentalised in key ways in the colony. Scholars like Ann Stoler (2002: 55) show how the discursive construction of the vulnerable white woman in contrast to the rapacious Black man was pivotal to the establishment and maintenance of white solidarity and power in many colonial situations. The colonial order of white supremacy turns on the dual imperatives of subjugating the white women in service of the (symbolic and material) reproduction of the *volk* and the control of the Black man and his labour in service of white capital, both of which are potentially undone when white women and Black men get too close to each other. Accordingly, the possibility of intimacy between the white woman and the Black man stirred up acute white racial anxiety and represented the loss of ethnic identity, white patriarchal power, community cohesion and colonial security. Stoler writes in this regard that '[a] defense of community, morality, and white male power was achieved by increasing control over and consensus among Europeans, by reaffirming the vulnerability of white women and the sexual threat posed by native men, and by creating new sanctions to limit the liberties of both' (Stoler, 2002: 60). Phipps explains that a 'vocabulary of rape' was used in the colony to activate a circuit between white women's constructed and instrumentalised vulnerability ('white women's tears') and white men's punitive power – something that white supremacy continues to rely on (Phipps ,2021: 85). The result was the emergence of the narrative of the 'black peril,' the imagined pandemic of sexual assaults by black men on white women then under way' (Keegan, 2001: 460, which 'came to stand for a dense array of ill-defined fears and fantasies of racial contagion and invasion' (Keegan, 2001: 471). This played out in many places, including America where thousands of Black men were murdered by lynching in the 'Jim Crow' period in the segregated American South, in some cases for merely whistling at a white woman (see for example Davis, 1981: 163).

Throughout the twentieth century in South Africa, the survival of the white Afrikaner people was pinned on the sexual 'purity' of the white woman and white reproduction, and an invented surge of sexual assault by Black men on white women was evoked at times of political uncertainty[8] (see for example Hyslop, 1995; Keegan, 2001; Van Onselen, 1982; and Etherington, 1988).[9] Again, because of the tenuousness of Afrikaner whiteness the sexuality of Afrikaner women was a particularly sensitive matter, and the circuit between white male rage and white women's vulnerability particularly charged. In a 2001 article Timothy Keegan analyses a 1914 incidence of mob violence by a group of white Afrikaans-speaking men that strikingly illuminates this. The Afrikaans men in question attacked an English-speaking man who wrote a letter that was published in a local newspaper asserting that white Afrikaans-speaking 'veld girls' were 'utterly abandoned' in the 'indulgence of their passions', and that 'every farm native who has a desire for white women knows where he can satisfy it' (Keegan, 2001: 459). In this incident the allegation that Afrikaner women were fantasising about sex with Black men functioned to draw into question the right of Afrikaners to be grouped (after the 'Anglo-Boer War' 1899 – 1902) with white people from British descent into the common White South African nationality (Keegan, 2001: 460). The accusation racialises the Afrikaner as less-than-white through first, the ascription of active sexual desire to the women (a colonial signifier of Blackness in itself) that is directed at Black men; and second, more subtly, her association with nature ('veld girl'). Furthermore, the suggestion that White Afrikaner men are failing to contain, control or satisfy the sexuality of 'their' women casts doubt on the Afrikaner's claim to White supremacy which implied 'the domination of the White male as the supreme evolutionary exemplar of civilization' (Keegan, 2001: 461).

When the White women of Natal express their gratitude towards the men who violently defended their 'honour' (with a gold watch and an inscribed scroll), they are installing the white man to his rightful place in the gendered hierarchy that structures Afrikaner racial identity and White supremacy, thereby exchanging sexual agency for racial

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containment reaching its peak during apartheid (Van der Westhuizen, 2017: 102). For detailed explorations of the *volksmoeder* trope, see Hofmeyr, 1987; Brink 1990; Du Toit, 2003; and Kruger, 1991.

[8] As a specific South African example of this, Stoler mentions the mineworker strikes between 1890 and 1914 as a time when rape accusations against Black men rose sharply (Stoler, 2002: 59).

[9] Amia Srinivasan (2021: 5) refers to false rape accusations as 'a tactic of colonial rule' in South Africa, but also in India, Australia and in Palestine.

privilege, repeatedly proving their complicity in the building of an apartheid society that is symbolically and materially dependent on the violent subjugation of all women (where Black women are rendered most vulnerable).This colonial racial/gender logic was foundational to the regime of apartheid. Striking in this regard is the fact that the election campaigns which resulted in the formal establishment of apartheid in 1949 largely revolved around the question of mixed marriages between white women and men of other races, and that the first two pieces of legislation that were passed by the apartheid government concerned 'mixed marriages' (see Hyslop, 1995).

Accordingly, during apartheid too, 'sexuality and sexual immorality came to be constitutive of how whiteness was fashioned and secured in place' (Ratele, 2009a: 160). Echoing Stoler's argument about the tenuous, shifting and highly gendered nature of racial categories in the colony, Ratele points out how, under apartheid, people who were 'obviously white-looking' could be found to be unaware of the fact that that they, in spite of appearances, were not white and on that basis reclassified to a different race (Ratele, 2009a: 159). Ratele argues that being indubitably white under apartheid, one had to live like a white person, and this had very specific gendered and sexual meanings, namely 'a hard, sexualized, ruling white masculinity' (2009a: 161), offset by a white femininity that was, above all else, sexually respectable (2009a: 164).

The deep symbolic entanglement between white woman's sexual containment and whiteness itself is evident from the way in which, under apartheid, a white woman who married or cohabited with a man of a different race could be legally reclassified into a different racial category (her sexual preference serving as proof that she was never in fact white to begin with) (see Ratele, 2009a: 164). This stands in great contrast to how white male offenders of the immorality edicts were treated. Ratele explains that white men were by far the majority of offenders but were also more likely than any other group to get acquitted or receive a suspended sentence, while the women involved would get sentenced (Ratele, 2009a: 171-172). Accordingly, 'relatively less racial threat or contamination to the race was posed by white males' immorality violations with females of other races than by white females' transgressions' and 'white females were seen as bringing more dishonour to the race if they chose to have coitus with, cohabit with, or marry males of other racial groupings' (Ratele, 2009a: 172).

In contemporary post-apartheid South Africa, we continue to live the legacy of these systems of racist sexualisation. Steyn *et al.* (2019) show in this regard how patriarchal borderwork (where some men have assigned themselves as gatekeepers of white women's bodies) does the work of policing racialised boundaries (see also Allen, 2002; Van der Westhuizen, 2017; Shefer and Ratele, 2011). Accordingly, colonial/apartheid prohibitions of interracial intimacy are informally re-inscribed in the 'private' sphere of intimacy, sex and kinship in ways that work to preserve systems of racial difference and hierarchy (Steyn *et al.*, 2019: 1671). On this basis, Ratele (2009b) argues that South Africans 'continue to live out the sexual identities, desires, fears, and relationships that apartheid fathers sought to cultivate on this land.' Again, this is not unique to the South African context. Phipps (2021: 86) explains that the global 2020 Black Lives Matter movements reiterated on a global scale how 'Black death is the price for white affective security' (see also Schuller, 2018: 2). Amia Srinivasan (2021: 14) unpicks the enduring consequences of this further when she explains that the 'disturbing genius at work in the white mythology about black sexuality' that continues to shape our global contemporary reality is that it 'produces a tension between black men's quest to exonerate themselves and black women's need to speak out against sexual violence, including the violence perpetrated against them by black men' – thereby constituting a doubled sexual subordination of Black women.

Taking all of this into account, it can be said that the work of decolonisation and the pursuit of social justice in post-apartheid South Africa requires of us, among other things, to identify and reveal the ways in which the (seemingly natural and private) gender norms, kinship configurations, and sexual lives that we live remain programmed by colonial/apartheid race logic, and in turn, serve to remake oppressive structures of racial differentiation and segregation almost three decades after the official transition to democracy.

SARA AHMED AND STRANGE ENCOUNTERS

In her book *Strange Encounters* (2000), Sara Ahmed explores how subjects and communities (national, cultural etc.) are made in strange encounters (encounters with 'strange' others). For her this means that encounter precedes ontology: '[i]dentity itself is constituted in the "more than one" of the encounter: the designation of an "I" or "we" requires an encounter with others' (Ahmed, 2000: 7). Accordingly, identity is not self-contained, but relational – 'identity does not simply happen in the privatised realm of the subject's relation to itself' (Ahmed, 2000: 7). And, more profoundly, that the first constitutive relationality is not within one's community but those that we recognise to be outside of it.

Ahmed takes her work on strange encounters further in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) where she explores race as an affective formation (constituted through feelings, emotions and affective forces) that involve relational encounters of proximity and distance. Ahmed's work forms part of a larger 'affective turn' in the social sciences and humanities over the last decade (see for example Zembylas, 2015) founded in the notion that in order to understand the resilience and tenacity of race and racism we need to look further than epistemology to

the ontological aspects of race and racism as 'doings' that have material consequences (see also Hook, 2005 and Cvetkovich, 2012, among many others). The advantage of theorising race and racism within an affective economy of interracial encounters is that it 'offers a chance to found accounts of race in the relational construction of identities, in the forces created between people rather than in fixed social categories' (Tolia-Kelly and Crang, 2010: 2309). This is helpful in the South African context where, as seen above, racial categories have never been clear cut or stable and where the maintenance of distinct racial identities continues to require boundary work that is performed consciously *and* unconsciously through everyday encounters. Ahmed's exploration of affect constitutes an important precursor to contemporary modes of analysing global sexual politics in the wake of the #metoo movement, as found in the work of scholars like Amia Srinivasan who develop the idea that our sexual desires and fears are not biological or innocent, but politically conditioned. My decision to centre Ahmed's theoretical framework in my reading of Helena's story is motivated by the fact that it helps us to make sense of the resilience of old forms of whiteness that continue to endure in the post-apartheid moment.

The way in which Ahmed locates the process of identity formation in the affective dynamics of strange encounters enables an understanding of how we remake colonial whiteness and reinstitute apartheid boundaries through adhering to deeply ingrained gender scripts which, because of their affective weight and embodied sexual meanings, are easily perceived as natural, neutral or pre-political. When arguing that we become subjects in encounters with those we deem strange (who then also become constituted as strangers in such encounters) Ahmed goes further than the primary post-Hegelian model of recognition in terms of which the subject is constituted by being recognised by the other. For Ahmed it is not being recognised by the other that is central to the constitution of the subject, it is rather the recognition of others: '[t]he very act through which the subject differentiates between others is the moment that the subject comes to inhabit or dwell in the world' (Ahmed, 2000: 24). Applying Ahmed's vocabulary to the context of colonial/apartheid South Africa, it can be said that the white feminine subject comes into existence as a subject that is properly white and feminine through recognising the Black man as Other. It was seen in Rothmann's diagnosis of the poor white family (1932) and in the work of Ratele (2009a) and others that the white woman who fails to do so and as a result does not sufficiently withdraw from the proximity of the Black man, was regarded to be gravely at risk of racial 'degeneration' and could be reclassified to a different racial group. In such cases the white woman's 'true' racial identity was revealed by her inability to differentiate between self and Other.

Like the self, the stranger does not precede the encounter as that which I/we do not know or fail to recognise but is produced through the encounter as that which we have already recognised as 'a stranger' (Ahmed, 2000: 3). In this sense, 'we recognise somebody *as a stranger,* rather than simply failing to recognise them (Ahmed, 2000: 21). Accordingly, when the white woman instinctively and fearfully withdraws from the proximity of the Black man (by crying rape or not) the Black man is produced as Black rapacious Other to the white woman subject (and her white community), also constituted in the gesture of recognising (giving a face to) that which is designated as Black and Other. The fact that we *recognise* strangers implies that encounters 'are meetings (…) which are not simply in the present' but are structured by what happened in the past (Ahmed, 2000: 8). On this basis, Ahmed introduces the idea of historicity, arguing that encounters we have with other others *'reopen the prior histories of encounter that violate and fix others in regimes of difference'* (Ahmed, 2000: 8).

One crucial implication of Ahmed's theory is that strange encounters quite literally shape bodies. Following Judith Butler (1993), Ahmed argues that 'there is no body as such that is given in the world: bodies materialise in a complex set of temporal and spatial relations to other bodies, including bodies that are recognised as familiar, familial and friendly, and those that are considered strange' (Ahmed, 2000: 40). The act of differentiating between what is familiar and what is strange marks out the inside and outside of bodily space, where the skin is established as boundary line (Ahmed, 2000: 42). In this sense, a refusal to touch someone still means being touched by someone: 'to withdraw from a relation of physical proximity to bodies recognised as strange is precisely to be touched by those bodies, in such a way that the subject is moved from its place' (Ahmed, 2000: 48).

Importantly, strange encounters do not only shape individual bodies, but also those of communities. The presence of the stranger allows us to demarcate spaces of belonging and therefore the formation of nations and communities, in so far as facing an 'alien stranger' 'allows us to share a fantasy that, in the co-presence of strange and alien bodies, we will prevail' (Ahmed, 2000: 3). 'The containment of certain bodies in their skin (bodily space) is a mechanism for the containment of social space' (Ahmed, 2000: 46).

Ahmed explains how the production of communities through the recognition of strangers follows a specifically gendered logic. Looking at Neighbourhood Watch discourses, Ahmed points out how 'self-policing communities' rely on 'the construction of the figure of the vulnerable member/body alongside the heroic citizen [which] provides the moral justification for the injunction to watch' (Ahmed, 2000: 30). 'The figuring of the good citizen is built on the image of the strong citizen: in this sense, the good citizen is figurable primarily as white, masculine and middle-class, the heroic subject who can protect the vulnerable bodies of 'weaker others' (Ahmed, 2000: 31). As foil to the good, strong citizen or mobile subject, the discourse of stranger danger also involves the figuring of the

vulnerable body 'the one who is most at risk' (Ahmed, 2000: 34). For Ahmed, the figure who is most at risk from the proximity of strangers is the child, who comes to embody 'in a narrative that is both nostalgic (returning to an imagined past) and fearful (projecting an unimaginable future), all that could be stolen or lost by the proximity of strangers' (Ahmed, 2000: 35). The child's innocence and purity become a matter of social and national responsibility so that '[i]t is over the bodies of children that the moral campaign against strangers is waged' (Ahmed, 2000: 35).

It was seen in the previous section how this is indeed how white community formation and consolidation in the South African colony worked. Keegan writes that '[t]he imagery of the dominant male provider, the patriarchal white family, the chaste white wife and mother, and indeed of the black brute at the gate, underpinned the racial and gendered edifice of the colonial order' (Keegan, 2001: 460). However, clear also from Keegan's words, in the South African context, it is the white woman (as mother, wife or daughter) and not the child, that has come to embody the figure most at risk and over whose body the moral campaign against strangers is waged. Like the narratives about the child in Ahmed's scheme, the narrative about the vulnerability of the white woman activates nostalgia (in so far as the white woman is figured as *volksmoeder* who represents a pure Afrikaner culture and history) as well as fear of an unimaginable future (the end of white patrilineage).This gendered construction of communities has harsh consequences for the mobility of the white woman *and* Black subjects in the colony in so far as 'safety for women is often constructed in terms of not entering public spaces, or staying within the home,' while Black people's passing through public spaces is delegitimated as the 'origin of danger' (Ahmed, 2000: 33-34). At the same time the narrative of stranger danger legislates 'a form of mobile and masculine subjectivity' (Ahmed, 2000: 33-34) that is, in the context of the colony, reserved for the white man.

READING HELENA

In this section I read the story that Helena Marais tells about herself. She is a middleclass white woman, more or less twenty years of age, living in the small town of Worcester, in the Western Cape, South Africa. She was born shortly after the ending of apartheid and is therefore part of the first generation of 'born frees.' Although she is aware of the legacy of apartheid in her town, which she can see from the enduring spatial segregation and economic inequality, she believes herself not to have been affected by apartheid – 'apartheid has not touched me really' she says in Afrikaans. However, a closer look at her musings regarding her experience of living in Worcester very quickly starts to reveal the ways in which Helena is indeed and continuously touched by the past. In what follows I highlight not only how her unawareness of this results in her complicity in the reinscription of the past within the present, but also how, through her claims to innocence and vulnerability, she is performing exactly the role that the symbolic logic of white supremacy requires of her.

It is clear that Helena does not think of herself as a racist person. On the contrary, she tells the interviewer of the community work that she is involved in and when the interviewer asks her what she does not like/enjoy about life in her town, she answers without hesitation that there still exists 'great division' in the town. The code she uses at this point to refer to race, is spatial. She says, 'I mean, if you go down Durban Street, in the direction of Avian Park, there is still great division.' Durban Street would be a big commercial street that runs right through town out to Avian Park which is one of the poor neighbourhoods outside of town, historically reserved for so-called 'coloured' people under apartheid law.

Helena mentions race by name directly afterwards when she explains her own experience of this segregation:

> and sometimes for me as white girl, I also sometimes want to go to Durban Street because there is a nice fish and chips shop where we often buy chips. But sometimes you feel unsafe to go in there, because you do not know… I do not say all black people or all brown people will do something to me, but sometimes you feel, 'joh, I'm scared to be here'.

Her evocation of colonial/apartheid racial-sexual categories within the first five minutes of the interview is striking. In her words we immediately see conjured up the image of the vulnerable white woman discursively figured at the heart of the colonial/apartheid projects of making and maintaining whiteness in Africa. We also see, although only in ellipses and the gaps between the words, the spectre of the dangerous Black man, in fear of whom the white woman does not venture far from home on her own. In the encounter with the strange other she becomes a white 'girl,' strikingly evoking Ahmed's point about the feminised vulnerable subject, or the child, that is 'most at risk' (Ahmed, 2000: 34) from the proximity of strangers (needing the protection of the heroic citizen who *can* move through dangerous places).

Interestingly, throughout the interview Helena never refers to Black men directly but expresses fear of Black 'people' more generally (perhaps precisely in a conscious effort not to explicitly perpetuate racist stereotypes). However, I read her from the outset to be referring to men. This is because, in South Africa and elsewhere, the

fear of assault (which Helena expands upon in the rest of the interview) is a gendered fear, something that clearly surfaces in her description of herself as a 'white girl'[10] (see also Allen, 2002 and Stanko, 1995). In her book (2001: xiii), Melissa Steyn recounts a moment in her early adolescence when a young Black man struck up a conversation with her, and her first thought was 'Will I be raped' – a reflex that Steyn understands to be underpinned by: '[t]he messages about the dangers of dark men, ingrained by socialization' (Steyn, 2001: xiii). Similarly, half a century before Steyn, Mary, the female protagonist in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1950), was afraid of Black men, 'of course' as '[e]very woman in South Africa is brought up to be' (1950: 70):

> In her childhood she had been forbidden to walk out alone, and when she had asked why, she had been told in the furtive, lowered, but matter-of-fact voice she associated with her mother, that they were nasty and might do horrible things to her (1950: 70).

When Helena starts speaking about the 'division' that she dislikes in Worcester, one initially expects a moral objection to the spatial politics of Worcester that keep white people separated from Black people in many aspects of their daily lives. However, as seen in the paragraph quoted above, Helena is quick to express her main qualm about the division, which is that it impedes her own freedom of movement because she is scared of what Black men could do to her when there are not enough white people around. Importantly, Helena understands her fear not as racist or political, but as something that is simply rational: 'you must use your head and realise you can't go there alone' she says (referring to places like Durban Street where one would encounter mostly Black people). The immediate give-away here is of course the analytical slippage occurring between Helena's fear of sexual violence and her fear of Black people, disregarding all the ways in which white men have proven themselves to be exceptionally deadly to white women (and all women) in South Africa throughout the course of our history (see for example Falkof's 2015 exploration of white family murders during apartheid.)

What complicates any reading of Helena's story is the fact that South African society is known for its shocking levels of sexual violence and is 'one of the most unsafe places in the world to be a woman' (Ramaphosa, 2019). Accordingly, Helena's fear of coming to harm in public spaces is not unfounded and very recognisable (see for example Allen 2002). Moreover, we are at a point in history where women's sexual victimisation is prioritised in mainstream feminist campaigns, which would then enjoin us to side with Helena as the victim of a deeply patriarchal society where the always present threat of sexual violence radically limits the ways in which women can inhabit space. And this is not entirely wrong. However, scholars like Srinivasan and Phipps warn us against the zero-sum game of easy victim/perpetrator binaries based on the single axis of gender. It was seen above that history gives us ample reason to be circumspect about white women's sexual fears of Black men in so far as the 'injunction to protect white women is key to the deadly disciplinary power that drive racialised and classed regimes of extraction and exploitation' (Phipps, 2021: 85). The point is that Helena's fears are not innocent, personal and simply rational, but imbued with great historical political meaning and force. An intersectional feminist politics therefore requires of us to ask who is served and what is obscured by the 'sanctioned victim status' (Hamad, 2019: 25) that the world so easily grants white women like Helena. This tension between the very real threat of sexual violence in South Africa, on the one hand, and the deeply implicated constructed vulnerability of the white woman, on the other, is markedly captured in Isobel Dixon's poem 'every twenty-six seconds' (named with reference to the statistic that the poet encountered that a woman is raped every twenty-six seconds in South Africa). In the poem (2001: 36-37) the white woman, described as 'the fairer sex, slight, delicate' who 'sunburns easily / wears layers of cream,' takes the kitchen knife to bed in fear of the 'poetic justice' or 'the vengeance of the maids.'

In what follows, I use Ahmed to explore these issues further with reference to the story that Helena tells about herself. When the interviewer asks Helena where she thinks the fear of Black people (men) comes from, she answers: 'I think it is about what you read in the news and what is happening in town,' referring here to the high incidence of rape and violent crime South African towns and cities. She says that she does not experience the same fear around the farm workers (employed by her father), 'because I know them and know what kind of people they are'. It is the Black men that she encounters in public spaces that scare her:

> But the stories that one hears always makes one think: are they maybe one [of the dangerous ones], are they nice? But you don't really know. I'm not saying all of them are the same. I have met so many people there in the past and then it is like wow. (…) But, some of them, I don't know, it is just that anxiety you feel. And I think it is about what you've read and what you've seen happening. Or the assault and those things. And you never know what to expect from the person walking past you.

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[10] Helena's references to her fear of Black people are also encoded with gender in other ways. For example, at one point she explains how her friend would warn her against a man of colour walking past. Also, when the interviewer tells a story from her own experience as a way to connect with Helena's story, it is again the Black man that features as the object of fear.

Helena contrasts the workers on her father's farm ('I know them') with other men that she walks past ('you don't really know' and 'you never know what to expect from the person walking past you'). Helena repeats this sentiment later in the interview when she says, 'if I know the people I go to, it will be fine to go there because it is not bad for me'. Helena recognises the Black man as the stranger, as the one of whom one does not know, rather than simply failing to recognise him – '[t]he figure of the stranger is far from simply being strange; it is a figure that is painfully familiar in that very strange(r)ness' (Ahmed, 2000: 21).

Following Ahmed, it can be said that Helena's encounter with the Black man therefore reopens prior histories of encounter that fix others in a regime of difference that was established in the past. Fear therefore 'does something' here: 'it re-establishes distance between bodies whose difference is read off the surface, as a reading which produces the surface' (Ahmed, 2004: 63). By recognising the Black man as the unknowable Other and withdrawing in fear, Helena is reinscribing the narrative through which she becomes white (connoted by her feminine hypervulnerability) and the Black man becomes Black (and therefore dangerous to the white woman).

Ahmed (2004: 79) explains that it is exactly the structural possibility that the rapist or violent criminal 'could-be' anyone that justifies surveillance and the restriction of the mobility of those bodies associated with that which is feared. Following Ahmed (2004: 79), we can see in Helena's story how the figure of the assailant is detached from particular bodies, ('an unspecifiable may-come-to-pass' (Massumi, 1993: 11)), but that it is this 'could-be-ness' (deeply established in the white South African psyche through centuries of racist colonial discourse) which leads Helena to fear Black men as a group. The fact that the Black man passes her on the street and does not harm her, does not result in the overcoming of her fear, rather it allows the object of fear to remain uncontained by specific bodies so that '[t]he black man becomes even more threatening if he passes by; his proximity is imagined then as the possibility of future injury' (Ahmed, 2004: 67). This reminds one of the moment in J. M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* where Lucy and David Lurie see '[t]hree men coming toward them on the path' when they go for a walk on the farm, and '[t]he dog at Lucy's side slows down, bristles' (1990: 91). 'Should we be nervous?' David asks and Lucy answers that she does not know. But the men pass them by and when they turn back '[t]he strangers are out of sight' (1990: 91). Of course, in *Disgrace* these three Black men *do* rape Lucy, evoking the criticism from the African National Congress that Coetzee was perpetuating harmful racial stereotypes (I will return to this in the Conclusion).[11]

Importantly, the fear of the Black man that Helena experiences has consequences for how she inhabits her body and how she moves within the world. It was seen already that when Helena describes her experiences of encounters with the Black man, she refers to herself in diminutive terms, 'as a white girl' she feels scared to go the fish and chips shop alone. When the interviewer asks her where she thinks the fear of Black people (men) comes from, Helena says the following:

> I think it is about how some of the people receive you. If you receive me with a friendly heart, a friendly face, I will not become fear-stricken or so. But if you look at me as if I… 'where does this child come from? What is she doing here?' If you look at me with such an attitude I will also become scared from my side.

In the imagined encounter with the Black man, Helena becomes small and vulnerable, a child who does not feel herself belonging in public space, thereby re-enacting or renewing the kind of femininity that historically marks whiteness in opposition to a less-than-human Blackness. To use Ahmed's vocabulary again, it can be seen that Helena feels that 'the openness of the [her]body to the world involves a sense of danger, which is *anticipated as a future pain or injury*' (Ahmed, 2004: 69). She says: 'if I am alone I feel like a target sometimes'. Also: 'some places in the town are very difficult for me, as a person, to go there alone because you are scared of what could happen to you.' The threat of the Black man, from whose physical proximity she withdraws, leads Helena to inhabit her body and to regulate her movement according to the prescriptions of colonial white patriarchy. In Ahmed's words: it forms her as a 'body-at-home', a comportment historically required of the white feminine subject (and something on which colonial Afrikaner whiteness hinges). In this regard it can be said that Helena's fear of the Black man does not only symbolise the expulsion of Blackness from her world and white social space, but actually works to shape social space by 're-forming the apartness of the white body' (Ahmed, 2000: 46).

However, it is clear from her words that her fear does not stop Helena from going wherever she wants to go – the important thing is not to go there alone. Helena mentions specifically that she would move confidently in spaces that would usually scare her, if she is not alone. She says, 'if I am with some of my friends then I also do not feel [scared]'. She explains that many of her friends play rugby (which in this context means that she is talking about men) and that they would sometimes play with Black people and then 'you support and watch the game,

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[11] See for example ANC News Briefing, 'Mediaracism-ANC' (Sapa, Johannesburg, 5 April 2000), online: http://www.anc.org.za/anc/newsbrief/2000/news040.

(…) then I do not feel [scared] at all. I feel safe, completely.' Accordingly, what becomes very clear is that although Helena's fear of the Black man limits her mobility, it does not lead to a refusal to inhabit the world, but regulates the terms thereof. In Ahmed's terms: it compels her to enter the world through the apparently safe enclosure offered by segregated spaces (being-at-home) and other white people (especially the white man). '[S]he is a mollusc, pale, without a shell […] she shouldn't be alone / should marry / or should move back home' (Dixon, 2001: 36).

The few times that Helena mentions white men, they feature as heroic, mobile citizens who work to protect the bodies-at-home. She mentions that her father was in the military during apartheid and that 'if it was difficult in town, he would go to help to keep it calm and so,' presumably meaning that he helped to quell anti-apartheid resistance protests by Black people. She also explains 'if the farm workers had a problem, they also knew that they could come and speak to my father'. Helena's father teaches her that she might end up having to leave her beloved hometown when she gets married because 'a woman moves after a man and not a man after a woman.' In the picture that Helena sketches, the white man moves easily and legitimately through space, in sharp contrast to everyone else.

Evident in the narrative is that it is not Helena's mobility that is most affected by her fear, but rather the mobility of the Black man (and in consequence, Black people more generally). Helena very clearly describes a town where there are areas that Black people do not enter legitimately, except as workers for white people. She mentions that she realised at some point in her life that 'some people do not like to have coloured people in their homes.' When she refers to the 'division' in Worcester, she refers to a town where there are leafy suburbs and affluent parts of town that remain unofficially off limits to Black people (except as workers of white families).

Helena herself does not draw a connection between the fear that she feels and the maintenance of racial segregation through the policing of white space. However, other research suggests that this connection remains strong in contemporary South Africa. Van der Westhuizen argues for example that White South Africa 'is privatised and recreated on microcosmic scale in white, Afrikaans enclaves' and at the heart of the white, Afrikaans enclave of today is the home, shaped by a specific ethnoracial, heteronormative domesticity (Van der Westhuizen, 2017: 20). Similar to what was the case in Afrikaner nationalist history, hegemonic Afrikaner feminine identity turns on the normalisation of the woman/wife-as-mother and the abjection of its racialised and sexual and gender non-conforming others' (Van der Westhuizen, 2017: 19). Moreover, Diphoorn (2017) notes that colonial and apartheid racial imaginaries are reified in present day South Africa through the racist depiction of the 'dangerous criminal' by citizens and armed security response officers in private security companies policing middle-class South African neighbourhoods. In this sense it can be said that the 'black peril' trope lingers in contemporary South Africa where the imputed sexual threat posed by the 'violent' Black man at the gate of the white enclaves continues to function as the symbolic counterpart to the 'vulnerable' white woman in the racist narratives that justify the apartness of white bodies (see also Allen, 2002 and Steyn *et al.*, 2012). This is also true in other places (see for example Phipps, 2021).

Importantly, the fact that Helena is not aware of the political import or consequences of the fear that she regards to be purely personal and natural/rational, does not render her innocent. Phipps (2021: 85) argues that the 'attempt to separate the personal and political is central to white women's tears as a strategic device' and that '[w]e demand to be treated as 'just a person' who should be granted the benefit of the doubt, who exist outside racialised structures and power relations even as our actions perpetuate them.' The power and license to centre our own personal experience in our theory and politics (while denying the connection) *is* white supremacy, Phipps argues (2021: 85). Because white women's personal experience of powerlessness activates the settler's and master's revenge (the circuit between white tears and white rage) 'the relationship between the personal and political in white feminism has always been corruptible or perhaps even inherently corrupt' (Phipps, 2021: 86). When Helena understands herself, on a very personal level, as victim of the segregation in the town and the constructed threat posed by Black men (because it means that she cannot move as freely as she wants to), she is therefore fulfilling the exact political role that white supremacy assigns to her. In this way she radically undermines any of her own conscious attempts to contribute towards racial transformation or new ways of being white in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

In her poem 'straatmeid' (a highly derogatory term for brown woman in Afrikaans) Ronelda S. Kamfer tells herself resolutely to 'remember that a white woman is a white man'[12] (2019: 29). To the extent that the poem is concerned with the racial power that white Afrikaans women have wielded against brown/Black women like Kamfer, she is of course not wrong. However, what scholars like Ahmed, Srinivasan, Phipps, Gqola, Davis and many others help us to see, is that there is a level at which the white woman is *not* the white man, and although she benefits greatly from her proximity to him, this proximity comes at a steep price to herself and at dire expense to

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[12] My translation from the original Afrikaans.

others. The opposite is also true: because of the instrumental structural function that the subjugated white woman and her tears fulfil in the logic of white supremacy, she bears great and unique power to undermine it. When we fail to interrogate the white woman's position as distinct from the position of the white man, we are granting her too much *and* too little agency, while missing the opportunity to put her to work as a potentially powerful agent of mutiny in the enduring machinery of white settler power.

In this article I used the lens of Ahmed's work on race and affect to interpret the story that Helena Marais tells about herself and her town. It was shown the extent to which her encounters with the Black man (or the way in which she shrinks from such an encounter) clearly repeats the sexual politics of colonialism and apartheid that turned on keeping white women away from Black men – a separation through which Afrikaner whiteness is secured and maintained in opposition to a less-than-human Blackness. In Helena's story the Black man becomes overrepresented as the unknowable other, or recognised as the stranger who cannot be known, and she herself becomes small and vulnerable, her body shrinking into the bounded spaces of her white community, in line with the historical prescriptions for white femininity (and a crucial symbolic marker for 'civilised' whiteness of her people). It was seen that it is in such encounters that old colonial forms of whiteness are remade even if Helena does not understand herself to subscribe to racist beliefs, and that the cultural/symbolic/ideological power of her fear is vested in, and at the same time obscured by, the narrative of her own innocence in the matter (and the idea that what she experiences is natural rather than political).

Ahmed, read in dialogue with feminist scholars like Srinivasan and Phipps, therefore presents us with one way in which to understand the resilience of settler/apartheid forms of whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa – namely that colonial racial identities are maintained through the seemingly natural gendered and sexual ways in which we encounter and touch others. In *The Right to Sex* Srinivasan asks:

> what might happen if we were to look at bodies, our own and others' and allow ourselves to feel admiration, appreciation, want, where politics tells us we should not. There is a kind of discipline here, in that it requires us to quiet the voices that have spoken to us since birth, the voices that tell us which bodies and ways of being in the world are worthy and which are unworthy. What is disciplined here isn't desire itself, but the political forces that presume to instruct it (Srinivasan, 2021, 96).

If we understand the white woman in the (post)colony to become what she is in the encounter with the Black man (or the absence of such an encounter) conditioned by her sexual/gendered fear, there is a possibility for her to become something else if she encounters him in a different way. And, if we take seriously the central position that the white woman occupies in her ethnic-racial community as symbolic carrier or reproducer of whiteness, we see that when the white woman encounters the Black man in new ways that unmake and remake her, it can radically subvert the whiteness of her community and the apartness of the white body, thereby making possible the respatialisation of the South African landscape on different terms. It could be argued that this is exactly what J. M. Coetzee is exploring in *Disgrace,* but seemingly without much hope in the possibility of real transformation. Recall that, unlike Helena, Coetzee's white woman character Lucy does not withdraw from the proximity of Black people, even after she is raped by three Black men. Rather, she insists on remaining on the farm (as neighbour to one of the rapists) and raising the child conceived by the rape. Although it can be said that Lucy is encountering the Black man on different terms, the book seems to imply that decolonisation will amount to a handover of women (along with the land) from the hands of white patriarchy to Black patriarchy. This is not where Ahmed, Phipps, Davis and Srinivasan want to take us. *Disgrace* dismisses or rejects the insight of decolonial feminist thought that the systemic sexual violence that has come to characterise a place like South Africa is produced by coloniality and that what the project of decolonisation requires of us is to do the work of imagining and reaching for a world beyond such violence.

I am not sure what a transformative encounter between Helena and the Black man would actually look like (and contemporary literature does not provide us with a clear example), but it would at least require that Helena starts to ask what it is that precedes her fearful encounter with him and begins to critically interrogate and reckon with her fear. Here I also do not mean to suggest that Black men are necessarily seeking encounters with white women or that we can expect of the Black man to receive the white woman in any particular way. Rather, my argument is that the making of whiteness historically relies on the white woman's fearful withdrawal from the Black man, and that there is therefore nothing less at stake than the unmaking of colonial whiteness if the white woman should start facing up to her structural role in the maintenance of racial categories and begin to take responsibility for it. In so far as this undermines the rules historically set by white patriarchy, such a shift would also carry profound possibilities for the feminist emancipation of white women in the South African post-colony.

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A Discussion of *Mr. Housewife* in Relation to the Social Construction of Masculinity in South Korean Society

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the socially constructed notion of Korean masculinity by examining Yoo Sun-Dong's *Mr. Housewife* (*Miseuteo Jubu Kwizeuwang*, 2005). By regarding masculinity as a value or 'place' that one can obtain through practices rather than as a fixed identity, this article takes the view that masculinity is also dependent on adopting culturally specific practices and roles. Yoo Sun-Dong's film presents a male positioning himself as a housewife, giving the audience a different perspective outside the social construction of rigid gender boundaries. Through critical discourse analysis, the article discusses three themes of narrative: non-hegemonic nurturer masculinity, home as woman's place to rest, and context-bound female masculinity/emphasised femininity. It is argued that Jin-Man's Korean masculinity is different not only from the soft *kkonminam* masculinities, but also other domestic masculinities reflected in the media, both in terms of his relationship with the female gender and divergence from hegemonic masculinity. The film also successfully subverts the conception of the home as 'a place to rest' which became a new way to rationalise gender segregation in modern South Korea.

Keywords: masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, man as nurturer, domesticity, hybrid masculinity

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of New Korean Cinema dates back to the mid-1980s and late 1990s when politically South Korea moved from authoritarianism to democracy, and filmmakers felt more free to explore new themes (Paquet, 2009: 3). Masculine identity can be considered as one of the most prominent themes of this new wave of Korean cinema (Kim, 2004). With the political and economic traumas that took place in South Korea during these periods, South Korean men perceived that they lost their power within the family and society, which led to a tension around the male identity (A. Lee, 2017: 201). To re-negotiate this traumatic past, there was a search for a new masculine identity in the New Korean Cinema (K. Kim, 2004: 9). Films such as *Happy End* (1999), *Shiri* (1999), and *Joint Security Area* (2000) depicted the change in male identities through portrayals of loss and the regaining of masculinity (K. Kim, 2004: 233-259). The decreased influence of masculinity in South Korean society due to economic problems, gender roles becoming uncertain, and the feminist movement led to a representation of excessive masculinity in the Korean cinema through which males were nostalgically reminded of when they had powerful masculinity (A. Lee, 2017: 224, 226). This excessive masculinity was often depicted through the violent character of the protagonists. For instance, in *Old Boy,* the protagonist Dae-Soo portrays a 'savage but cool' male character which symbolises a 'transgressive and dangerous masculinity' (Jung, 2011: 102, 121).

According to Connell (1995: 68), how masculinity is constructed differs based on the cultures and historical periods. Therefore, each culture constructs its own masculinity through culture-specific behaviours of daily life. The definition of hegemonic masculinity as 'particular kinds of behaviour and ways of being which are made culturally dominant and come to be seen as the pattern of masculinity in general' (Kessler *et al.*, 1982: 10) was later used by Moon (2002) to define the features of hegemonic masculinity in South Korea as military service, distance from daily reproductive labour, and providing for the family. The depiction of hegemonic masculinity through themes like male heroism and military culture has been salient in films such as *Silmido* (2003)*, Shiri* (1999), *Brotherhood* (2004), *The Host* (2006), and *D-War* (2007) (A. Lee, 2017: 202, 228).

In the twenty-first century, South Korean popular culture has also seen the emergence of other masculinities (*kkonminam or 'flower boys'*) characterised by soft, romantic behaviour and attractive looks (Jung, 2011: 58). However,

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for such images to be accepted by the audience, they still needed to possess other traditional characteristics of the manly man such as strong muscles or personal characteristics such as courage, loyalty, and honour (Shiau, 2017: 222). Rather than a loss of masculinity or 'mere' feminisation, *kkonminam* has represented a hybridisation of male and female identities (Kim 2003 cited in Jung, 2011: 58).

Yoo Sun-Dong's *Mr. Housewife* (*Miseuteo Jubu Kwizeuwang*, 2005), which is the focus of this article, is different from the mainstream films in which the protagonist is presented within the boundaries of the traditional definitions of masculinity. On the contrary, this film deals with different themes that are centred around the notion of male domestic masculinity. I argue that Yoo's film depicts the transgression of the normative boundaries of gender and deconstructs traditional gender roles, offering an alternative vision to masculinity. In order to posit this view, the article discusses masculinity as a fluid, culturally negotiated and changeable 'place' (Connell, 1995: 71; Moon, 2002: 82-83) which is contested and negotiated continuously through gender-specific roles, practices, and discourses within the South Korean socio-cultural context.

Yoo's film was selected because contrary to most popular visual cultural texts in South Korea, it reverses the gender roles of both male and female characters. Whereas the male characters in films, dramas, and reality shows exercise a form of hegemonic masculinity, even though they might be aesthetically androgynous or celebrate domesticity (Jung, 2011; Rhee, 2019), the female characters are often portrayed as feminine, weak and slim enough to fit into the conventional standards of male-gaze in order to be supportive of hegemonic masculinity (Elfving-Hwang, 2011). This is in line with the concept of emphasised femininity that is 'practiced in a complementary, compliant accommodating subordinate relationship with hegemonic masculinity' (Messerschmidt, 2018: 136). On the contrary, Mr. Housewife portrays a female character occupying the position of masculinity through her practices and through her relationship with the male protagonist (Jin-Man). The article aims to discuss whether the male masculinity depicted by Jin-Man is different from South Korean domestic masculinities reflected in the media, in terms of its relationship with the female gender and hegemonic masculinity. The concept of home as 'a place to rest' which became a new way to rationalise gender segregation in modern South Korea is also discussed in order to address this question.

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF 'NEW MEN'

In gender studies, the concept of masculinity has been less critically examined as compared to femininity, as is usual with representative norms. The meaning of the former is made through opposition to the latter. Reeser (2010: 8-9) argues that because of the way language functions, we are inclined to consider masculinity in direct opposition to femininity, and we assume that there is a binary opposition between the two. In that sense, masculinity is 'unmarked'. Nevertheless, this does not mean that masculinity's meaning is absent; rather, it has a 'significant absence'. When we ponder more about the meaning of masculinity, we notice that it is unstable and constantly contested in relation to various opposites whose meanings are not fixed (Reeser, 2010: 14-15). Therefore, it is difficult to think about the existence of an essentialist gender binary. Following Butler's (1988: 527-528) understanding of gender as a performative act, Connell takes a social constructionist approach to masculinity, describing gender as a social practice. She asserts that gender is a social structure that constitutes the social practices where power relations play an important role, opposing the essentialist views that view bodies as deterministic of gender (Connell, 2000: 12, 24). She proposes a hierarchical social structure of gender that is constructed around power relations where heterosexual masculinities have a dominant position over women and other masculinities (Connell, 1995). While agents construct masculinity, they are influenced by the dominant form of masculinity that is also defined as hegemonic masculinity and which defines 'how men should act' (Connell, 1995). Even though most men try to position themselves in relation to the hegemonic masculinity, many men do not fit into these masculine ideals and construct and practise their masculinities differently (Frosh *et al.*, 2002: 76). Because such a hierarchy exists, men have traditionally felt a burden of having to prove their heterosexuality and against behaviours that could be perceived as feminine (Anderson, 2009: 28-29; Zurbriggen, 2010; O'Neil, 1981) as a defence against being perceived as homosexual (Kimmel, 1994).

However, recent transformations in masculinities such as changes in dressing styles (Demetriou, 2001) and male grooming (Shiau, 2017: 222; Lim, 2008), the emergence of softer, more effeminate male images and metrosexual males in the West, (Anderson, 2009), *kkonminam* males in South Korea (Jung, 2011), and *bishōnen* males in Japan (Jung, 2009) which have been defined as hybrid masculinities, are being widely discussed by prominent scholars. While Anderson (2009: 93-105) and McCormack (2012) try to explain the emergence of hybrid masculinities (termed as 'inclusive masculinities' by Anderson) which challenge hegemonic masculinity in some settings, on the opposite side, Messner (1993), Demetriou (2001), Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that such alternative masculinities do not pose a significant challenge to hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, these new gender practices have made hegemonic masculinity seem softer and less oppressive (Demetriou, 2001: 355). Yet, it is also argued that these masculinities – both in representations and practices – are often produced through the

hybridisation of traditional traits with softer forms of masculinity but without any significant divergence from hegemonic masculinity (Demetriou, 2001; Lim, 2008; Messner, 1993: 725). Therefore, the construction of these masculinities is not equal to the deconstruction of the gender hierarchies (Donovan, 1998: 837; Moon, 2002: 100).

In South Korea, the emergence of new masculinities was a result of the consumer culture within which 'new men' were constructed as a trend whilst a strong heterosexist patriarchal society has been maintained (Lim, 2008: 116). Hegemonic masculinity is difficult to challenge in South Korea as it is based on Confucianist tradition (Hoffman, 1995; Wrochna, 2018: 66-67; G. Lee, 2020: 368). Even if there is hybridisation, still an excessive deviation from the dominant masculinity is often not supported. Therefore, the soft masculinities need to stay within their limits to be socially acceptable. For example, although attractiveness is very important for success in some spheres of life (Jang *et al.*, 2019), men still consider traditional determinants for success such as financial ability as more important (Lim, 2008). Indeed, the representations of *kkonminam* masculinities in Korean drama and film narratives are still developed around culturally specific elements of hegemonic masculinity such as military service (military masculinity), distance from daily reproductive labour (housework and childcare), and providing for the family (Moon, 2002). These characters represent financially capable males who are strong providers, often heirs to wealthy family businesses. In other words, they are strongly grounded in the economic sphere and separated from reproductive labour. They possess characteristics like strength (muscular bodies), courage, and leadership which can be considered as the characteristics of militarised ideals of masculinity (Hwang, 2019; Shiau, 2017).

On the other hand, the depiction of male housewives *(chubu)* in popular culture and TV shows like *the Return of the Superman* (Praptika, 2016), *Teacher Paek* and *Three Meals* (Rhee, 2019) follows a different trend as these films try to foster the image of domestic men and reconstruct gender roles through reproductive activities like cooking and taking care of children, which are traditionally assigned to women.

KOREAN HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

The characteristics of ideal representations of hegemonic masculinity in South Korea could be generally defined as military service, distance from daily reproductive labour, and providing for the family (Moon, 2002). Military masculinity's influence on the construction of the masculinities within social and business contexts has been discussed by prominent scholars (Kwon, 2019; A. Lee *et al.*, 2019). South Korean traditional discourses constructed the national duty of men to serve their nation and their families, not only in the military but also in the economic sphere, constructing two elements of hegemonic masculinity (ability to materially provide, and military masculinity) in relation to a warrior-like manhood (Lee *et al.*, 2019).

In South Korean society, family roles and division of labour are defined in favour of the traditional patriarchal system that reinforces men's authority in the family and society. Collier (1995: 192) argues that women's increased involvement in the workforce in the modern era makes it more difficult to assert that there is a breadwinner/child-rearer dichotomy between male and female, in practice. However, socially embedded familial ideologies continue to preserve this division while women are expected to 'do both': earn money and be responsible for domestic chores. On the other hand, the masculine identity and status of men are still constructed in relation to their work and income (Collier, 1995: 193-194). In modern South Korea, the gendered division of labour is not as rigid as before. According to the data from Statistics Korea, the number of double earner households in South Korea reached 5.662 million as of October 2019 which accounted for almost half (46%) of the married couple households (Koreaherald, 2020). However, the ability to provide is still considered as the basis of the patriarchal authority of men.

The South Korean ideal of men's separation from domestic activities is traditionally rooted in Confucian *seonbi* masculinity. *Seonbi* were the scholar-officials who studied official texts to obtain 'wisdom' (*wen* in Chinese) and advised the king during the Choson era (1392-1910). They strictly distanced themselves from manual labour or economic activities since it would be considered degrading. Still, being a traditional ideal model of Korean masculinity (Jung, 2011: 27), *seonbi* masculinity contributes to the gendered division of labour as domestic labour is still considered as 'emasculating' (Moon, 2002: 99).

CHUBU MALES AS THE 'NEW MAN AS NURTURER'

As Foucault (1980: 92-94, 142) argues, some discourses ('true discourses') construct meaning systems that define how the social world is defined, whereas alternative discourses are marginalised but still provide places where hegemonic practices can be contested and resisted. Within the social structure of gender relations, it is natural that discourse and practices resist and transform hegemonic masculinity and the traditional gender roles of work and family. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 853, 854) argue that the meaning of hegemonic masculinity is

under constant construction and change. There is a constant struggle of power and interests amongst different masculinities and femininities within the gender in order to generate the hegemonic definition of masculinity. Understandably, the recent changes and shifts in gender relations have led to a crisis among men in which they try to renegotiate masculinity (Jang et al. 2019: 683).

Beynon (2002: 83-86) states that masculinity is in a crisis which resulted from a loss of what had been taken for granted as masculine rights and changes in male employment. Considering that men used to have absolute dominance in every field, it can be argued that their perceived autonomy is threatened in most social aspects such as law, finance, politics, and business with the widespread recognition of women's rights and the challenge to breadwinner ideology. Men are confusedly caught between the modern values of equality and traditional values of patriarchy, thereby affecting their concepts of masculinity. Gerson's (1994) study demonstrates how men can react in different ways to the crisis of masculinity. In the twentieth century when men's sense of economic security weakened, they began to reassess their commitments to family and work. As a result, some continued being breadwinners, some fled the responsibilities of parenthood, whereas others got significantly involved in family life. Kaufman (2013) argues that the group of men involved in family life increased even more in the twenty-first century and a new group which he names 'superdads' emerged. Beynon (2002: 100) uses the concept 'new man as nurturer' that is characterised by the nurturing and domestic features of men while referring to the more involved type of masculinity that emerged amidst the crisis of masculinity.

The number of these 'new men as nurturers' who are known to be involved in daily work, such as housekeeping and nurturing, inside the house is growing in South Korea (G. S. Kim, 2019). Compared to the older generations, the sharing of domestic chores is somewhat more common in South Korea, and the perception of traditional gender roles has changed to a certain extent. Advanced policy measures such as paid family leave for men also support more equal gender rights and have led to an increase in the number of fathers taking parental leave despite the fear of social stigmatisation (Byun and Won, 2020: 593). Recent studies found that more women seem to disagree with the traditional division of labour of husband as the breadwinner and wife as the housekeeper, and with the notion that the wife needs to help her husband develop his career rather than her own (R. Kim, 2019). Between the years 1999-2019, the percentage of men who engaged in housework on the weekdays increased from 44.8% to 60.8%, although women continue to cover most of the share of the housework; the percentage of women who engage in housework on the weekdays was 92.7% in 1999 and 91.6% in 2019 (Oh, 2020).

Despite some relatively positive changes in practice, the traditional heteronormative perceptions of 'how a man should be' are also still salient in South Korean society due to Confucianist values. The results of a survey conducted in South Korea in 2019 showed that 76% of the participants agreed that 'a man staying home to look after children is less of a man' (Statista, 2019). Joo Hyun, a full-time working mother, whose husband is a stay-at-home father (househusband), admits: 'In Korean society, they say that if a man even steps foot in the kitchen, his penis will fall off' (Shin, 2015). The use of traditional discourse which defines the kitchen and other places of recreation as the place where a man loses his manhood strengthens hegemonic masculinity. Despite the modernisation and emergence of new masculinities in South Korea, the traditional gender binary still exists in dichotomies and assigns to people gender-specific roles and places.

The role of housekeeping is also discursively linked to the female in the Korean language. The definition of the word *chubu* (housewife) in the Korean dictionary can be translated as 'the female owner of the household who adopts the housekeeping role'. In *Hanja*, this word consists of the syllables *chu* 'owner' (of the house) and *bu* 'wife'. This can be translated as 'the wife of the house owner'. Lakoff (1973: 45) asserts, 'the speech about women implies an object[...]whose social roles are derivative and dependent in relation to men'. In a relevant sense, linguistically it can be interpreted that the woman is put in the second position after the 'house owner', who is considered to be the husband. The emerging generation of men who are stay-at-home husbands or engage in domestic chores are referred to as *sallimhaneun namja* which can be translated as 'man who does housework'.

A study by Han (1997 as cited in Moon, 2002: 100) shows that although men idealise a family-oriented father, they face anxiety regarding the possible decline of paternal authority. This is a slow process in which the social construction of meanings and gender norms are constantly modified. The discursive reconstruction of the dichotomised gender relations happens through different channels including the media.

DOMESTIC MASCULINITY IN KOREAN MEDIA

The modern societies' trends in the family and social life brought about shifts in gender roles in family and workplaces; while the role of the female as an economic provider gained strength, the caring male role came to the fore (Oláh *et al.*, 2018; Goldscheider *et al.*, 2015). In line with these globalising trends, domestic masculinity has been salient in several visual products in South Korea. *The Return of Superman* is a variety show where celebrity fathers stay at home and take care of their children and engage in domestic chores while their wives are sent away from the house. The father figure portrayed in this show represents a type of masculinity that is gentle and

nurturing but is able to become strong if necessary. However, in *The Return of Superman*, the division of traditional gender roles seems prevalent, and men require women's assistance for specific chores (Praptika and Putra, 2016). Praptika and Putra further argue that in the show, there are instances the male character engages in behaviour that is related to traditional characteristics of men; he controls emotions and tries to show a strong image. Suppressing the expression of emotions has been related to the reflection of hegemonic masculinity on television (Scharrer and Blackburn, 2018: 152–153). In other words, although the portrayal of the 'superman masculinity' is in line with the 'new man as a nurturer' in Beynon's (2002) conceptualisation, although he is caring for children, willing to help women in domestic jobs, he does not strictly reverse the gender dichotomies and still conforms to the traditional hegemonic masculinity.

Korean TV cooking shows provide a space for male celebrities to perform 'culinary masculinity' that is distinct from traditional masculinity. However, in shows like *Teacher Paek* and *Three Meals*, men use the kitchen as a space for male bonding and leisure rather than using it as a space to represent domestic labour (Rhee, 2019: 63-64). Although South Korean cooking shows include male chefs who defy traditional masculinity, they put them in authority positions whereas the female actresses act like students, servers, and tasters who engage in 'food porn', consuming large amounts of food while looking slim and fit (Tavassoli, 2020). Hence, these shows create platforms for maintaining hegemonic masculinity in the media.

In sum, while the South Korean examples of domestic masculinities in popular media exercise different masculinities, they still adopt the traditional components of hegemonic masculinity and female actresses conform with the ideals set by the emphasised femininity (Connell, 1987).

METHODOLOGY

The article aims to discuss whether the domestic masculinity of Jin-Man adopts the traditional characteristics of hegemonic masculinity within the South Korean context, or whether it follows a different trend from other popular visual cultural products that have dealt with domestic masculinity in South Korea.

Taking the relational nature of hegemonic masculinity into consideration, the analysis focuses on the representations not only of hegemonic masculinity but also emphasised femininity and female masculinity. These representations are analysed through critical discourse analysis.

Critical discourse analysis is an approach that assumes that the social world, social identities, social relations are constructed through discourse which is a social practice, and discourse can be used to transform, dismantle, maintain, restore or legitimise the status quo (Wodak *et al.*, 2009: 7-8). It differs from other poststructuralist discourse analysis methods in that it is used to understand the causal relations between the discursive practices, events, texts, and broader social and cultural structures, in particular looking at how it shapes power relations (Fairclough cited in Aydın-Düzgit, 2014: 357). CDA was selected as a method because it is useful for analysing gender relations that are about unequal power relations, but are legitimised through discursive practices.

The critical discourse analysis of Jin-Man's exercise of masculinity is conducted in relation to the gender practices of his wife Soo-Hee. After watching the film three times, observing the interactions of Jin-Man with other characters, noting the dialogues, watching the key scenes a few times to observe the clothing, gestures, and other visual details, three themes of the narrative were arrived at. The themes identified for critical analysis were: non-hegemonic nurturer masculinity, home as woman's place to rest, context-bound female masculinity/emphasised femininity.

MR. HOUSEWIFE (*MISEUTEO JUBU KWIZEUWANG*): AN ANALYSIS

Mr. Housewife depicts the life of a full-time stay-at-home father (Jin-Man) who takes care of his daughter and takes the responsibility of housework when his wife is working at a broadcasting station. After winning the big prize in a quiz show for housewives, he becomes famous as the 'Miseuteo Jubu Kwizeuwang' (Mr. Housewife the Quiz King) in the media. Jin-Man gives a soft, feminine impression, which is in contrast to the mainstream stereotypical masculine father.

Non-hegemonic Nurturer Masculinity

Jin-Man is introduced to the audience in the opening scenes of the film where he is shopping in the grocery store. In this introductory scene, he is struggling with *ajummas* (married Korean women with kids) to buy the last bag of squids on sale. Although he is wearing a suit, he behaves and uses the same mannerisms as the *ajummas* and persuades them. After he comes home, the audience can observe that he has created a cosy, homely environment that is traditionally linked with *ajummas* in the Korean context.

Figure 1. 'Jin-Man is cooking in the kitchen', *Miseuteo Jubu Kwizeuwang* [*Mr. Housewife*]. 2005. Copyright © Polstar Entertainment

Figure 2. 'Jin-Man is making kimchi', *Miseuteo Jubu Kwizeuwang* [*Mr. Housewife*]. 2005. Copyright © Polstar Entertainment

However, Jin-Man acts differently from the other male *ajummas* that audiences are used to seeing on Korean TV channels, who assume 'the kind of authority a female *ajumma* lacks in real life, being empowered by the kind of femininity that disempowers women in everyday life' (Rhee, 2019: 60). On the contrary, he uses his culinary masculinity to portray an image that is close to the real Korean *ajumma* who shows dedication to her family.

Jin-Man constructs his culinary-domestic masculinity through his clothing, stances, and language in the kitchen (**Figure 1**). It is possible for the audience to notice that he does not make any efforts to separate himself from the daily work of social reproduction and caring labour in different contexts. In South Korea, staying away from the reproductive activities of the household is expected from the man as part of hegemonic masculinity. The role of man as the family provider and military serviceman is considered to justify man's disengagement from such activities. Among the housework duties that the husband is conventionally separated from are preparing food, cleaning, washing, caring for the elderly, the sick, the disabled, and children. If the man performs any of these activities, he is considered to be emasculated (Moon, 2002: 99). Contrary to the domestic masculinities depicted in culinary shows, that emerge only in specific places and contexts, Jin-Man's domestic masculinity portrayal is multidimensional and spreads into other spaces than the kitchen such as the school of his daughter, Da-Na. He is the neighbourhood representative and guides those who move into the neighbourhood. In terms of caring labour, his tasks include picking up their daughter from school, attending various activities with the mothers of other kids, and looking after their daughter when she is at home. In terms of reproductive work, he does all the housework including cleaning, cooking, and even preparing kimchi with his mother (**Figure 2**). Since hegemonic masculinity necessitates staying away from those tasks, he is perceived to be unmanly and loses the respect of his male friends and even the friends of his daughter. His daughter is made fun of by her schoolmates who shout behind her, '*Da-Na has a daddy for a mommy!*' because Jin-Man does not fit the ideal breadwinner father role.

Some of the conversations between Jin-Man and his wife represent a failed masculinity in the South Korean context. While having dinner together, Soo-Hee argues *'I bought you [that suit] for finding a job', 'Are you looking for a job?'*. Ideas and practices that define men as the principal income earners of the family justify men's domestic authority and dominance in Korean society (Moon, 2002). As Kim (1998: 177) indicates, in Korea, this division of labour was built upon Confucian gender ideology according to which women were assigned to the 'inside' and the men to the 'outside' of home. According to these gender constructs, the role of the family provider and men's earning power are an indicator of men's authority in the household and his manliness. Failure to provide for the family results in a loss of respect, loss of authority in the family, and loss of masculinity. Jin-Man's masculinity is considered as a failed masculinity by his parents as well. While they are making kimchi together – which is a woman's task in Korean society – Jin-Man's mother's words reflect disappointment: *'I am confused whether you are a son or daughter'… if your father finds out (that we are making kimchi) I am dead… he was very happy when you were born… how long will this thing last?'* However, Jin-Man continues to say that he likes his job, and he prefers to live like that, and doing the housework is a very difficult task that should be appreciated. It could be stated that his reaction towards his mother's criticism depicts a feminist resistance to hegemonic masculinity.

Jin-Man's refusal to get a job is also a rejection of the ideals related to military masculinity. As explained above, within the South Korean context military masculinity has been considered ideal in relation to corporate life. Before the 1997 financial crisis which led to a loss of masculinity through unemployment and loss of income, a permanent employee status signified masculine power in South Korea. In the 2000s, Korean television series such as *Winter Sonata* (2002), *Coffee Prince* (2007), and *Boys Over Flowers* (2009) introduced new kinds of soft masculinities and *kkonminam* masculinities, reflecting the idea that the hardworking salaryman image was not the only measure of masculine achievement (Elfving-Hwang, 2017). However, in order not to threaten the traditional masculinity ideals, these male characters often showed masculine bodies and financial strength while the female characters were represented as weak, economically dependent, and subordinated. In contrast with the *kkonminam* masculinities that do not shift the symbolic structures of gender (Elfving-Hwang, 2011), Jin-Man's masculinity does not put the male subject in a primary position and offers a new perspective for symbolically resolving the crisis of masculinity within the same period. *Mr. Housewife*'s message is meaningful because it potentially gives the male audience the idea that domestic labour matters (which is also in contrast to the contemporary cooking shows that fail to depict it as labour) and implies it is possible for men to have a meaningful existence outside the corporate sphere that can be the source of primary stress for most Korean men.

Home as Woman's Place to Rest

In *Mr. Housewife* we see that the social roles of the husband and wife in the family do not fit into the roles that the traditional dichotomy of homemaker-breadwinner defines (Yanagisako and Collier, 1987). The mother is the breadwinner, and the father is the homemaker. Most of the dialogues are stereotypical of homemaker and breadwinner, while the 'places' of the man and woman have been shifted. The dialogues involve themes related to the man's domestic chores and the women's job.

For example, in one of the scenes, Jin-Man asks his wife Soo-Hee when she will receive her bonus. In another scene, Soo-Hee is getting ready for work in the morning and asks Jin-Man where her clothes and accessories are. Jin-Man also frequently engages in nurturing acts. In one scene, Soo-Hee asks him if he can cook bean sprout soup for breakfast. He replies, *'Ok, if you two finish all your food today'* (addressing his wife and kid). When Soo-Hee is in front of the main door, leaving for work, he insists that she has breakfast and brings a spoon load of food to her mouth (**Figure 3**). Overall, the behaviour of this nurturing, domestic husband, and the wife who has masculine and authoritarian features do not fit into the image that society expects. So, they face many reactions from other character's comments outside. In one of the scenes, a woman who is watching the Housewife Quiz Show that Jin-Man is competing in asks: *'Is doing housework something for a man to brag about?'* Another woman answers: *'His wife must have asked him to earn money.'* It can be noticed that for her, a logical explanation is only possible by rationalising Jin-Man's behaviour in the public sphere (earning money by joining the quiz show). Her answer is reflective of the traditional mindset in Korean society, where the work-public sphere is the place where masculinity is exercised.

Kim (1998) argues that in Korean middle-class families, the home was culturally constructed as a 'place to rest' for men, from the public sphere of production. She argues that in the past, gender roles had been constructed in terms of traditional hierarchy; the man was viewed as 'heaven' or 'outside' and woman as 'earth' or 'inside'. However, in today's Korean society, with the influence of rapid industrial growth, the division of labour has been used to rationalise the gendered division between family and work. The idea that the husband should be recharged before going to work the next day and the wife should help him feel comfortable at home became acceptable. In this sense, the conception of the home also changed into a 'place to rest' as the western concept of 'home sweet home' was accepted by Korean society.

Figure 3. 'Jin-Man brings a spoon load of food to Soo-Hee's mouth', *Miseuteo Jubu Kwizeuwang* [*Mr. Housewife*]. 2005. Copyright © Polstar Entertainment

The hierarchical model of gender division is increasingly rejected in today's Korean society. Traditional ideas which saw the husband as superior are becoming less acceptable for most married women in the younger generation. Whereas men value women's economic and social activities outside the family, women are engaged in social activities and the number of working women is increasing. According to the data from Statistics Korea[1], the number of double earner households in South Korea reached 5.662 million as of October 2019 which accounted for almost half (46%) of the married couple households. In today's middle-class families, the husband is expected to help with the housework. However, the segregation of gender roles is still rigid when compared to the West, but it is important to note that this gender segregation is rationalised by the new conception of home 'as a place to rest' (Y. Kim, 1998). Women no longer see gender segregation based on the traditional mindset which is based on the 'inside/outside' distinction but based on the 'work/home' distinction.

In one of the scenes, Jin-Man is peeling apples for Soo-Hee while she is watching TV comfortably on the couch. Her mannerisms and the way she eats the apple give a masculine impression. She then asks Jin-Man: '*Where have you been all day, you know our housewife (Jin-Man) is neglecting his duties a lot lately.*' In *Mr. Housewife* we notice that the gender segregation based on the work/home distinction is shaped in contrast to social expectations. The roles of breadwinner and homemaker are switched to the opposite gender. It is also possible to notice that home is a place of rest for the woman rather than the man. The husband is waiting for the wife with the delicious meals he has cooked, and the wife is very tired after work.

Kim (1998) mentions the communitarian ideology according to which the wider collectivity outside the family is considered to transcend the family. The communitarian ideology is about the male identity (based on Confucianistic principles) and his membership and commitment to the wider community outside the family. Family matters are considered as a simple, private matter by the work environment and are expected to be secondarised. She also adds that women are excused to some extent if they need to prioritise their family responsibilities over work because work commitment is expected from the men as a part of the male identity. However, because of their commitment to family, women are discriminated against in the labour market. In the film, it is possible to see that the woman has to prioritise her work over her family in order to fit into the Korean communitarian work ideology. In order to do that, she has to entrust all the family matters to her husband. The working woman in the film has to spend the after-work hours in restaurants or bars. In one scene, she comes home very tired at night and finds her husband and daughter sleeping, contrary to traditional expectations. Moreover, the idea that 'home is a place to rest' is hardly reflective of the situation of women in real life. When the middle-class wives have a full-time job, they are expected to do the housework even if they are working because their work is idealised in terms of 'self-development' which became a status or attraction symbol for them to often do double shifts (Y. Kim, 1998). Korean society is slow to adapt to the woman's place as a breadwinner and is challenged by the man as a stay-at-home father. Even though men are expected to help with the housework and women are welcomed to work full time, both genders find it difficult to escape the place they are assigned to within the dichotomy. The career of a wife is considered to be for her 'personal interest' rather than for 'family interest'. The reason is that only the work the woman does inside the house is categorised as for 'family interest' and the commitment to family roles is still expected from the wife, even if she is working. Consequently, by successfully subverting the conception

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[1] Koreaherald. (2020). [Monitor] Half of married couples have double income. Available at: http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20200624000545.

of the home as 'a place to rest' which rationalises gender segregation in modern South Korea, Mr. Housewife provides a different perspective to the audiences.

Context-bound Female Masculinity/Emphasised Femininity

Prominent scholars (Brod, 1994; Messerschmidt, 2018) have argued that the study of masculinities should not be biased towards the relations among men but should focus more on the interrelations of men and women. *Mr. Housewife* allows us to investigate the male-female inter-relationship and how both characters construct their gender roles in relation to each other. While reading into the film, the audience could notice that it was impossible for Jin-Man to construct his domestic masculinity without Soo-Hee, nor would Soo-Hee be able to build her female masculinity without Jin-Man.

According to Butler's concept of gender performativity, masculinity is constructed through the repetition of bodily performances such as acting, dressing, and speaking (Butler, 1993; Moon, 2002: 83). However, the subjects who construct masculinities are mostly assumed to be male, since the mainstream category of masculinity has been traditionally defined in relation to males. Yet, female masculinity is also produced by women with sexual variance as well as heterosexual women (Halberstam, 1998: 268). Even so, it has not attracted as much attention as male femininity in social life or academic literature (Halberstam, 1998: 2).

Existing studies have demonstrated that women may themselves adopt characteristics that are considered 'superior' gendered qualities and preserve hegemonic masculinity (Irvine and Vermilya, 2010). In the film, Soo-Hee is portrayed as an ambitious woman. She carries the characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity such as competitiveness, assertiveness, confidence, and independence (Mann and Krane, 2017). Soo-Hee's masculinity is also supported by her mannerisms, facial expressions, and way of speaking. Earning money is known to contribute to the sense of masculinity in men (Gould, 1991). It is also used as a signifier of power and masculinity in the small and big screens as well as advertisements (Timke and O'Barr, 2017). In the film, we observe that Soo-Hee adopts the full responsibility of providing for the family which is one of the features of hegemonic masculinity in Korean society. Soo-Hee also organises the finances. In one scene where they are eating together, Soo-Hee ponders about what to do with their remaining money and asks Da-Na: *'What would you like for us to buy you?'* The personal identity of a man in a family is derived from his willingness and ability to manage and maintain the family unit (Bowman, 2016: 1433). In the film, the opposite can be observed since Soo-Hee feels responsible for opening the discussions about finances, future plans, and setting schedules.

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that Soo-Hee's female masculinity is more salient when she is at home. Talbot and Quayle (2010) discuss that different forms of gender relations may be constructed depending on the context, while women may construct either emphasised or liberated femininities. When Soo-Hee is introduced to the audience in the opening scene, she is hosting a cooking show. Her mannerisms, and her way of speech seem more feminine compared to when she is interacting with Jin-Man. When she communicates with the audience and her male co-workers, her behaviour corresponds to emphasised femininity that is "defined around compliance with the subordination and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men" (Connell, 1987: 183). Nam-Gyu, who is the producer of the new television program, constructs his masculinity through objectifying and devaluing Soo-Hee's femininity. The legitimisation of his masculine dominance becomes possible through Soo-Hee's adoption of emphasised femininity. While hegemonic masculinity is legitimised through her compliance within the working context, Soo-Hee seems to be burdened and struggles to exert her true character in the form of liberated femininity. In the scene where Nam-Gyu gives Soo-Hee a ride home, he stares at her and says: *'I really like your voice, it's warm'*, which makes Soo-Hee very uncomfortable. In another scene, Soo-Hee is giving Nam-Gyu ideas about their upcoming show over dinner, but he does not seem to listen carefully and opposes all of her ideas. Later when he makes Soo-Hee the host of the show, he begins to ask for a sexual relationship in return for this favour. Soo-Hee, in the working context, is devalued into an object of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1999). Shippers (2007) argues that maintaining hegemonic masculinity and exerting male dominance also depends on making sure that the traits related to hegemonic masculinity are not available to women. Moreover, different exercises of feminine characteristics other than emphasised femininity are stigmatised. In order to keep her job, Soo-Hee feels obliged to put up with the behaviour of Nam-Gyu and she tries to comply with what is expected of her. The Confucianist tradition of femininity attaches to women attributes such as submissiveness, caring, obedience, and dependence on men's protection (Lin and Tong, 2008: 121). The female characters depicted in the South Korean dramas also signal an emphasised femininity; the main male character is often attracted to the girlish charm of the female character lacking any social power, waiting to be saved by him (Elfving-Hwang, 2011).

In *Mr. Housewife*, the audience can observe the shifts between Soo-Hee's female masculinity and emphasised femininity that emerge in different contexts. Female masculinity is also portrayed as a resistance to the current gender segregation and sexual harassment in the work context. In one scene, Nam-Gyu enters the hotel room that Soo-Hee is staying in and sexually harasses her. Soo-Hee finally decides to punch him and makes his nose bleed. It is the only scene Soo-Hee's female masculinity is asserted in another context outside of her relationship with

Jin-Man. As a film produced in the mid-2000s, it reflects the notions behind the global feminist movements that took place in the millennial era. At the beginning of the 2000s, feminist movements sought to promote gender equality and ameliorate women's work and domestic conditions (Wrochna, 2018). A contemporary example of a similar resistance is the 'Escape the Corset' (Edraki, 2019) movement in which South Korean women cut their hair short, stopped wearing make-up, and spent their money on cars as a rebellion against the traditional standards of appearance set by conventional femininity and unequal gender relations. As Connell (1995: 261) argues, 'Gender inequality produces resistance.' Social inequalities of gender in the South Korean context led to the construction of female masculinities. Within such a context, occupying the position of masculinity can act as a resistance, a rebellion against the conventional weaker position of the female that is assigned by the patriarchal system. Despite these, because of the Confucian legacy, the traditional notions regarding gender roles are still prevalent in society (Wrochna, 2018). The film successfully reflects this Confucian legacy: although Soo-Hee subverts the traditional gender boundaries with her female masculinity, she still thinks conservatively in terms of the roles that a man is supposed to have in the family. Soo-Hee desires that her husband would find a job and maintain a masculine character in the traditional sense.

CONCLUSION

The article discussed whether the male masculinity depicted by Jin-Man was different from South Korean domestic masculinities reflected in the media, in terms of its relationship with the female gender and conforming to hegemonic masculinity. The critical discourse analysis of Jin-Man's exercise of masculinity was conducted in relation to the gender practices of his wife, Soo-Hee. Three themes of narrative were arrived at and discussed in detail; non-hegemonic nurturer masculinity, home as woman's place to rest, context-bound female masculinity/emphasised femininity.

The results of the analysis demonstrate that Jin-Man portrays a type of non-hegemonic nurturer masculinity. In contrast to other examples of domestic masculinities in popular media that have exercised different masculinities, but still adopt the components of hegemonic masculinity, Jin-Man portrays an example of a Korean father who does not fit the standards of hegemonic masculinity in all three aspects – ability to provide, separation from daily work of social reproduction and military masculinity. Jin-Man's masculinity is different not only from the soft *kkonminam* masculinities, but also other domestic masculinities reflected in the media, both in terms of his relationship with the female gender and divergence from hegemonic masculinity. The film provides a unique perspective for symbolically resolving the crisis of masculinity when compared with *kkonminam* masculinities that gained popularity in the same time period. Instead of reaffirming the normative standards of masculinity, Jin-Man's character gives the male audience the idea that men do not have to be the primary subjects in order to resolve the masculinity crisis. The film provides a space away from the actual world's demands of hegemonic masculinity that are stressful for the white-collar male workers and new graduates who are struggling to find a position in the job market.

The film also successfully subverts the conception of the home as 'a place to rest' which became a new way to rationalise gender segregation in modern South Korea by depicting home as a woman's place to rest. Although the idea that "home is 'a place to rest'" is not reflective of the situation of women in real life, *Mr. Housewife* provides a different perspective to the audience. Moreover, the film communicates the difficulties that women could experience due to the communitarian ideology.

Mr. Housewife is successful in depicting how male and female characters construct their gender roles in relation to each other in different contexts. While reading into the film, it could be observed that Soo-Hee's female masculinity is apparent mostly in the home-context and when she is interacting with Jin-Man. On the contrary, in the work context, Soo-Hee seems to conform to the ideals set by emphasised femininity. The female character cannot exercise her female masculinity in the working space due to her obligatory relationship with hegemonic and toxic masculinities. Although the film is empowering for the female audience, it also reminds them of the marginalisation of women in corporate life.

In a nutshell, this film can be seen as a part of the discourse that transforms the traditional gender roles. It demonstrates the inherent tension within a historically rigid but still changeable gender dichotomy, where it is difficult for both sexes to exist in a different place than what has traditionally been assigned to them. Mr. Housewife successfully presents how, despite the challenges, manhood and womanhood can be renegotiated through alternative ways.

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Boxed: Exploring Containment and Resilience in Times of Crisis

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ABSTRACT

This article draws upon materials created between May and July 2020 as part of an artistic collaboration between the two authors which took place during the first COVID-19 lockdown. The authors worked together remotely, drawing on their personal and professional experiences to explore the themes of identity, migration and belonging in times of crisis. One of the strongest themes to emerge from the collaboration was the importance of individual and collective resistance to the deeply gendered social and political categories that 'box us in', and serve constantly to remind us of our place and how we should – and shouldn't – behave and be. As mothers, grandmothers and wives. As migrants, artists and academics. And as women.

Keywords: gender, identity, categories, resilience, arts, migration

INTRODUCTION

This article draws upon materials created as part of an artist collaboration between the two authors entitled *The Artist and The Professor: The Mother and the Wife*, which took place between May and July 2020 during the first COVID-19 lockdown. Laura Nyahuye and Heaven Crawley are, respectively, an artist and a research professor who, at the time of the project, were working for organisations based in the city of Coventry, UK. Laura is a creative visionary. Her body of work is about stories, stories that challenge perceptions to do with migration, to do with women, stories that celebrate women. Summoning her craft as a storyteller, Laura's work echoes and weaves together stories, journeys and experiences lived creating a rich palette and a tapestry of textures and perspectives. Each piece is an artefact embodying the voices, the ancestry and the daily lived realities of migrant women and communities. Heaven is a white, female professor who has undertaken research with and for refugees and other migrants for more than thirty years, focusing in particular on the ways in which gender shapes the experience of migration, and the intersection of gender with race, class, age and other aspects of identity. Heaven is a mother, a grandmother, a pilot and a cook. She was born in the UK but lives in Italy.

Whilst we might appear to have little in common, the COVID-19 lockdowns that started in the UK and Italy in March 2020, provided us with an opportunity to draw together our personal and professional experiences in order to reflect on issues of identity, migration, resilience and hope in times of crisis. One of the strongest themes to emerge from this collaboration is our individual and collective resistance to the social and political categories that 'box us in', that serve constantly to remind us of our place and how we should – and shouldn't – behave and be.

As mothers.
As grandmothers.
As wives.
As migrants.
As people from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.
As people from different professional backgrounds.
As women.

At seemingly every turn, we are required to comply with the expectations of others. These different identities interact and intersect with one another in complex ways. What does it mean to negotiate identities such as being a Black woman? A white woman? A teenage mum? A female artist? A female professor? What expectations are

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[2] *Artist, Maokwo*, Coventry, UK
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placed upon us? Which of these identities do we take on and allow to shape who we are? Which do we push against, and resist?

Categories, and the expectations around them, also affect refugees and migrants, the people that we work with, through our artistic practices and research. For them, the expectations and assumptions of others – lawyers and judges, policy makers and politicians – about what it means to be a 'refugee' or a 'migrant' have real and often serious consequences. Fitting a box, an administrative or policy category can mean the difference between being allowed to stay or being required to leave. Between being with your family or separated from them indefinitely. Between having rights and opportunities or being made destitute or detained. Between being alive or dead. Like all categories, the legal and policy categories that shape the lives of those who move are deeply contested, reflecting who asks the questions, whose story is heard, who has a voice. And what colour or nationality we are. Whilst some people are able to move with relative ease, waved through immigration controls without questions or visas, the experiences of others are very different. From the Windrush scandal[1] to the Mediterranean 'migration crisis'[2], the ability to move is deeply racialised.

This article presents some of our exchanges and artistic outputs which reflect on the ways in which categories are often harnessed by others – and sometimes by ourselves – with the purpose of making us feel 'out of place' or 'displaced in place'. We invite readers to explore our website[3] in order to understand how the different themes and aspects of our exchange relate to one another – as indeed they do in life. For the purposes of this article, we have organised our artistic outputs around three themes, *Boxed*[4], *Cracked*[5] and *Resilience*[6], each of which includes a selection of poems and images, which capture our conversations and reflections. In the poems *Blackness* and *Whiteness,* for example, we reflect on the racialised layering of our identities as two women – one of whom is white, one of whom is black. In *Shoes I* and *Shoes II,* we explore the ways in which people have tried to label us from a very early age, shaping the people we have become. In *Cracked but not broken* and *Crushed but not defeated,* we acknowledge the pain that we have experienced but also our determination not to allow these life experiences to break us. The final three pieces – *Bend like the trees, No apologies* and *Magumbo* – capture our resilience and refusal to submit to other people's expectations of us or apologise for the people we are or want to be. We conclude the article by offering up some reflections on how these types of artistic collaborations, conducted entirely through digital technologies in the context of a global pandemic, have the potential not only to help us identify more clearly the commonality of our experiences despite our seeming differences, and for building new forms of solidarities across categories and borders.

OUR COLLABORATION

The COVID-19 lockdown of 2020 provided us with an opportunity to draw together our personal and professional experiences, and reflect on issues of migration, resilience and hope in times of crisis. Individually and through conversations with each another by email, WhatsApp and Zoom, we took the opportunity provided by the lockdown to explore our shared experiences as women, wives, (grand)mothers and survivors of hardship and domestic violence. In the process of these conversations, we produced a series of creative outputs (prose, drawings, body adornment, photography, video) which explore the ways in which our own and societal expectations of gendered and racialised roles and responsibilities have shaped our lives. By sharing our experiences – often in very frank and explicit ways – we highlight the ways in which, as women, we can come together to push against the categories that limit individual and collective possibilities for change.

The fact that this collaboration happened at all was, like so many things in life, a matter of chance. We met at the Rising Global Peace Forum[7] held at Coventry Cathedral in November 2019. Laura was attending the event as

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[1] The Windrush scandal began in 2018 and involved the wrongful detention and deportation of people who were born in the UK, to parents who arrived from the Caribbean. These people are often referred to as the 'Windrush generation' after the name of the ship that brought one of the first groups of West Indian immigrants to the UK in 1948.

[2] The Mediterranean 'migration crisis' refers to the arrival of more than million people who arrived on the shores of Europe in 2015, often fleeing conflict, violence and insecurity from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Eritrea. It refers as much to the political crisis across seen across Europe in 2015/16 in response to this migration as it does to the experiences of refugees and migrants themselves.

[3] All of the artistic outputs can be found on our project website, which also includes voice recordings of some of the prose included in this article. See https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/

[4] https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/boxed/

[5] https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/cracked/

[6] https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/resilience/

[7] See https://www.risingforum.org

a speaker and exhibitor with her beautiful collection of body adornments[8]. Heaven was attending to speak about her work as Director of the MIDEQ Hub[9], which explores the relationships between migration and inequality in the context of the Global South. Our conversation was fleeting but we subsequently exchanged emails and met again in February 2020. Although we had only been able to meet in person for a few hours before the COVID-19 lockdown began, we both felt certain that we would work together when the time was right.

Ironically, for all of its many, many challenges, it was COVID-19 itself that created that opportunity. The lockdown brought with it the opportunity to spend time in one place, to *Stop*[10]. It created time and space for both of us to breathe, to reflect on our respective challenges and achievements and to explore new ways of thinking about ourselves and our relationships with others. It took us on a unique, inspiring and though-provoking journey. Intense. Challenging at times. But full of excitement and laughter and the pure pleasure of connecting with another human being to share ideas, think and talk, write and make.

ON METHODS AND OUR WAYS OF WORKING

When an opportunity arose to apply for a small amount of university funding (£2k) to support collaboration between researchers and artists as part of *Coventry Creates*[11], we felt compelled to grab with both hands. *The Artist and the Professor, the Mother and the Wife* began in the middle of May 2020, mid-way through the COVID-19 lockdowns in the UK and Italy where each of us lives, and was completed by the end of July 2020.

When we first started working together we didn't actually have a concrete plan as to how the project would evolve.

We knew we wanted to work together.

We knew we had things to say.

But we didn't really know each other.

And we had never worked together before.

So we trusted our instincts and started to communicate.

At first, we wrote letters to each other by email. We talked about how we were finding the lockdown. About the things that were important to us. The things that make us think. Some of these initial exchanges are included as outputs from our collaboration because they provide the backdrop, the context, within which the creative pieces emerged. For example, in *Letter to Heaven*[12], Laura reflects on our conversations and the article written by Heaven about the ways in which categories are used to control refugees and other migrants and to limit their possibilities (Crawley and Skleparis, 2017). Through these initial exchanges we came to realise that there were significant commonalities in our experiences, our relationships (especially with the men in our lives) and in our feelings of being 'boxed in' by the expectations of others, of society – and of ourselves (**Figure 1**).

We then started to exchange prose and poems about how we saw ourselves and our place in the world. Once the similarities in our ways of thinking and writing about the world became clear – and it happened very quickly – the conversation became intense. Emails and images, WhatsApp messages and emoticons went back and forth, a flurry of exchanges and ideas. The interweaving of our personal and professional lives was reflected in our poetry. As our work progressed we felt increasingly comfortable with the process of co-production, trusting that one person would not deliberately choose to misrepresent the other's feeling or experiences. And that where there were differences of understanding this would simply lead to a deeper exploration of our experiences. A gentle inquisitive probing, not a push or a poke. We started to weave together our words and ideas, literally cutting and gluing sentences together[13] (**Figure 2**).

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[8] Our project website contains a large number of artistic outputs and reflections not included in this article. More at https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/

[9] More at www.mideq.org

[10] https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/2020/07/03/stop/

[11] *Coventry Creates* was a project established by Coventry and Warwick universities in the lead up to and during Coventry being the UK City of Culture in 2021. The University Partnership funded over 60 creative research projects, involving many diverse Coventry organisations and local communities and hosted many of the outputs, included some of those produced through our collaboration, on its project website. More at https://coventrycreates.co.uk

[12] https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/2020/07/20/letter-to-heaven/

[13] https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/2020/07/16/weaving-words/

Figure 1. Categorical fetishism. Italy, 2020. Photograph by Heaven Crawley. Used with permission
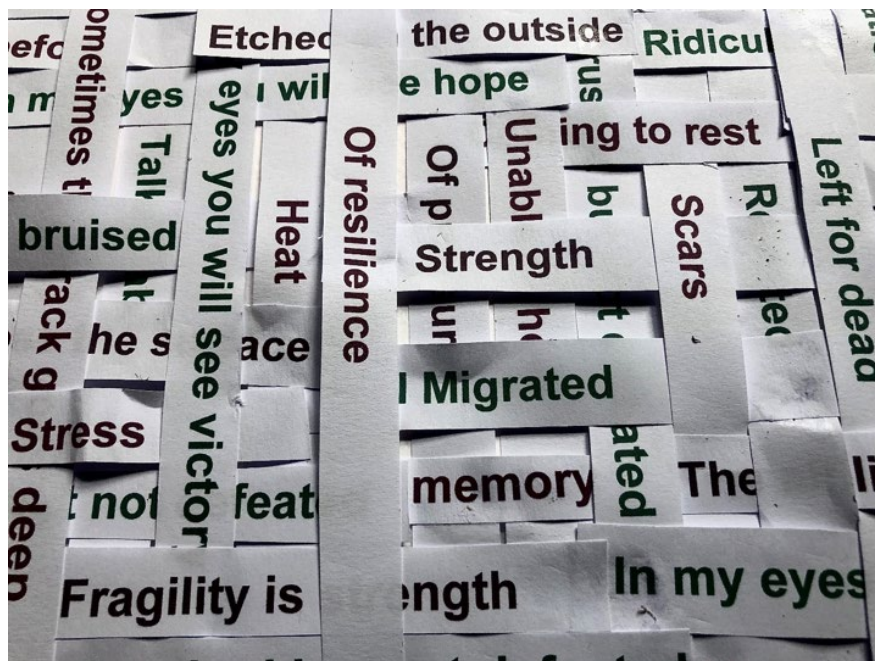
Figure 2. Weaving words. Italy, 2020. Photograph by Heaven Crawley. Used with permission

The energy in our conversations was always exiting and inspiring. Our weekly Zoom chats were loud and filled with laughter.

But there were tough times too.

Times when the pressure of the deadline or the ethics application or the need to 'produce' stifled our creativity and ability to communicate. To trust each other and what we wanted/needed from the collaboration rather than simply react or respond to another agenda or pressing need. Times when the challenges of personal relationships, of motherhood, of being 'Zoomed out' sapped our energy and made it difficult for us to focus on what were already difficult and complex personal issues.

But we never stopped communicating.

Never stopped trusting each other.

Never stopped believing that our ways of working would produce beautiful and thought-provoking outputs because of our individual and collective commitment to the work, the ideas behind them and each other.

By the end of the project, we felt able to co-produce work in a way that neither of us had imagined or planned for when we started the project. *Coming together*[14] was intended as a reflection on the nature of our collaboration and the ways in which our lives and ways of thinking had become intimately connected. One person provided the other with the last word of a sentence she had written and the other responded using the first word as the start of what she wanted to say. Neither of us had any idea of what had been written by the other until we read our words to one another. The synergies and connections between the lines reflect the synergies and connections that developed between us as the project evolved.

BOXED

Boxed In by Heaven Crawley[15]

You want to put me in a box
Tell me what I am
And what I am not

But I am me

I am strong
'Pushy'

I am kind
'Weak'

I am vulnerable
'Needy'

I am White
'Black'

I am passionate
'A kid on a gap year'

You see what you want to see
You see who you want me to be
But I am all of these things

At the same time
At different times

I am me
And my box is big enough
To hold me
Not contain me
To protect me
Not limit me

And if I need a bigger box
A different box
I will find one

You cannot box me in
I will not allow myself to be put in your box
I am me

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[14] https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/2020/07/17/coming-together/
[15] https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/2020/07/20/boxed-in/

Blackness by Laura Nyahuye[16]

Identity a crisis in modern day society
Identity a tug of war, tugging with self, tugging with the other
Identity the knowing of self

Allowing circumstance to define who we are can possibly be the worst catastrophe to happen is one's life. Whatever the circumstance is, be it good or bad circumstance. It must not define us!

Inside each and every one of us, there's a still small voice, that guides us, if we INTENTIONALLY ignore the everyday noise and INTENTIONALLY take time to listen within. I personally call it the voice of God guiding me. Listening to the voice within, is a gift guide us

We are living in a fast-paced world, with a mix bag of voices competing to be heard and it can be easy to succumb to a false identity

I often find myself tangled up in ready-made labels. 'She must look like this, she ought to dress like so.'

As a black woman before l open my mouth, assumptions are already in waiting. I constantly find myself tumbling across, befitting identity. Pigeon-holed to certain topics, mindsets. Pigeon-holed to a square.

Anyway, how do you fit a square into a circle

Red blood running through our veins… #tauratinzwe

#allhuman #lovewins (**Figure 3**)

Figure 3. Blackness being human. UK, 2020. Photograph by Laura Nyahuye. Used with permission

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Whiteness by Heaven Crawley[17]

The privilege of whiteness
Is never having to think about
The colour of my skin

Never having to walk down the street
With my sleeves pulled down over my hands
To stop the names
The stares
The spit
Of those that pass

The privilege of whiteness
Is never having to worry
That my son will be stopped
For no reason
Keep his mouth shut
But not too shut
Comply
Or potentially die

The privilege of whiteness
Is never having to wonder
Whether the job I wanted
Never came
Because of my name
My history
Because of who I am
The discomfort of others
The awkward glances
The 'race card'
The privilege of whiteness
Is the right to be offended
Upset
Angry
If that privilege is questioned
Or even mentioned

The right to be offended that the hurt and pain of others
The insults
The racism
The violence
Could be more important than the gravestone of a dog called 'Nigger'

The privilege of whiteness
Is knowing that I can walk through a border
More easily than a woman from the country next door
Wave my passport
Show my face
Smile
And it's enough
Because the privilege of whiteness will protect me
Keep me safe

The privilege of whiteness
Is the refusal to see it
Acknowledge it

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[17] https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/2020/07/16/whiteness/

Hear it
See it
Check it
To deny the reality of others
Even when that reality means
Blood
And sweat
And tears
To dismiss those who fight the injustices
As snowflakes
Fake news
Political correctness gone mad

The privilege of whiteness
Follows me
Wherever I go
A blanket of security
Self knowing
Self worth

The privilege of whiteness
Is never having to think about
The colour of my skin (**Figure 4**)

Figure 4. Whiteness. Italy, 2020. Photography by Heaven Crawley. Used with permission

Shoes I by Heaven Crawley[18]

I remember those shoes
Blue
Shiny
With a silver band

Hand down shoes for the poor kid
The pikey kid
The gypo kid

An act of kindness
Reminding me that I am different
Not the same

Dress up
Shape up

Be like us

But I cannot
Will not

Be like you

My difference is my weakness
And also my strength

I take the shoes
Play the game
Do what I need to do
To survive

But it's my difference
That makes me thrive
Makes me alive
Makes me

Me (**Figure 5**)

Figure 5. Shoes I. Italy, 2020. Photograph by Heaven Crawley. Used with permission

Shoes II **by Laura Nyahuye** [19]

> I remember the dress, pleated, floral
> I remember staring…
> Sandwiched between them,
> I remember the rumbling of their voices in fervent prayer
>
> 'Prayer of the righteous availeth much'
>
> I remember them standing there
> Sitting there
> Kneeling there
> Watching, watching, waiting

'Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength'

I remember the slamming of the door
The cracking wine glass
The snapping of the jaw
door banging
door cracking
door snapping

'Greater is He that is me that he who is in the world'

I remember the heat of the sun
the drumming of the heart
the trees, the warm soil,
feet denting the soil
as if to prove their existence

'He in me, me in Him'
 I remember my sweet tiny, black, buckled, leather shoes. So cute (**Figure 6**)

Figure 6. Shoes II. Italy, 2020. Photography by Laura Nyahuye. Used with permission

CRACKED

Cracked by Heaven Crawley[20]

We are all cracked, damaged in some way by the experiences of our past.

Our experiences of hurt, pain and fear shape who we are and our relationships with others. Some of these cracks run deep, fracturing our sense of self. Some are caused by experiences beyond our control…the unexpected death of a close friend, tragic events that leave us feeling helpless. Others lead us to question our (in)actions, our complicity and, ultimately, ourselves…abusive family relationships, the beating sustained at the hands of a partner, the unravelling of an idea, a dream. These deep cracks are accompanied by other seemingly more superficial ones…an unkind word from a friend, a complicated relationship, a stupid mistake. The cracks crisscross and reinforce each other in sometimes difficult and unexpected ways.

As women we know only too well that being honest and open about our experiences – the cracks – will often lead others to judge us. Gendered judgement comes hard and fast, often framed rhetorically to make us question ourselves:

'I was a teenage mother' = 'Were you stupid, after a free house or just a slut?'

'Sometimes he used to hit me' = 'Why did you let him do that to you? Why didn't you just leave him?'

So we cover cracks, hide the pain. And for good reason. If others see the cracks they might see them as weakness, exploit them, take advantage of our vulnerability. We present ourselves as strong, capable, invincible even at those times when inside we feel anything but.

As we get older we start to understand that the cracks do not mean that we are broken. They are an integral part of **who** we are and **how** we are. And if the people that we care about can't see the cracks, our vulnerabilities, then they can't see us or know us for who we are. And we, in turn, can't truly know ourselves.

The Japanese art of *kintsugi* is a repair method that honours the artifact's unique history by emphasising, not hiding, the break. Rather than rejoin ceramic pieces with a camouflaged adhesive, the *kintsugi* technique employs a special tree sap lacquer dusted with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. This method celebrates each artefact's unique history by emphasising its fractures and breaks instead of hiding or disguising them. In fact, *kintsugi* often makes the repaired piece even more beautiful than the original, revitalising it with a new look and giving it a second life.

The symbolism of *kintsugi* has been written about extensively (see, for example, Santini, 2018). For us, the art of *kintsugi* is a metaphor for resilience. What we imagine to be broken and beyond repair becomes something even more beautiful when the cracks are brought to the fore and made visible.

This has profound implications for how we chose to live our lives.

The important message behind *kintsugi* is that it can support the healing process. Your cracks are your strength not your weakness. They make you more beautiful, not less.

They make you who you are.

Cracked but not broken by Heaven Crawley[21]

Each crack tells a story
Of pressure
Heat
Stress
Unable to hold
Unable to bend

Sometimes the crack
Darts across the surface
Chasing the contours
Coming to rest
At an edge

A mark
A memory
Etched on the outside

Sometimes the crack goes deep
Scars
Impossible to hide

Each crack tells a story
Of resilience
Strength
The ability to withstand pressure
Heat
Stress

And emerge more beautiful
Than before

Fragility is strength
Resilience is beauty

Cracked
But not broken

Crushed but not defeated by Laura Nyahuye[22]

I Migrated
Migration is only a snapshot of my story
This is an on-going story
Daily it's being written
There's so much more
Crushed but not defeated

I've been crushed
I've been bruised
Talked about
Ridiculed
Rejected
Left for dead
Crushed but not defeated!

In my eyes you will see hope
In my eyes you will see resilience
In my eyes you will see victory
Crushed but not defeated!

RESILIENCE

No apologies by Laura Nyahuye [23]

No! I will not apologise
Does it offend you?

Don't clip my wings
Category this
Category that
Ethnicity
Blackness
Whiteness
Colourless

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[22] https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/2020/07/16/crushed-but-not-defeated/
[23] https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/2020/07/16/no-apologies/

Don't clip wings
I have no desire to fit in
No Apologies

Born to be free
Born to be me
Born to thrive not strive!
Don't clip my wings
Category A
Category B
Ability
Disability
Born to be free
Born to be me
No desire to fit in
I am Me
For this l will not apologise (**Figure 7** and **Figure 8**)

Figure 7. Urikuenedepi? UK, 2020. Photography by John Whitmore. Used with permission

Figure 8. Aluta continua! UK, 2020. Photography by John Whitmore. Used with permission

Bend like the trees by **Heaven Crawley**[24]

When the storm approaches
Bend like the trees

You are strong
Resilient
Flexible
And you will survive

You will be different
A little bent out of shape
But beautiful
In a different way

When the storm arrives
Lean into the loneliness
The unknown spaces
The fear

For if you resist
And try to fight it
You will crack
Splinter
And fall

Bend like the trees when the storm arrives
For there are other trees around you
And they will shelter you
Protect you
Keep you safe

The storm will pass
As it always does
The sun will shine
As it always does

And you will be left standing

Magumbo by **Laura Nyahuye**[25]

Totem: Magumbo
Character traits
Magumbo anopenga.
Haaite zvekutamba
A lioness
A fighter
Don't do it!
Who am I?

I am a child of God
A daughter
A mother
A sister
friend,
colleague,
artist

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[24] https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/2020/07/16/bend-like-the-trees/
[25] https://theartistandtheprof.art.blog/2020/07/16/magumbo/

Magumbo?
I am so MANY things

I roar
I meow
I howl
Sometimes my blood boils so hot I feel like WONDER Woman,
cum Super woman
cum Laura,
cum, Lioness

I roar
Laugh so hard, tears uncontrollably roll down my cheeks
I roar

hurt so hard
cried so hard
peanut brain spins with confusion
and awe,
whispers
how did you survive that?
Magumbo?

tummy, heart,
Lungs, kidneys, every organ,
spirit, intricate details of my being
Rumbles
It can only be God...

So...
you were saying…
The voice tone,
Picks you up by the arms
Arms above your head
And a warmth, some vibration brews up somewhere in your mwongo
Then your Lungs contract and expand
You find yourself there…

There…
where it all started

You mean the voice, the tone takes you
There?
Picks you up by the arms
Arms above your head
And a warmth, some vibration brews up somewhere in your mwongo
Then your Lungs contract and expand
You find yourself there

I see...
You are bitter... (**Figure 9**)

Figure 9. Magumbo. UK, 2020. Photography by John Whitmore. Used with permission

REFLECTIONS

There are very few opportunities in life for dialogic collaborations such as this one in which work and relationships are able to develop organically because we have time. So much is driven by a deadline, a target, a box within which we've already put ourselves – or been put by others. A box that shapes the questions we ask, the ways we ask the questions and what we produce. For us, there are many lessons to be learnt from this way of working. This is our first attempt to document it so that others might take from it what is useful for them in their own work and practice.

So, what have we learnt about ourselves? About each other? About the ways in which we communicate and share ideas around migration and identity in times of crisis?

One of the strong themes emerging from this collaboration was the ways in which categories serve to 'flatten out' and oversimplify our multiple identities.

Categories are important as a means of organising the social world in which we live and we will never be able to get rid of them. The problem is not categories *per se* but rather the fact that not all categories are equally recognised or valued. The differential value assigned by society to different categories is rooted in power and deep-seated inequalities. Categories are not natural, neutral or simply descriptive. They are highly value-laden and they have consequences, particularly for those for whom these categories determine access to social/legal protection and rights.

For us too, categories have consequences. They open up some opportunities whilst closing down others, sometimes simultaneously. The privileges of being white can intersect with poverty and hetero-patriarchy in ways that limit the opportunities of women everywhere. For Black women the inequalities of being female can intersect with race and poverty in even more complex ways. It is perhaps not surprising that the idea of intersectionality, coined and elaborated by the brilliant Kimberlé Crenshaw (2017) was ever present in our discussions.

Through our artistic engagements and practices we were able to engage with parts of our identities as women that have shaped our lives and careers but typically have often had to be buried deep in the interests of others – children, partners, family, work.

This collaboration did not intentionally set out to explore how creative approaches can facilitate work with refugees and other migrants. And neither are the authors refugees themselves. However, as migrants with a deep professional and personal experience of working with those who are forced to move, we were able to see parallels and synergies between the processes and structural injustices that seek to marginalise and exclude in terms of gender, race and/or other dimensions of difference. Our work together enabled us, individually and collectively, to reclaim spaces of representation and represent our worldviews in ways that resist dominant narratives. It also reminded us of the importance of understanding women's lives not just as refugees and migrants but also as mothers and wives 'at the borders of humanity' (O'Neill *et al.*, 2019).

Ultimately, the project has shown us that we do not need to be constrained by the particular boxes and categories within which we find ourselves – and are put in by others. Our resilience and refusal to be limited by these categories was a strong theme emerging through our prose. And so too was our determination to resist the ways in which our lives and identities as women were positioned and represented by others. For us, and we hope for others, these kinds of artistic collaborations can provide a catalyst for transformation, offering new ways of self-expression and, in turn, new ways of understandings of the experiences of those who move.

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Confined, Controlled, and Violated: The Rohingya Women in Bangladesh Refugee Camps

Ena Tripura [1]*

ABSTRACT

Encampment of the Rohingyas in the camps in Bangladesh has reinforced the continuum of male dominance and violence carried out on women's bodies. This article employs Judith Butler's concepts of precarious life and frames of recognition to analyse three layers of violence against Rohingya refugee women: the violence carried out by the humanitarian regime, by Rohingya men as spaces to express their anger and frustrations, and by local Bangladeshi men as sites to demonstrate their superiority over the Rohingya intruders into the national space. The article draws on secondary literature on Rohingya refugees' lived experiences in camps and semi-structured interviews conducted with humanitarian service providers.

Keywords: refugees, threat, encampment, gender-based violence, humanitarian service providers

INTRODUCTION

A majority of the Rohingya population have taken shelter in the neighbouring country Bangladesh since the 1970s, due to violent conflict in the Rakhine State of Myanmar (Sengupta, 2015: 15). In the initial years, tripartite talks among Bangladesh, Myanmar, and the United Nations (UN) succeeded in repatriating all of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognised Rohingya refugees (Idris, 2017: 9), except 32,000 Rohingyas who still live in two registered refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. However, the Rohingyas who entered Bangladesh secretly through porous borders at different times were not registered by the UNHCR as refugees and became integrated into the local community. By early 2017, their number was estimated to be 300,000 to 500,000 (Chaudhury and Samaddar, 2015: 2). After 25 August 2017, approximately 730,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh again because of mass atrocities carried out against them by the Burmese (Myanmar) Military (Goodman and Mahmood, 2019: 9).

About 76% of the newly arrived Rohingyas are women and girls (Hutchinson, 2018: 2), the majority of whom have experienced different forms of sexual and gender-based violence in Myanmar, and on their way to seeking asylum in Bangladesh (Chowdhury and Mostafa, 2020). According to Goodman and Mahmood, 150 humanitarian organisations of both non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the UN agencies are working alongside the government of Bangladesh to help the refugees with necessary humanitarian assistance in camps in Cox's Bazar (Goodman and Mahmood, 2019: 9). Despite this effort, the Rohingya refugees, especially Rohingya women, continue to experience deprivations of their basic human rights and entitlement, and suffer gender-based violence in different forms with multiple implications for their bodies and sense of self (Chowdhory and Mohanty, 2020: 2). Their experience of living in the camps in Bangladesh remains relatively unknown with little research conducted on the issue. This article tries to address the gap by analysing the ways newly-arrived Rohingya refugee women's bodies have been subjected to control and violence in Bangladesh by focusing on three areas of inquiry.

1. The humanitarian regime that confines Rohingya women in the camps and uses their bodies as sites of control by imposing certain expected behaviours through a range of policies and regulations.
2. Rohingya men's use of Rohingya women's bodies as spaces to take out their anger and frustration, and to reaffirm their cultural position as head of household.
3. Bangladeshi men's use of Rohingya women's bodies as sites for conquest and violence to intimidate the unwelcomed Rohingya refugee community.

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METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK

A major part of the article is based on the secondary literature review, discussing refugees' lives, refugee camps, and violence against refugee women in Bangladesh and other parts of the world. The article also includes other grey literature such as newspapers and official documents of different government and non-government organisations working for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. The secondary literature is supplemented with interview data from 13 humanitarian actor participants collected from February to April 2021. Interviews were conducted over phone and online with the male and female staff of NGOs and the UN agencies that provide humanitarian services to the Rohingya refugees in the new camps. In line with the Research Ethics approval granted for this research, all the participants have been de-identified and given a pseudonym. The interview data was translated from Bengali to English with great care to retain the richness and nuance of the original data in the process of data transcription and analysis.

To study Rohingya refugee women's experience of violence in Bangladesh, this article draws on Judith Butler's prominent work, *Frames of War* (Butler, 2009). Rohingya women's experience of violence in Bangladesh is shaped by how they are viewed or framed by others as threats, and perceived as lives not fully liveable, which can be appropriately analysed through Butler's concepts of 'precarious life' and 'frames of recognition'. According to Butler, all human beings are precarious in the sense that their bodies can be injured, violated, and destroyed willingly or accidentally. Precariousness is, therefore, a shared and interconnected aspect of human life, as human beings are dependent on other human beings or entities for survival. Dependency can expose a person to exploitation and cruelty, jeopardising one's possibility of persisting at all, and conversely to a protective environment with the 'possibility of being relieved of suffering, of knowing justice and even love' (Butler, 2009: 61). While precariousness is a universal condition of being human, under certain social and political conditions some lives become more precarious than others, which Butler identifies as precarity. This happens when some human beings are denied access to social and political support and are differentially exposed to harm in the forms of 'injury, violence and death' (Butler, 2009: 25).

According to Butler, this unequal distribution of precariousness is produced by power and selective means of framing which occurs through recognition, recognisability, and intelligible schemas (Butler cited in Taylor, 2018: 149). Recognition is the active identification of a human being as such and offering relevant treatment entitled to that human being within a social context. Recognisability precedes recognition and refers to a historically constituted normative structure that directs and enables recognition. To be recognisable, a subject or life at first must be part of the 'intelligible schemas', although not everything intelligible gets recognised in a frame. The recognisability that prepares some lives or subjects to be recognised, set a frame (what to recognise) to fit into a certain political purpose. By delimiting contents, framing thus produces some lives recognisable and liveable while making other lives difficult to be recognised (Butler, 2009: 2). The lives that are not recognised get exposed to harm differentially, and the loss of these lives is not fully grievable as they are already 'dead' socially and politically. They never lived and so were not lost fully in the true sense (Butler, 2009: 1). As Butler points out, framing not only excludes some lives from being seen as liveable, but also produces a condition, 'a certain field of perceptible reality' (Butler, 2009: 64) for precarity to be seen as normal. Without being critically challenged, precarity is thus perpetuated. Applying this argument, this article analyses the lives of Rohingya refugee women to reveal the layers of actual and symbolic violence in their lives.

HUMANITARIANISM, BODILY CONTROL AND VIOLENCE AGAINST ROHINGYA WOMEN

The Rohingyas are one of the ethnic minorities of Rakhine state, Myanmar. According to the UN, they are the most persecuted ethnic minority in the world (Costa, 2017). They could be described as one of the most ungrievable minority populations of Myanmar as they are not given any rights and entitlements considered necessary to flourish and persist as human beings. Due to violence and persecution in Myanmar, they have risked their lives by crossing the river, sea, and jungle to seek refuge in Bangladesh and other countries around the world (Zine, 2016: 8). Most recently, in August 2017, due to waves of persecution by the Burmese Military, about 730,000 Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh, bringing the total Rohingya population in the country to about 1 million (Johnston, 2020:1). The Bangladesh government sheltered them in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, a district of Bangladesh close to the Myanmar border (Goodman and Mahmood, 2019: 9).

Humanitarian organisations supported the government in building camps for the newly displaced Rohingyas to provide them physical protection and ensure the delivery of emergency humanitarian services. Since then, the Rohingya refugee crisis has become protracted, and humanitarian organisations have continued to work in the camps. Despite good intentions, the human rights of the Rohingyas continue to be violated within the camps as

the camps are overcrowded and lack basic amenities, and the Rohingyas cannot enjoy their 'fundamental rights to the freedom of movement that is essential to the enjoyment of all other rights' (Verdirame and Harrell-Bond, 2005: 271). The camp authorities allow only small numbers of refugees to leave the camps on day passes for emergency issues like medical treatment. Anyone found outside the camps without permission faces harsh treatment, including physical beating by the police (Parnini, 2013: 288).

Their freedom of movement is not seen as a right afforded to any other human beings but as an exception (Odoloma Opi, 2021: 98) because, in Bangladesh, they are not seen as fully liveable lives but as economic burdens and security threats. For example, in Dhaka Global Dialogue -2019, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, referred to the Rohingyas as security threats not only for Bangladesh but for the region (Sheikh, 2019). According to Butler, human beings, particularly if they are vulnerable, feel threatened by other human beings who do not fit into the normative frame of their cultural recognition of human beings (Butler, 2009: 2). In Bangladesh, the Rohingyas are seen and treated as threats and intruders as they do not fit into the frame of Bangladeshi nationality (Guhathakurta, 2017: 650). The government of Bangladesh fears that because of their deplorable living condition, the Rohingyas are more likely to be easy targets of criminal groups and Islamic fundamentalists. Associated with such criminal groups, the Rohingyas are feared to become security threats in the country by being involved in 'terrorism, illegal drug and human trafficking, illegal logging, environmental degradation, maritime privacy, deadly violence and crimes' (Parnini, 2013: 294). According to Mr. Asaduzzaman Khan, the Home Minister of Bangladesh, desperation can make the Rohingyas easy targets for recruitment by terrorist groups. While he admitted that Bangladesh does not have any evidence of Rohingyas joining the terrorist groups, the country's security agencies still assume the Rohingyas to be a potential security threat due to their precarious situation (Khan cited in Bennet, 2017). Bangladesh's government also fears that Rohingyas may import drugs from Myanmar, a country known as a Narco-State in Southeast Asia (Mallick, 2020: 207). Of course, the criminalisation of asylum seekers and refugees has a long discursive history and is an enduring trope.

The media plays a key role in constructing and sustaining an image of Rohingyas as potential criminals in Bangladesh. For example, in October 2017, a Bangladeshi news agency *Dhaka Tribune* published a report entitled, 'Law and order situation dips in Ukhiya and Teknaf,' the two sub-districts of Cox's Bazar where the camps are located. It reported that just 3 months after the Rohingya exodus to Bangladesh, 7 dead bodies were found near the camps (Yasmin and Akther, 2020: 108). Likewise, another widely read newspaper, *The Daily Star*, published a news article with the title, 'Rohingyas threat to economy, security: ICCB' (*The Daily Star*, 2018). It ran another story on 17 May 2019 with the title, 'Refugee camps: Crime spikes while Rohingyas despair' (Molla, 2019). According to a study conducted by Rahman and Kamal, from 2017 to 2019, *Bangladesh Pratidin*, a Bengali newspaper, published 72 reports on Rohingya women, and 57% of the reports represented them as criminals (Rahman and Kamal, 2020). While the crimes reported could be real, similar crimes are also carried out in other parts of Bangladesh by Bangladeshi people. However, by focusing more on crimes involving Rohingyas, the media generates a perceptible reality about the refugees as associated with crimes and, therefore, as security threats (Butler, 2009: 10).

When the refugees, who themselves fled violence, are seen as threats, then for the sake of protection and securitisation, the camps are locked down even more strictly, and the behaviours and mobility of the inhabitants are monitored (Hyndman and Giles, 2016: 30). With Rohingyas represented as threats, the government of Bangladesh, in cooperation with global humanitarian organisations, monitors and controls their mobility and actions to bring the threats under control. The Rohingyas are, therefore, not only physically confined within the camps, but also continuously watched and controlled by the authorities. The Bangladeshi government restricted any kind of development planning and activity that would allow the Rohingyas to achieve any form of self-reliance. The government also ordered telecommunication service providers to shut down the mobile network in the camps so that the refugees cannot be organised and are increasingly isolated from the outside world (Hussain and Lee, 2021: 193).

Without mobility, communication, and livelihood opportunity, the Rohingyas are forced to become completely dependent on humanitarian aid. The humanitarian service providers claim that they are working in the best interest of the refugees, but arguably the mechanism they use to administer their services makes refugees more vulnerable to control. Humanitarian organisations, such as the UNHCR and their partner organisations, have introduced biometrics registration of the Rohingyas, collecting their identity details, including fingerprint and iris recognition, for the purpose of effective and personalised aid delivery to the Rohingyas, most specifically to Rohingya women. However, this biometric data is used by the government of Bangladesh as a surveillance tool and a biopolitical instrument to keep the Rohingyas segregated from the local community and to bar them from having access to any opportunity available for Bangladeshi citizens (Poyil and Chowdhory, 2020: 17). In addition, using their power over resource allocation and administration, the humanitarian actors regulate and control the bodily activities of the refugees to a great extent (Hoffman, 2011: 29). For example, to ensure better logistical support, the humanitarian actors regulate when and where refugees can fetch water for households. Humanitarian actors installed toilets and bathing facilities in the places they thought suitable as they cannot ensure these facilities in

every household due to limited resources. Consequently, the Rohingyas cannot have baths or use toilet facilities whenever they want to or need to as these facilities are either located in places far away from their tents or are insufficient in number in comparison to the camp population (Karin *et al.*, 2020: 8). As Schmidt writes, the Rohingya refugees are organised by 'daily routines that are introduced by an institution, i.e., waiting in line for food (…) and (…) medicine' (Schmidt, 2003: 6). Caroline Moorehead thus describes the poverty of camp residents as 'about more than not just having things; it is about having no way to get them, and no means of altering or controlling one's own life (…)' (Moorehead, 2007: 156). Once a person is inside a camp, the person seems bound to lose their individual agency and control, as the camp is the place where humanitarian actors decide what the refugees will get and what the refugees can or cannot do.

Encampment thus makes the lives of Rohingyas more vulnerable in general and the lives of Rohingya women in particular. This is because they need to adjust their gender roles and routines to the new rules imposed upon them. For example, no matter how busy women are with other tasks, they must fetch water around 11 am. This is the time when water is released from the reserved tanks in some camps, and traditionally fetching water falls under the responsibility of women (Karin *et al.*, 2020: 9). Furthermore, there are women who never left their house without being accompanied by their male family members but are now systematically compelled to deal with camp administrators to collect rations. To collect rations, they need to stand in a queue and present their biometric ration card to the humanitarian actors to demonstrate their entitlement (Haddinott *et al.*, 2020: 4). For some women, the new system can be empowering in the sense that it provides them access to targeted aid delivery and an avenue to interact with public space - the humanitarian system (Poyil and Chowdhory, 2020: 23). For the majority of the women, however, it can be an overwhelming experience as they are not accustomed to performing work outside of the home. Confirming Akhter and Kusakabe's study, an interviewee (Purnima, April 8, 2021) stressed that working and dealing with issues outside of the house was not part of Rohingya women's gendered embodiment. Their male members were always there to deal with the outside world (Akhter and Kusakabe, 2014: 234).

New systems imposed upon the refugees by the camp authorities also expose women to the risk of violence. Because of social mobility restrictions and other household duties, many women cannot stand in the queue for relief items and other necessary services. They need to depend on others to access the services and relief items - who may ask for a sexual favour in return (Karin *et al.*, 2020: 15). In order to survive, many women often deliberately produce and reproduce their gender identities as helpless victims to get an advantage. However, this strategy of victimhood diminishes women's agency (Tyszler, 2019). As Freedman points out, such re-appropriation of victimhood led to Rohingya women's exclusion from leadership and the decision-making process about their lives and made them vulnerable to violence (Freedman, 2010: 601).

According to a UN report, violence and insecurity increase at night. In the camps, humanitarian actors work from 9 am to 5 pm. After 5 pm, the camps are governed by the Majis, with few security forces deployed in some hotspots (United Nations, 2018). The Majis are influential Rohingya community leaders appointed by the humanitarian organisations and the 'Camp-In-Charges' (government officials) to represent the refugees in camp management and implement their customary rules where applicable. All the Majis are men except one in Shalbagan camp. While a few of the Majis are appreciated by the refugees as being supportive, the majority set rules in favour of themselves and other influential men (Parveen Kumar *et al.*, 2019: 43). At night, young Rohingya women are often forcefully taken away from their tents to provide sexual services for influential people. The Majis usually do not take any action (United Nations, 2018).

These incidents lead the young unmarried women to live in constant fear, and many spend whole days inside their tents to avoid attention from potential sexual predators. The tents are usually extremely hot and humid during summer which can be painful and distressing physically and mentally. Razia Sultana, a Bangladeshi Rohingya woman (Born in Myanmar in a Rohingya family, and raised in Bangladesh) and an advocate for Rohingya women's rights, thus compares the lives of Rohingya women in Bangladesh refugee camps with prison lives. In an interview with the magazine *Time USA*, she said

> It is a jail. The women cannot move around, they cannot get much access to health care, or to education. It is not a life. They cannot even go outside of their tents, which are not even real tents, they are temporary shelters. Rohingya society is very conservative, so when there is no fence, no privacy, the women just stay inside, cooking and dreaming of their previous life (…). They have nothing to do in the camps. One day is like one year. Inside the camps, they have no future and are living like animals (Razia Sultana cited in Barron, 2019).

Sultana also compares the lives of young refugee women with animals' lives because the women are denied humanity. They do not have any say in the camps. A research conducted by a team of Bangladeshi researchers found that 42% of 3000 Rohingya women interviewed spend 21-24 hours a day inside their tents (Yousuf *et al.*, 2020: 164). Agamben argues that an animal and a human both have life, but what makes them different is the human being's 'capacity to speak and engage in political praxis' (Agamben cited in Owens, 2009: 750). Unable to

show these capacities, human beings in camps are, therefore, reduced to bare lives no different from animals, which Judith Butler refers as unrecognisable lives - not grieved and not protected (Butler, 2009).

REASSERTION OF MASCULINITY AND VIOLENCE AGAINST ROHINGYA WOMEN

Encampment and the way humanitarian aid is administered also have huge effects on men's sense of self. Being physically confined within camps means they cannot fulfil their traditional gender roles as decision-makers and income earners, which they strongly believe to be their assigned duties as men. As Krause posits, through their 'aid projects, humanitarian agencies take over these positions of provisional and hegemonic institution' (Krause, 2020: 201). In this humanitarian system, Rohingya men feel frustrated and emasculated. Since gender is relational, the destabilisation of men's lives affects women's lives. When masculine domination is asserted to cope with the vulnerabilities imposed by humanitarianism (Turner, 2019: 17), women find themselves forced into more traditional roles (Horn and Parekh, 2018). Rohingya men, frustrated with being confined and unable to earn income, are in fear of losing their status as heads of the households. One response to this precarity is to show or uphold their masculinity as decision-makers and heads of the household 'through irresponsible sexual behaviour, domestic violence and other forms' (Women's Commission cited in Akhter and Kusakabe, 2014: 228).

According to the humanitarian actors interviewed for this study, gender-based violence in the forms of domestic violence, forced marriage, and early marriage are widespread in the camps. Domestic violence is directed mostly by husbands to wives and is linked with polygamy. After marrying a new wife, the men abandon their previous wife/wives and children. The men collect family rations, sell them, and spend the money on themselves or the new wife, which creates conflict and violence in the family. There are many influencing factors for polygamy. According to Bangladeshi researchers Alam and Sobhan, polygamy is used as a weapon by Rohingya men against Rohingya women (wives) to teach them a lesson for disobeying their husbands (Alam and Sobhan cited in Khan, 2019). Contrary to this, Simul, an interviewee who has been working in the camps for 3 years, states that frustration and idleness among Rohingya men lead to polygamy. She said:

> The Rohingyas sit idle in camps without any purpose in life. It causes frustration and anger in them, especially for men, as women can still be busy doing household work and looking after children. The men try to express their masculine dominance by engaging in domestic violence and by preying on women and girls growing up in the camps. They try to develop relationships with them or their parents to pursue them for marriage (Simul, February 25, 2021).

Simul acknowledges the camp situation as responsible for polygamy but also blames the Rohingya men for the violence. To address such violence in camps, the humanitarian organisation she works with implements several gender-sensitive programs. Similarly, Research Initiatives in Bangladesh implemented a participatory action research education program called *Kajoli* in the 2010s, actively engaging Rohingya women as teachers and decision-makers for the program to give them a sense of ownership and agency (Guhathakurta, 2017: 657). However, these kinds of efforts are inadequate compared to the protection needs of women and to ensure their full empowerment. Simultaneously, the humanitarian organisations, in cooperation with the 'Camp-In-Charges', continue to promote and strengthen male leadership by appointing them as Majis.

Irrespective of its cause, polygamy helps men gain increased access and control over women's bodies. To prevent their husband from marrying another wife, women are under pressure of pleasing their husbands in every possible way. Having more children increases men's social status among the Rohingya community as children are considered the 'Gift of Allah' (Ainul *et al.*, 2018: 1). To help men increase their social status, women endanger their reproductive health. Although bearing children does not automatically endanger women's health, the overcrowded camps with limited health care and other necessary supports can make women more precarious (Chowdhury and Mostafa, 2020: 157). According to a study report published by Save the Children, an international NGO, in May 2020, the Rohingya refugee camps contained 76,000 children aged under 3 years born in Bangladesh (Save the Children, 2020). This indicates a high birth rate among Rohingya refugees.

Jony, an interviewee, who has been working with an UN agency in Cox's Bazar for both the refugees and the host communities, confirmed the high birth rate among the Rohingyas. He stated:

> If you ever visit the camps, you will see women almost 50 years of age with a breastfeeding child and pregnant with another child, although they already have many other children. It is a kind of gender-based violence against women (Jony, February 26, 2021).

He identifies the high birth rate as a form of gender-based violence because he assumes many women do not want to have children at such an age but have no say over their reproductive health, sexual rights, and means to control fertility. Adnan, another interviewee, offers another perspective, suggesting that despite going through so much

physical and mental difficulties women do not refuse to have children. Women think it is their duty to fulfil men's needs and act in the way family and society expect them to. This is, he suggests, not only in the case of Rohingyas but also for marginalised Bangladeshi communities from remote villages (Adnan, March 23, 2021).

According to Butler (1990), gender is a frame of recognition that visualises human beings through the male-female dichotomy. Within this frame, human beings recognised as women are constituted and understood as inferiors and subordinated to men. Such ostensible framing of women as inferiors makes it more difficult for women to be viewed and to view themselves as fully liveable lives. As they are not recognised as fully liveable lives, they accept everything attributed to them by society as their roles and duties (Taylor, 2018). In the camp environment, without social and legal support, women become more submissive and vulnerable to such violence.

In hetero-patriarchal societies, especially in developing countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar, women's value as human beings depends on sexual service, producing children, and upholding traditional cultures and norms formulated by men (Ganguly-Scrase, 2012: 79). To continue to exist as a community with a distinct cultural identity, women are protected. Men have social entitlements and responsibilities to control women's behaviours in the name of protection (Sengupta, 2020: 117). Such efforts of disciplining and protecting women are highly prevalent in the Rohingya community. For example, the Rohingya women are not allowed to talk to outsiders without permission from their husbands or without being accompanied by a male family member. Any woman who tries to break this norm is treated with harsh punishment, often with physical abuse (Sengupta, 2020: 117). However, according to Olivius, the deliberate controlling of women by Rohingya men increases in the camps as men resist humanitarian actors' efforts to engage women in their gender project activities while they themselves are ignored. Consequently, as an anti-feminist stand, men restrict their women from meeting and working with humanitarian actors (Olivius, 2016: 57).

Rohingya women are not only controlled by their male family members but also by the community leaders (religious leaders), who consider that women talking to strangers and leaving their house are against their religion. For example, an official from a humanitarian organisation called Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) stated that about 150 of their Rohingya women teachers in the camps stopped going to work fearing violent threats from men of the Rohingya community (Karim, 2019). Likewise, some Rohingya women health care workers had to abandon their jobs upon receiving threats from Rohingya militants (Parveen Kumar *et al.*, 2019: 43). Working in the health sector and education provision is intended to have a positive influence on society. However, the men fear that by working outside the home, the women will disobey them, and fail their culture and social responsibilities. As one interview participant stated, some of the Rohingya men think that women will become shameless and tempted by humanitarian actors, which can make their families vulnerable to breaking (Nasir, March 27, 2021). Consequently, women are pushed back into the home and to their traditional gender roles.

The violence and control of Rohingya women within their families and community affect their potential necessary to flourish as human beings. But within the frames of recognition, Rohingya women stand at the very bottom of the priority list. Hence, violence against them is accepted in the Rohingya community and goes unchallenged or insufficiently challenged by the government of Bangladesh and other humanitarian actors, although they have a moral and legal obligation to foster every life within their care equally.

ROHINGYA WOMEN'S BODIES AS SPACES FOR THE EXERCISE OF POWER BY BANGLADESHI MEN

Rohingya women are also violated by members of the Bangladesh host community. As time goes by, the number of refugee increases and the possibility of their returning to Myanmar remains uncertain in the foreseeable future; the majority of the Bangladeshi people's attitudes and thinking have shifted from initially welcoming nature to rejecting the Rohingyas (Yasmin and Akther, 2020: 108). Popular local opinion asks their government to repatriate the Rohingyas soon and to stop providing rations so that the Rohingyas feel discouraged to continue living in Bangladesh. They fear that giving Rohingyas a good life in Bangladesh will act as a pull factor and invite them to stay (Guhathakurta, 2019: 30). This view is articulated by Mr. Shahriar Alam, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, who stated in an interview with the *TIME News Magazine*: 'if we are offering them a better life than what they're used to, they will not go back' (Alam cited in Solomon, 2019). Such a statement not only denies the Rohingyas from being 'treated as fully endowed rights-bearing subjects' (Hyndman and Giles, 2016: 13) but also shifts Bangladeshi people's thinking on whether the Rohingyas deserve public sympathy, support, and shelter in Bangladesh (Esther and Hajo G, 2017). The tension between the Rohingyas and the host community people has increased after a Bangladeshi man (Omar Faruk) was killed by some Rohingyas near a camp at night on 22 August 2019 over a dispute. Following Faruk's murder, 6 accused Rohingyas were killed by the state security forces in a so-called 'crossfire' (Brad, 2019). However, Bangladeshi people felt more outraged about Faruk's death than the killing of refugees because, as Butler points out, our feeling is to some extent 'conditioned by how we interpret the

world around us' (Butler, 2009: 41). Since Faruk is Bangladeshi, he is a culturally and nationally recognisable human, hence people felt outraged and aggrieved by his death, while seemingly accepting the violent death of Rohingyas as justified and deserved.

A significant minority in Bangladesh, especially in Cox's Bazar, live below the poverty line and depend on natural resources and day labour wages. They are in fear of losing their means of livelihood to Rohingyas as the latter offer cheap labour and live in the camps built on lands that once belonged to Bangladeshis (Yasmin and Akther, 2020: 109). There is also a sense of deprivation of opportunities and unequal treatment by the UN and the NGOs among this marginalised host community. They believe that the Rohingyas are getting more attention from humanitarian organisations. They fear that by providing shelter to the Rohingyas, they are losing their natural resources (Chowdhury and Mostafa, 2020: 164) and potential development projects. According to Md. Shahadat Hossain, the Acting Director-General of Bangladesh NGO Affairs Bureau, after 2017, NGOs have shifted major parts of their development budgets and programs to the refugee camps. In an interview with *The Daily Star,* he said that most of the foreign donors and their personnel who worked in Bangladesh on education, river erosion, and skill development had shifted to the Rohingya refugee camps from 2017 onward (Hossain cited in Islam, 2019). Despite this shift in development funding, the assistance provided to refugees is still insufficient. And public grievance is generated 'from perceived inequalities of treatments in resource-constrained settings where refugees receive free shelter, firewood, food, and health care, while the host do not' (Jerin and Mozumder, 2019: 172).

Hostility between the Rohingyas and the host community has had different impacts on women. Rohingya women have become more vulnerable to violence with different manifestations, including rape, abduction, and forceful captivity, which are used as weapons to terrorise the Rohingyas. As Mitra argues, violence against women by a group in conflict is not only intended to subordinate women but also to humiliate and intimidate the opponent (Mitra, 2018: 186). In camps located in the remote hilly-forested area, women must go to collect water from streams at the edge of the camp boundary, which puts them in proximity to violence from host community members. In one study, a Rohingya woman is quoted saying:

> Whenever we go near the Bengali village (to collect water), they call us bad names. However, if we are lucky, then things stop there. In some cases, they attack us and rape us. Sometimes, they keep us in their homes or villages for 2 to 3 days and we have to suffer from sexual assaults throughout the whole time (A Rohingya woman cited in Krehm and Shahan, 2019: 25).

Many women do not know where to complain against such violence, and even if they complain, justice will be denied as they do not have the legal right to be protected. As Uddin argues, the Rohingyas are born into human society but treated as subhumans everywhere because they do not have space in the legal framework of any state, neither in Myanmar nor in Bangladesh (Uddin, 2020). In Bangladesh, the newly arrived Rohingyas are not officially recognised as refugees but as 'Forcefully Displaced Myanmar Nationals' and are not given any associated rights as refugees, which are vital to protect them from injustice, discrimination, violence, and exploitation (Uddin, 2019: 10). Hence, they might instead be arrested and harassed for leaving the camp and for breaking the rule of the encampment. Moreover, the women will lose dignity within the refugee community and their families will be dishonoured as their family and society's honour is linked to the virtue of their women folks (Sengupta, 2020: 117).

According to an Inter-agency research conducted in 2020, Rohingya women have been forcefully taken out of the camps by the host community members and sexually assaulted (Ahsan, 2020: 51). After being raped, the women are subsequently sold into the commercial sex industry, and in households as domestic maids (Chowdhury and Mostafa, 2020: 161). In very rare cases, Bengali men marry these domestic maids to get household work done for free and to have their sexual desires met, as sex outside of marriage is against their religion. The displacement of Rohingyas has created opportunities for many Bengali men, especially older men who cannot find a suitable wife in the Bengali community, to marry young Rohingya women. They hang around in the camps looking for Rohingya women of their desire. They can marry whoever they want, as the women do not have much choice or say in whether and whom they wish to marry. Similar to women in other hetero-patriarchal societies, Rohingya women are suppressed by social norms that do not allow them to construct themselves as capable of making decisions about their lives or sexual choices, including in marriage which worsens in a refugee situation (Ussher *et al.*, 2017: 1902). If any Bangladeshi wants to marry a Rohingya man/woman, Rohingya parents accept the proposal without any delay with the hope of having a better life for their daughter/son, which can also potentially lead to permanent residency for the family eventually. The number of Bengali women marrying Rohingya men is very insignificant, but Rohingya women marrying Bengali men is very common (Uddin, 2021: 2048). This reflects the unequal power dynamics between the communities - the local community is in the position of power, hence can access the women, the property, of the powerless Rohingya community.

Butler argues that human beings are bound up or exposed to other physical entities/beings, which can offer protection, love, justice or exploitation, and cruelty (Butler, 2009: 61). Likewise, being exposed to the Bangladeshi men through marriage, some Rohingya women may find true love, while others are abandoned or brutally tortured

by their Bengali husbands. They are left helpless, without any rights or support from anyone. The precariousness of their lives has been maximised by unsupportive state policies. In 2016, the Bangladesh government banned marriage between Bangladeshi and Rohingya. Anybody found guilty of such a marriage is punished under the law (Uddin, 2021). This leaves Rohingya women who marry Bengali men secretly with no recourse or opportunity to seek justice against violent Bengali husbands.

The Rohingya people come from the Rakhine province in Myanmar, that 'has the highest concentration of HIV/AIDS-affected people' (Yasmin and Akther, 2020: 111). So, Bangladeshi people often see them as potential bearers of HIV/AIDS, although baseline information on their health status is unavailable. As potential bearers of deadly diseases (modern AIDS/HIV medication is not available), the Rohingya women are seen as undesirable to live in the host community, and such perceptions make local people feel reluctant to offer necessary social support to these Rohingya women. As Butler argues, people's response to the sufferings of other people depends largely on the power of representation that generates perceptible reality, different from actual ontological quality, and delimits certain lives as unworthy of protection and existence (Butler, 2009). Hence, as lives unworthy of protection, Rohingya women are left to violence and even death.

The prevalent public discourse about Rohingya women in Bangladesh is as women of bad moral character. They are seen and framed as potential enchanters who try to trap the Bangladeshi men into marriage to obtain Bangladeshi citizenship for themselves and their families. Hence, they are blamed for drawing sexual attention. Sexual violence against them by the host community is often made invisible, as sex between Rohingya women and Bengali men is seen as wanted or consented to by the women; hence it does not come under the framing of violence. To solve this problem, women must take responsibility first, most of the time by limiting their mobility and covering themselves up not to be seen as inviting or available. The women who do not adhere to such norms are cruelly blamed for their own abuse both by the Bangladeshi people and by their fellow refugees. They are often seen as deserving of such punishment for not following social norms (Taylor, 2018: 157). Such public discourse mitigates the perpetrator's action and helps the perpetrators get away without being punished for their behaviours.

CONCLUSION

Feminist research on violence against women's bodies during the war has brought attention to redress the injustice of the violence carried out against women. However, despite several decades of such activism and campaigning, women's bodies continue to be sites of control and conflict for people in the position of power. Violence against women's bodies continues to be one of the major pressing concerns at present for women across the globe, which constantly restricts women's agencies and understanding of self, affecting every minutia of their lives (Thistlethwaite, 2015).

Such violence against women increases in situations like the vulnerable refugee community of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh, who are framed as threats, worthless, and ungrieveable. Along with some real challenges, such as resource scarcity in Bangladesh, social media and public discourse play significant roles in portraying the Rohingyas as threats to Bangladeshis. The camps are established to protect the refugees physically and to provide better humanitarian services. But because of perceived threats, the Rohingyas are strictly confined within the camps, which enforces and reinforces women's vulnerable femininity, bodily control, and subjection to violence carried out by different actors. Inside the camps, the Rohingyas are physically confined, but the administration process within the camps enacted further control over women's bodies. Rohingya women have been pushed more towards the margin of power structures and rendered vulnerable to systematic violence and exploitation by the humanitarian actors, community leaders, and male family members combined.

Being confined within the camp does not spare them from the violence carried out by host community men of Bangladesh. As the conflict and tension between the communities increase over natural resources, job market access, illegal business, and politics, local Bangladeshi men forcefully kidnap and rape Rohingya women from inside and outside the camps. Using their position of power, Bangladeshi men also marry young Rohingya women of their desire, although marriage between these unions is illegal in Bangladesh. Being illegally married, Rohingya women are unable to seek justice from the formal legal system, and neither do they have recourse to seek social redress. Public rhetoric about them as of bad moral character serves to socially criminalise their marriage and other relationship with Bangladeshi men and justify their punishment in the forms of rape and other violence.

Since the Rohingya women are not considered worthy human beings, their embodied experience of violence remains insufficiently challenged by the government of Bangladesh and other humanitarian actors. They claim their policies and programming to be pro-women's rights, which absolves them from taking responsibility for the violence carried out against Rohingya women within the camps. And the number of women who experience insecurity and violence over their bodies is so significant that it cannot be overlooked as a by-product of refugee settlement but rather must be acknowledged as systematic exploitation of women's bodies by the people in a position of power within the space of humanitarianism. By highlighting the location of Rohingya women's bodies,

this article has problematised and challenged the taken-for-granted attitude of the state, family, and women themselves about their bodies as something fragile, to be violated, and precarious.

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'I Was Certain I Saw My Future in Him': Coming into Intergenerational Empathy and Escape in lê thi diem thuy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*

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ABSTRACT

The 2003 novel by lê thi diem thuy, *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*, explores its unnamed narrator's coming of age particularly through an exploration of her relationship with her father, both in terms of their actual interactions as well as her understanding of herself through her understanding of him, including the ways that she sees herself being or becoming him, both psychologically and physically. The primary means by which the narrator comes to understand herself and the world is through an imaginative empathy with those around her, most prominently her refugee father, which is depicted as a deeply embodied experience. Yet her empathy is also a burden that, while shaping her subjectivity, constrains her sense of self. Thus, the novel raises a question: how is it possible for the children of immigrants to form their own identities in the shadow of their parents' suffering and sacrifice? This article argues that the novel stresses the necessity of working to understand one's immigrant parents as well as the simultaneous potential necessity to distance oneself from them. In other words, the novel explores the generative possibilities of bodily distance as a means of achieving psychic closeness.

Keywords: gender, migration, refugee, empathy, intergenerational

INTRODUCTION

The 2003 debut novel of lê thi diem thuy, *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*, explores its unnamed narrator's coming of age particularly through an exploration of her relationship with her father, both in terms of their actual interactions as well as her understanding of herself through her understanding of him, including the ways that she sees herself being or becoming him, both psychologically and physically. While the novel contains many of the common elements of coming-of-age narratives, including depictions of schooling, sexual awakening, and coming to understand the world through the loss of childhood innocence and ignorance, it works through these common themes in a very uncommon fashion. The primary means by which the narrator comes to understand herself and the world is through an imaginative empathy with those around her, most prominently her refugee father, which is depicted as a deeply embodied experience. Yet her empathy is also a burden that, while shaping her subjectivity, constrains her sense of self. Thus, the novel raises a question that arises in numerous one-and-a-half and second-generation texts: how is it possible for the children of immigrants to form their own identities in the shadow of their parents' suffering and sacrifice? While this question is ubiquitous in texts of its kind, lê's approach to addressing it is unusual in that novel stresses the necessity of working to understand one's immigrant parents as well as the simultaneous potential necessity to distance oneself from them. The novel explores how the act of recuperating complex and painful familial dynamics does not always take the form of family reunion. In other words, the novel explores the generative possibilities of bodily distance as a means of achieving psychic closeness.

IMAGINATIVE EMPATHY

By imaginative empathy, I mean the ways in which one can bring about the feeling of empathy through the exercise of imagining oneself as or in the place of the other in a creative way that extrapolates beyond just what one observes and that is possible without direct interaction. The concept of empathy is complex and contested,

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having been explored across the sciences, social sciences, and humanities (see Engelen and Röttger-Rössler, 2012) for an overview of many of the key questions the concept raises). Drawing upon interdisciplinary research, Schmetkamp and Vendrell Ferran define empathy as 'the apprehension and understanding of others' mental states such as emotions, beliefs, and desires' (2020: 743). This definition highlights that empathy is active and applicable to not just feelings. In a psychological context, it can be broken down into 'three major neuroanatomically based subprocesses':

> (a) an *emotional simulation* process that mirrors the emotional elements of the other's bodily experience with brain activation centering in the limbic system and elsewhere (Decety & Lamm, 2009); (b) a *conceptual, perspective-taking* process, localized in parts of prefrontal and temporal cortex (Shamay-Tsoory, 2009); (c) an *emotion-regulation* process used to soothe personal distress at the other's pain or discomfort, making it possible to mobilize compassion and helping behavior for the other (Elliot *et al.*, 2011: 43).

This formulation is useful both because it recognises empathy as an embodied set of processes and because it allows me to differentiate between empathy as emotion and imaginative empathy as narrative practice engaged in by both characters and novel; in the context of the novel, the characters experience the emotion of empathy as defined above and project themselves into the minds and experiences of others, while the novel itself mirrors these acts of imaginative empathy as a function of the narrative. This creates a layering effect that highlights the role of imagination for the characters and readers. Imagination is generally considered a part of empathy, although the precise nature of its role is an area of debate (Schmetkamp and Ferran, 2020: 746); empathy's emergence out of the German word *Einfühlung*, meaning 'feeling into,' indicates the way that empathy functions as an 'imaginative projection' as well as 'a kind of voyage' (Veprinska, 2020: 2). The imaginative empathy that this article is concerned with retains this idea of journeying into the other, but expands both who or what may be included in the other and the value of such a voyage even if it leads to a greater distance from its object.

Much discussion of empathy in literature understandably focuses on the ability or inability of literature to produce empathy in readers and the value or danger of this ability (see Whitehead (2017), Hammond and Kim (2014)). Suzanne Keen (2007: 4), for example, posits that 'fictional worlds provide safe zones for readers' feeling empathy without experiencing a resultant demand on real-world action. This freedom from obligation paradoxically opens up the channels for both empathy and related moral affects such as sympathy, outrage, pity, righteous indignation, and (not to be underestimated) shared joy and satisfaction'. Part of what is interesting about lê's novel is that it actively depicts empathy as a complex emotion experienced by the characters, especially the narrator and her father. This empathy is directed not only toward other people they encounter but toward non-living beings and towards people they experience through media. In other words, my discussion of *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* is primarily concerned with empathy *within* the novel and how that positions the reader as a witness to the characters' empathy at the same time as it puts them in the position to feel empathy themselves. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper, it might be interesting to consider whether the representation of empathy strengthens or weakens the freedom from obligation that Keen describes.

Critical writing on lê's novel is diverse and often interdisciplinary; see, for example, sociologist Yen Le Espiritu's discussion of it in *Body Counts* (2014) and Jutta Gsoels-Lorensen's article (2008) focused on the role of the photographic in the novel. Literary analysis of the novel has largely been concerned with the ways in which it represents and navigates the geopolitical space inhabited by Vietnamese refugees in the United States whose dislocation to the US is the result of imperialist war by the very nation that they are finding their place in (see Liu (2018), Kase (2015)). As seen in his article, Brian G. Chen is concerned with embodiment in this novel, though his focus is on the individual subject's walking and wandering (2017: 63) while my own focus is more relational. Isabelle Thuy Pelaud takes an intersectional approach to the novel and the circumstances of its publication, stating that her article 'brings forth the notion that Vietnamese American identities and imaginaries are multilayered, complex, and diverse and that Vietnamese American women writers of the 1.5 generation in particular are exceptionally burdened by being refugees, people of color, and female' (2015: 96–97). She highlights the ways that the novel has been seen as semi-autobiographical even though lê has tried to resist the overdetermination that can come from such a reading, usefully engaging with lê's own commentary on the reception of her work within and outside of the Vietnamese American community. My reading of the novel will not retread this ground but will draw from Pelaud's analysis and insights into the tension between the communal and the individual when representing refugee communities.

MIGRATION, IMAGINATION, FREEDOM

The Gangster We Are All Looking For has a poetic and nonlinear narrative, structured almost but not completely like a series of short stories; it follows the growth of an unnamed girl narrator, who arrives in the United States as

a small child with her father and 'uncles' and is eventually joined by her mother. The novel begins with place, drawing attention to the narrator's experience of the physical world. However, rather than this description of place suggesting a groundedness, it is used to emphasise movement. The narrator begins by saying, 'Linda Vista, with its rows of yellow houses, is where we eventually washed ashore' (3), at first giving the impression that this neighbourhood was their point of arrival in the United States. The next sentence, however, reveals this impression to be false: 'Before Linda Vista, we lived in the Green Apartment on Thirteenth and Adams, in Normal Heights. Before the Green Apartment, we lived in the Red Apartment on Forty-ninth and Orange, in East San Diego' (3). Immediately, the novel interrogates what it means to arrive and, by using the phrase 'washed ashore,' questions what arrival looks like. What does it mean to wash ashore years after literally arriving? The narrator, her father, and the uncles did not even arrive by boat but rather by plane, so the idea of washing ashore is metaphorical even as it is grounded in physical experience; just as a person can still feel the water rocking beneath herself after getting off a boat, lê's characters remained at sea long after leaving the boat behind. From the beginning, this novel identifies migration as an ongoing experience rather than an action with a defined beginning and ending. Crucially, this is not an experience of fragmentation but of motion; the characters, while unsteady, are still at least metaphorically in the same boat.

The defamiliarisation of space and distance permeates the novel. The use of a child narrator makes this device plausible, but also suggests that confusion around these dimensions is a natural result of migration. The narrator wants to go to the beach because she believes her mother is there, but her father tells her no: '"You told me she was at the beach," I said. "Not the beach here. The beach in Vietnam," Ba said. What was the difference?' (13). Without a developed understanding of spatiality or geography, migration is experienced by impression rather than knowledge, and distance is an abstraction. To cope with the disorientation that results from her experience of migration and its many aftereffects, the narrator relies heavily on her imagination. In this way, the novel makes clear the connection between her embodied displacement and her use of imagination as a means of coping with it.

The concept of imagination is as ubiquitous as it is difficult to define; after all, 'the history of imagination is the history not simply of a word, but of a category of mental activity whose definition and interpretation has varied very greatly from age to age and from author to author' (Murray, 2005: xiii). Nevertheless, imagination as represented in the novel is in keeping with the Romantic idea of it as 'no longer simply a reproductive faculty which forms images from pre-existing phenomena, but a productive and creative power which autonomously frames and constructs its own image of reality' (Murray, 2005: viii). Throughout the novel, the protagonist's imagination is emphasised, serving as the primary means by which she withstands hardship and develops a sense of self in the face of the often-alienating process of racialisation.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator is six years old. At every point in the text, the narrative voice reflects her age, so that her level of understanding the world around her is always expressed. The non-linear narrative forces the reader to adjust to multiple ways of seeing throughout the novel. Imagination is not only central to the narrator's child perspective but also to the retrospective voice, the voice that draws attention to the adult woman who makes a few appearances in the text. When describing their first night in America, the narrator imagines the conversation their sponsors have outside their door, re-creating an exchange she could not have understood at the time because she did not know English. Understanding her past through narrative requires this kind of imaginative reconstruction. When she imagines Mel, the man who inherited the position of their sponsor after his father's death, telling his mother, 'I feel like I've inherited a boatload of people. I mean, I've been living here alone and now I've got five men I've never met before, and what about that little girl?' (6), her imagining seems a realistic reproduction of what a man in Mel's position might think, but it also is inflected by her own approach to language, as can be seen by the use of the term 'boatload,' which is more in keeping with her preference for sea-related figurative language than Mel's way of speaking. While in this moment she is engaged in an act of imaginative empathy – she is literally imagining the experience of their arrival from the perspective of Mel – she is mobilising that empathy to better understand her life, not that of her brief benefactor.

The narrator's imaginative approach to her life is a direct result of her lack of control over what takes place around her, as well as her understanding that this lack of control extends to those she loves. First literally and then figuratively buffeted around by the ocean, she has the limited agency that all children have in the world of adults; this lack is compounded by her position as a refugee, as a racialised girl with damaged parents living in poverty or close to it. Her isolation and her lack of freedom are explored symbolically through her relationship with a butterfly encased in glass found in Mel's office. Mel is an important but distant figure, whose role of benefactor does not fit him or the narrator, Ba, and the uncles comfortably. Yet this relationship has defined terms; the narrator muses, 'If it was true that this man Mel could keep us from floating back there – to these salt-filled nights – what could we do but thank him. And then thank him again' (8). There is no question here; the clause is completed by a period, not a question mark. All they can do is thank, repeatedly. The compulsion to be thankful is the defining feature of the relationship.

Mel's paperweight is the externalisation of the narrator and her father's lack of freedom. The glass encases a butterfly, and the narrator finds the artifact immediately troubling. Her child's mind is confused by how such a thing could come to exist: 'Though I turned the glass disk around and around, I could not find the place where the butterfly had flown in or where it could push its way out again' (25). She goes to her father with her concern for the butterfly, which she believes she can hear rustling in the disk (25). She tells Ba, 'I found a butterfly that has a problem'; she believes that it is alive but trapped, and that it wants to get out (25–26). In this way, she imaginatively feels with a body that can no longer feel. When he asks her how she knows, she says, 'Because it said this to me: "Shuh-shuh/shuh-shuh"' (26). Her father refuses either to tell her she is wrong or to offer to help the butterfly, instead choosing to pretend to knock the butterfly's sound out of his head so that he can sleep (26). This reaction is telling. Their kinship with the trapped butterfly is apparent, but for Ba, there is no room for empathy with it. This lack of empathy is reinforced when the narrator takes her concern to the uncles. They tell her that 'that butterfly got itself into a lot of trouble flying into a disk' and that there is nothing they can do about it (27). The narrator demands they empathise, asking, 'But doesn't it sound terrible?' (27). They resist, stating, accurately, that the butterfly must be dead. But when the girl insists that she can hear it rustle its wings, they tell her, 'Listen to me, little girl, no butterfly could stay alive inside a glass disk. Even if its body was alive, I'm sure that butterfly's soul has long since flown away' (27). All of the uncles agree that the butterfly's soul must have departed even if its body remains. Here, the uncles give her a lesson that defines the nature of their American life – that it is possible to continue to live only in body, especially when one is confined. They explicitly connect the butterfly's plight to their own. When the girl argues, 'If there's no soul, how can the butterfly cry for help?', the uncles answer, 'But what does crying mean in this country? Your Ba cries in the garden every night and nothing comes of it' (27). Whether or not the girl's concern for the butterfly is consciously a substitute for concern for her father, who she knows cries at night but whom she is powerless to help, the butterfly paperweight is the first symbolic site of the narrative's preoccupation with how the feeling of being trapped shapes subject formation and how escaping it is necessary to come of age with any degree of hope. At the same time, this escape is characterised as an unavoidably violent and destructive process, despite or because of its necessity.

When the narrator tries to free the butterfly, the paperweight's metaphorical significance is made even more explicit, as her actions cause herself, her father, and the uncles to be expelled from Mel's home, suggesting the incompatibility of her longing for freedom with the terms of their American life as refugees. Their banishment is stated before the incident that precipitates it is described, creating a cause-and-effect relationship in order to reveal their expulsion's unreasonable nature through the telling of the story. Her father's reaction to the incident is also revealed beforehand: 'Ba said it wasn't my fault, wasn't anybody's fault' (31). Her father's response – his unwillingness to blame his daughter for her desire for freedom and his inability to blame Mel for his grasping for the first excuse to kick them out – reflects the fatalism that the novel suggests is a result of both wartime experiences and the experience of migration. Her father's awareness of his lack of control makes him vacillate wildly between calm acceptance and enraged lashing out so that his behaviour throughout the text is difficult to anticipate for both the reader and the narrator, seeming as it is untied to the severity of any infraction.

Indeed, her father is harshest when the narrator's only mistake is seeing him:

> One night when my father was sitting on the couch looking sad and broken, he turned and realized there was someone standing where he had thought there was only a shadow. He came for me because I had seen him. I leapt through a window and ran from the house, but before I could make it to the street, he caught me by my hair and pulled me back inside. Gripping my head with one hand, he raised the other and demanded to know what I had seen (117).

erin Khuê Ninh points out that immigrant parents exercise sovereign power over their children in numerous ways, one of which is enacting discipline without revealing expectations: 'the fact that infractions are typically identified as such *only after the fact* makes obedience less a question of walking a line than of picking one's way through a field of land mines' (2011: 43). As the above scene suggests, this power is menacing because it is wielded by someone who is otherwise deeply powerless; the narrator's transgression is seeing her father 'looking sad and broken,' and his power gives him the right to punish her for this act of sight. Ninh draws on Giorgio Agamben's theorisation of sovereign power to demonstrate that filial guilt is structural and that the immigrant parent, as the sovereign in the familial structure, 'traces a threshold between that which is inside and that which is outside of the law (2011: 15), "producing" his subject as such [the child], as well as deciding from among the activities of living what may fall under governance' (2011: 43). The narrator in lê's novel accepts her father's role as sovereign; in response to his demand to know what she saw, she narrates, 'To protect myself, I tried to forget everything: that first night at the refugee camp in Singapore; those early morning walks after we arrived in America; the sound of his voice asking a question no one could answer' (118). Her attempt at forgetting not only this but other instances of seeing her father is her response to his position as sovereign over her, and she is unable to submit fully: 'The only thing I couldn't drive away was the memory of my brother, whose body lay just beyond reach, forming the shape of a

distant shore' (118). She is unable to forget everything that she needs to forget in order to avoid transgressing her father's unspoken rules.

Significantly, the narration of the event stops as her father is poised to strike; whether he actually hits her in that moment goes unrevealed. This silence is reflective of the way the novel grapples with representing domestic abuse. A few pages earlier, the narrator describes her father's vacillating extremes:

> He becomes prone to rages. He smashes televisions, VCRs, chases friends and family down the street, brandishing hammers and knives in broad daylight. Then from night until early morning he sits on the couch in the living room, his body absolutely still, his hands folded on his lap, penitent (116).

The narrator describes him chasing 'friends and family' but does not say she herself is chased; in this passage, she withholds explicitly stating whether she is subjected to his violence. This withholding can be read as holding back from addressing abuse directly, yet the withholding adds to its menace rather than diminishing it, reflecting the uncertainty experienced by the narrator. Nevertheless, the narrator's recognition of her father's authority over her remains even in the face of American structures of authority, as can be seen when he comes to pick her up from the shelter and she feels protective of him in the face of the counsellors there (118–119), a passage later discussed in greater depth.

To return to the incident of the butterfly, the narrator resolves to break the disk, choosing a portion of the wall in Mel's office to throw it against, carefully measuring it with her hand (34). Before she throws it, she listens to it one more time: 'There, very faintly, was the sound. It was like a light almost transparent curtain rippling across a window' (34). She is in a room with an open window but at this point, she re-locates a real sound – the curtain in the breeze – to a different source, one of the many times the novel shows her using her imagination to manipulate the world around her. Imagination, then, can be used to understand but also to reshape; in this instance, she is wilfully misunderstanding the physical world to support her course of action. Instead of hitting the wall, the disk crashes into a display case containing glass animals collected by Mel's parents over the years. Everything shatters, but the narrator reacts only by spinning herself in the desk chair, 'scanning the ceiling for the butterfly' (35). Her imagined sound of the butterfly wings 'shuh-shuh/shuh-shuh' is interspersed with the sound that is suggested to be her father saying 'suh-top!/suh-top!' (35), a word he has been practising reading on a stop sign while walking her to school. This moment marks her father's desire to protect her from grasping too hard for freedom as well as his understanding of why she grasps for it. It also signals the novel's questioning of whether freedom is an illusion. The narrator, of course, does not find the butterfly on the ceiling. Her attempt to free it is futile, and her imagination has succeeded only in alienating their already reticent benefactor.

IMAGINATION AS RECUPERATION

The rundown housing complex full of migrants and their children the family later moves into serves as a site of community and connection for the narrator. The novel contains paragraphs-long descriptions of the children's play. Much of their play is imaginative, reflecting both those things they lack and the circumstances that shape their lives. In terms of the former, they often use what they have on hand to pretend to have more; they make a trampoline out of a mattress and pretend to find and devour 'French fries, hamburgers, and fried chicken' in the kitchen of the burned-out house next to the complex (57). What the children can actually afford is to pool their pennies in order to buy single boxes of candy that they share among themselves, so they supplement their desires through their imagination, demonstrating once again the value of imagination for reshaping reality in active defiance of what is. In terms of the latter, the children use the neighbouring Jehovah's Witnesses church as the site of a game they call Kingdom, which goes through a telling transformation: 'At first, Kingdom was about pretending that we were in Heaven. We tried to be the people in the little books [Jehovah's Witness tracts]. We swept the stairs and kept the castle clean. We walked around smiling, waving to invisible people in our heavenly community… When we got bored, Kingdom became about having fights and waging war' (49). Many children play war games, but the war games represented here clearly draw from the experiences of the children and their parents related to actual war and forced migration. Interestingly, the children still filter these experiences through the terms of imagination: 'we made up stories about ships at sea, on the lookout for pirate ships' (49); they 'made up' these stories even though the narrator and presumably some of the other children have had this very experience. The children's game is a parody of war, satirising its consistent elements, such as its self-perpetuating nature: 'We fought over which side had killed more people and because we usually couldn't agree, we'd have to collect more eucalyptus cones and have another war' (50). Here, the novel demonstrates how children like the narrator use play to survive and even recast painful memories and histories.

The novel is constructed as an act of recuperation. It is a first-person narrative in which the narrator imaginatively inserts herself into the minds of all of those around her. She is, at the end, far from her family, yet

the very act of producing this narrative expresses a need to come to understand her family and her past in order to face her future and create for herself an identity beyond becoming her father. The unsteadiness of time in the novel suggests that when she describes her parents' feelings and thoughts and actions in scenes she has not witnessed, this is information that she might learn from them once they can speak to each other freely and be together without filling her with the need to run away. Until this is possible, the imaginative empathy she engages in maintains their connection while protecting her from the burden of her father's violence and her mother's expectations. The project of recuperation informs the text as a whole, including in how characters are identified.

Most significant is that the narrator is unnamed. The parents are given names: Minh and Ahn (82). The parents' identities are given more coherence than that of the narrator. She is not simply passively unnamed, but rather her name is wilfully withheld. She describes an interaction with another child in her apartment complex while they play: 'Upside down, you look like a boy. You look like the brother of…' And then she said my name' (71). The narrator refuses to share her name with the reader. Part of the narrator's namelessness is an act of separation. She not only declines to name herself to the reader, she also refuses to answer to her name when hailed on the street by someone from home after she has left Linda Vista. He calls her a liar for not responding, and her description of how she experiences this moment of naming is telling: 'I kept moving as the lilting syllables of my own name fell around me like licks of flame that extinguished on contact, never catching' (100). By denying her name, she becomes untouchable. Yet denying her name still connects her to her family, as she attributes her ability to do this to her father: 'It was my father who taught me how to do this, how to keep moving even when a bone in the leg was broken or a muscle in the chest was torn' (100). She has inherited her father's abilities of self-preservation but embodies them differently. She uses the lessons she has learned from him to distance herself from him; in this way, her empathy with him fuels her escape from him.

The fact that the novel foregrounds the narrator's relationship with her father, and even further, the idea of her becoming her father, is vital to understanding how it frames subject formation and familial relationships. In one of the novel's many heartbreakingly beautiful passages, the narrator asserts her childhood belief about her identity in relation to her father: 'I grew up studying my father so closely as to suggest I was certain I saw my future in him' (116). She sees herself becoming her father physically, 'I would inherit his lithe figure and beautiful smile,' as well as in action, 'I would build and break things with my hands. I would answer to names not my own and be ordered around like a child. I would disappear into every manner of darkness only to awaken amid a halo of faces encircling my body' and in emotion, 'Shame would crush me. I would turn away from the people I loved. I would regard with suspicion the bare shoulders of a woman I desired' (116). She also suggests that she will inherit his memories: 'The sight of two boys shooting marbles in a dirt yard would fill me with sadness… The sight of a young girl playing house, sweeping out an imaginary courtyard with a branch of eucalyptus and the little song she sang, about a fluttering butterfly, and the way her arm described the course of its body in flight, would haunt me' (116–117). She will not only inherit her father's memories of her brother, but even memories of herself. She will haunt herself through memories of herself unconsciously passed down from her father. I read this passing down as an example of Marianne Hirsch's idea of 'postmemory,' especially because it demonstrates the way that 'postmemory's connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation' (107). The narrator's subjectivity is formed through the layering of her own experiences with her father's experiences, her own emotions with the father's emotions, which she watches closely both for self-preservation and for prediction. She is burdened by these inheritances. Yet while the description of her father might suggest that she has also inherited his fatalistic approach to life, she develops a different approach: 'Whereas my father would disappear into himself when haunted, I would leap out of windows and run. When there were no windows, I would kick down doors. The point was to get to the street, at any cost. I would come to see running as inseparable from living' (117). The daughter of migration responds to being haunted with movement instead of stillness; for her, the outdoors feels safer than the home, but not just, or even primarily, because of the threat of physical violence: 'I would choose falling asleep on rooftops and on the lawns of strangers to lying in my own bed, surrounded by knots of memories I had no language with which to unravel' (117). For the narrator, the absence of language that can make sense of the memories, both those of her parents and her own, is a greater threat even than her father's rages. Home cannot be seen solely as a place of refuge from the world, as the conflicts of the world are embedded in the home. The narrator's stretching towards freedom is contrasted with her father's withdrawal. Still, the narrator's description of her teenage self demonstrates that she cannot escape being like her father: 'Yet exactly like my father, I would become suspicious of tenderness and was calmest when I had one hand quietly lying over the other, both ready to be raised in an instant, shattering to the bone whatever dared come too near to me' (117). This section repeatedly uses the word 'would' to indicate both possible future occurrences and common past behaviours; by framing these directions of the narrator's gaze using the same heavily repeated word, their supposed distance is questioned. The narrator can distance herself from the home space, but she carries her father no matter how far away she goes. Their physical resemblance serves as a metonym for her psychical and emotional inheritances, the weight of which threatens her survival.

As I have previously suggested, much of the symbolism and figurative language in the novel revolves around water. Indeed, water is the central symbol of the text. Its role is both life-giver and life-taker, a constant as well as something that can be missed, a marker of distance and a means of travel – in short, the very essence of contradiction. When the family lives in the rundown apartment complex with a pool in the courtyard, the narrator observes, 'Though my parents didn't want me to play near the swimming pool, they both liked having the pool in the courtyard. My mother said it wasn't the sea but it was nice to open the door and have some water' (51). The parents fear the water taking another child from them but also long to be near it. When the pool is filled with concrete because the landlord discovers children jumping off balconies into it, tension arises between the narrator's parents. It angers her mother, but her father tries to shrug it off, another instance of his fatalistic attitude. Her father responds to her mother's complaint by saying, 'He's the landlord. It's his building' (154). This statement emphasises the lack of control the characters have over their lives and environment and that they cannot expect beauty. The narrator does not say anything; after all, 'What was there to say?' (54). Her manner of coping is neither the self-inflicted indifference of her father nor the vocal complaints of her mother but rather a quiet, thorough remembering of what she saw in the swimming pool. The memory of 'the body of a boy, gliding along the floor of the pool, sunlight streaming across his bare back…the reflection of clouds, and birds migrating…the leaves that floated to the edges of the swimming pool and nested' (54) is her active form of preservation. She narrates, 'But what I remembered most were the boys, flying, I remembered their bodies arcing through the air and plunging down. I remembered how their hands parted the water and how as they disappeared, the last thing I would see were the pale soles of their feet' (54–55). This memory establishes the pool as a site of deeply embodied freedom, of escape, foreshadowing her later practice of jumping out of windows to escape her family. At this point in the narrative, her longing for freedom is established, but her attempts at achieving it have been forestalled. Her imagination, however, continues to provide her a space for this longing to flourish.

TIME, IMAGINATION, EMPATHY

The way that time functions in the novel is directly tied to the way that the narrative subtly constructs the adult version of the narrator and her imaginative engagements. This is particularly evident in the novel's final chapter, which jumps back and forth in time. The first section, which describes a seemingly average day for the narrator's father, is unmarked, but the next section, focusing on the childhood death of the narrator's brother in Vietnam, starts with 'twenty years ago' (126), which suggests that the previous section is meant to take place in the present as told by the adult narrator. Yet later in the same chapter, her father is described as having arrived in the city of San Diego 'more than twenty years ago' (140). This description thus indicates that these sections of the chapter take place in the future. As such, these sections can be read as future projections, even though they are written in past tense. The repeated use of 'more than twenty years ago' (143) allows a vague sense of how far into the future these events could be taking place since just how much more than twenty years have passed remains unclear.

The narrator introduces information about her adult self third-hand. In describing how her parents' apartment building functions as a village, she notes what the neighbours know about her parents' absent daughter:

> It was known that my parents had a daughter who lived on the East Coast, somewhere near New York. Some people heard that she had run away and some people heard that she had simply gone away. That was many years ago and now the rumor was she was writing stories. No one had read them and no one had met her. They imagined that her English was very good (148).

This passage sets up her life as open for interpretation; what is the difference between her having run away or simply gone away? The narrator has already revealed that she has done both. Having already run away, she calls her parents to let them know that she is going to the East Coast to go to school (119). Regardless of the nature of her departure, the real news is the rumour of her writing. Her parents' apartment building, which it is implied is inhabited primarily by first-generation Vietnamese refugees, is disconnected from the second generation in part through language. The stories the narrator is rumoured to be writing lead them to imagine 'that her English was very good' – that conclusion is all they can or will make of her writing. This metatextual moment creates a doubling for the reader. The narrator is said to write stories and the text is ostensibly a story of the narrator's, as indicated by the times that the novel directly addresses the reader (99). Of course, the narrator herself is the creation of the author. The reader is thus asked to imagine how these subjects of the story, who are fictional, might react to the way they are portrayed in a story they will never read and would not read, even if they were not fictional. This is a demand for a very particular form of empathy. The disconnect between the writer and the community about which she writes is foregrounded here, but even more so is the paradox of audience for this type of text. The narrator is telling her own coming of age, but she is also telling the story of her parents because that story is necessary for her self-representation. Yet working-class Vietnamese migrants to the United States are unlikely to choose leisure

reading that chronicles their own suffering. Thus, an exercise in better understanding and empathising with the first generation is also a site of further alienation. The slippage between author and narrator, reinforced by the narrator's lack of name and identity as a writer, is a challenge put to the reader, demanding that the reader consider how subjectivity is constructed narratively. The narrator is like the author but is not the author, and the novel asks that one engage in the imaginative empathy displayed by the narrator towards the narrator, without having to know what is 'true' in the story, despite the common desire among readers to read this text and others like it as autobiographical (Pelaud, 2015: 99). Describing herself as a 'fellow traveler' with her narrator (Pelaud, 2015: 99), lê uses a designation that stresses the kinship between author and character as well as the novel as reflective of a journey: the process of coming of age but also the process of imaginative empathy.

The tension between the narrator's empathy for her father and her need to be distant from him is the heart-breaking centre of the novel. She feels the need to shield him from institutions even as she needs to run away from him. When he comes to pick her up at a shelter after she has run away, two counsellors speak to her and her father. The narrator says her father 'apologized for what his hands had done,' and while the counsellors take this to mean that he is 'taking responsibility for his drunken rages,' the narrator understands that something else is going on; he 'spread his hands wide open, and said, in Vietnamese, to anyone who could understand, there were things he had lost a grasp of' (118). The narrator casts her father's statement as a plea for understanding from anyone, but the only one there who can understand what he is saying is her, in terms of both the language he is speaking and what he is talking about. The narrator states, 'I thought [the counsellors] had no right to frown at my father' (119). While she wants to escape him, she cannot bear to see him scrutinised by those who cannot understand him, especially those who are representatives of government or social systems with which she and her father both have an ambivalent relationship. In this moment, the narrator is demonstrating Ninh's argument that

> while there is no question that the losses of immigration matter, that institutional racism and media representation figure into the second-generation experience, so too does power in the most intimate, vulnerable, and formative social contexts – one which may demand that the subject compensate for familial losses by successfully navigating hostile social and political waters, and which may very well redouble the stakes of 'racial' failure (2011: 5).

The narrator finds herself protecting her father from systems that are, at least nominally, meant to protect her from him; his powerlessness in the wider world is an aspect of his power over her. Her empathy towards him is a burden that shapes her behaviour even in moments when her own safety is in question. The final line of this section is telling: 'I remember crossing the parking lot, my hand in my father's hand, the two of us running to the car as though we were escaping together again' (119). The shared experience of escaping together from Vietnam has produced an us-versus-the-world dynamic between them that survives even their conflicts. The next section makes it clear that she runs away again, however, and eventually does so for good. Her desire to shield him from the counsellors does not negate her need to escape from him. She cannot or will not depend on the state in her quest for freedom and selfhood, but that quest continues.

The narrator's imagining of her estranged father's empathy towards others is one of the most interesting aspects of her imagining of him. She describes him as watching a news report on mute of a woman crying in a field somewhere in Europe (126) and, after thinking about it for hours, realising that the woman is indicating that bodies are buried in the field (152). Her father's fixation on this scene continues to re-emerge throughout the chapter until it culminates into a fully realised desire to show solidarity. He imagines that the woman 'would not be able to rest until she had dug, with her own bare hands, through that field' (156) and consciously connects this to his own wartime experience: 'Thinking of the bright green field she stood in, he remembered the bodies that floated through rice paddies during the war' (156–157). His reaction to this connection is to want to help her in the task he has imagined for her: 'Sitting on his porch in Linda Vista he thought about loading all his gardening equipment into his truck. He would drive to wherever she was and offer her his help, his hands' (157). The very next paragraph reminds the reader of the estrangement between the narrator and her father, drawing attention to the degree to which the narrator puts herself into an omniscient role when imagining her father's life without her. She narrates, 'Often when he said a word in English, he would think of how his daughter might say it' (157). He can only imagine how she 'might' say it because they rarely speak. This reminder of the narrator's distance from her father even as she imagines his feelings of closeness to a person far away from himself is one of the ways that the novel ambivalently constructs the idea of the narrator becoming her father; she has been formed by him and this means that she has inherited his capacity for empathy. However, that is not his only legacy in her. Another is a feeling of being trapped; in earlier portions of the novel during which Ba takes a fatalistic approach to life, his lack of control over his life is central and the narrator frames herself as a daughter who simultaneously relates to and tries to push back against such helplessness. Near the end of the novel, her father's lack of agency is symbolically conveyed by his reaction to the phone ringing: 'though my father didn't feel he could answer it, he also didn't feel he could disconnect it' (139). This description of powerlessness is one of the many moments in the text where the narrator

demonstrates an empathy for her father that is in contrast to her actual actions. Research suggests that 'close and secure family relationships (a major component of environment) also contribute to individuals' feeling responsive to others' (Keen, 2007: 3); this novel complicates this notion by contesting what closeness looks like as well as questioning its relationship to security, and by demonstrating how the particularities of migrant family life might produce empathy through means that defy expectations. The novel produces a compelling sense of empathy while resisting any suggestion that it is wrong for the narrator to separate herself from her father. Thus, lê's novel is a relevant text to consider when responding to Ninh's critique that 'Asian American studies has thus far shown itself, nevertheless, to be mainly invested in a defense of immigrant parents against their reproachful daughters' (2011: 122); this novel offers critics an opportunity to consider how both the reproach and the defence might be already embedded in narratives and in fact inextricable from one another. Rather than defend immigrant parents, critics might consider how second-generation reproaches nuance interpretations of immigrant positionality. In texts like the ones that both Ninh and I analyse, the desire to understand is deeply interwoven with the desire to reproach.

The imaginative empathy of the narrator extends far beyond her parents, even to the man who comes to tell her mother that her husband knows of his son's death. She describes the man's interaction with her mother, imagines how he feels: 'He looks at the young woman. She is probably the same age as his wife was when they first met. He wants to tell her there is nothing to do but to bury her son and be patient' (136–137). This section of the text emphasises that the war, though officially over, still shapes their lives; her father cannot return because he is in a re-education camp. Their tragedies and traumas are layered, connected to the war in ways both direct and indirect. But the narrator's exercise in understanding the perspective of the man sent to tell them her father cannot return is also an exercise in solidarity; she narrates, 'How many times has he seen this? He looks away. He doesn't say anything' (137). He looks away from the family, but the narrator does not look away from him; she acknowledges that her family is among many who have lost things to the war. This practice of projecting herself into the past, piecing together not just events but emotions, signals an investment in understanding and representing how being born into the context of war is a fundamental factor in who she becomes, even if her direct experiences and memories are minimal or non-existent. Espiritu identifies this turn as common among those she refers to as the 'postwar generation,' arguing that their

> practice of looking to their present conditions in order to understand their parents' past corroborates one of the strongest and most enduring premises of Walter Benjamin's conception of history: the belief that it is not history that enables us to understand the present but, conversely, the present that enables us to understand the past' (2014: 170).

The narrator's present understanding of herself and her parents informs her reconstruction of the past, which she then uses to further construct her vision of her present.

IMAGINATION, EMPATHY, THE SELF

The narrator comes to understand herself through her family. By reaching outside of herself, she accesses herself. When her father returns from the re-education camp, she describes his arrival, noting that she was staring into the family well and did not notice him arrive. She narrates, 'I stood leaning over the mouth of the well. The stillness of my body led Ba to understand that I had just lost something in the water, something I could not see much less retrieve' (144). They have, of course, both lost something in the water – his son and her brother. This loss is communal. She processes her loss through him. Until this point, the narrator has described her child self as unable to accept her brother's death. She reanimates her brother, imagining him laughing at them at his funeral and hiding behind gravestones in the cemetery (141–142). Her loss can only be acknowledged through the conduit of her father.

The central mystery of the text – what happened to the narrator's brother – turns out to be not directly related to war or migration. Her brother's death by drowning demonstrates that the events that define the family's life are complex and cannot be solely equated with the primary narratives associated with refugee life. As Espiritu argues, personal secrets and traumas are tied up with war secrets and traumas so that the personal cannot be extricated from the social and political (2014: 154). The loss of the narrator's brother haunts the entire family and contributes significantly to the intergenerational tensions that crackle through the text, as well as shapes the narrator's understanding of herself. Her brother's death is not directly caused by the war, but it takes place in the aftermath of the war, and the events that follow, including the father's absence during the time of the boy's death, are a direct result of the war even though it has ended. The narrator's feeling that she must become both herself and her dead brother is not unrelated to her experience of migration, as the loss of her brother is also tied to her loss of Vietnam, but it is also not solely a product of it.

Although in the present, the narrator is estranged from her parents, the novel's emphasis on their interiority along with that of the narrator conveys a hope of future reconciliation or at least a longing for continued familial investment, even from a silent distance. The novel's ending vividly illustrates this longing. Rather than ending in the present, the novel concludes with a past event that simultaneously points to the future. 'One night during [their] first spring together in California' (157), the narrator's father takes her and her mother to the beach, where they see 'small silver fish whose bodies gave off a strange light' (158). These fish are being washed ashore, but the narrator describes them from the perspective of a child: 'Up close, their little mouths moved busily, as if they could not get enough of the cool salt night air' (158). The narrator's father 'pointed at the fish as if we knew them' (158), establishing the family's kinship with creatures who are washed ashore, left gasping on the beach. This image calls back to the very first sentence of the novel, in which the family, at that point an unexplained 'we,' 'eventually washed to shore' in Linda Vista (3). Yet Ba is 'smiling broadly' (158) as he gestures, not casting this shared condition in a mournful light. Most significantly, this final scene exemplifies the novel's theme of the complexity of belonging to family. This is a happy memory. The parents' connection and mutual dependence is emphasised, but the narrator is described as being separate. This separation is represented both in memory and in action. She describes how each of them remember this event:

> My father remembers stroking my mother's face.
>
> My mother remembers wearing my father's coat.
>
> I remember taking off my sandals and digging my heels into the wet sand (158).

Her mother and father remember each other, while the narrator remembers her physical connection to the ground, not the solid ground, but wet sand. She grounds herself in instability. She is connected to place even as that place remains unsteady.

The last sentence of the novel demonstrates that this separation takes place in action as well, mirroring the narrator's earlier reflection on her need to run in comparison to her father's stasis: 'As my parents stood on the beach leaning into each other, I ran, like a dog unleashed, toward the lights' (158). This moment indicates the narrative's turn to futurity; here the narrator sees herself not as running away from her parents but as running towards something. That these lights are dying fish on the seashore does not make her running in vain. By ending the novel on this solitary yet strangely beautiful note, the novel completes its coming-of-age story in a space where past, present, and future converge. The adult narrator's aloneness is active and her simultaneous need to understand and love her family and to be distant from them reaches a delicate balance. The recuperation that the novel has been enacting opens up a space for a future responsive to but not overcome by the past.

The novel centres a complex view of love – that it can coexist with violence, that a couple can fight constantly physically and verbally and also eventually settle into happy mutual dependence, that despite this, the past is not changed and its effect on the narrator remains. This theme is present in many second-generation texts that deal with the afterlife of migration. Especially in texts concerned with the coming of age of protagonists, the familial ruptures that result from migration pose a specific set of obstacles for the development of selfhood. In lê's novel, how the children of migrants come into being while navigating the dangers of both the home and the outside world, physical and psychological, is explored. Rather than casting the family home as outside of the world, the novel demonstrates how deeply embedded it is in the world and, significantly, the multiple communities that have made up and continue to make up the narrator's social world, from Vietnam to the particular world of the boat and the ongoing community it produces, to the family's various homes in California, to her own eventual home in some unspecified part of the East Coast, from the imaginative world of working-class children in the apartment complex to the seemingly lonely but resolute life she builds for herself away from the physical space of her parents. The narrator's imaginative empathy towards inanimate objects, her father, and strangers allows her to both understand herself and her life better, and at times to manipulate her experience of the world for that same purpose. In this way, seeing her future in her father may not be a sentence to a life of powerlessness and rage but rather a means by which she can embody empathy and reach for freedom.

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The Body at the Borderlands: Applying a Feminist-of-Colour Disability Studies Lens to the USA-Mexico Refugee Crisis

Kristen H. Starkowski [1]*

ABSTRACT

From the complications associated with the USA Migrant Protection Protocols to recent reports that United States immigration detention centres are operating at almost quadruple their capacity, news clip after news clip features another story of bodies being violated at the US border. Under United States law, any noncitizen can apply for protection, but recent processing policies at the border complicated the immigration process, especially for migrants with disabilities. With these narratives of displacement in mind, this article begins by examining disability and displacement in terms of both voluntary (migrant workers) and involuntary (refugees) migration at the United States-Mexico border. This article presents an archive of forced displacement under the 'Remain in Mexico' policy with heightened consequences for migrants with disabilities and chronic health conditions. In the analysis of migration legislation, the methodology associated with anti-oppressive practice is used, which assumes that reducing social and structural disparities depends upon disentangling the complex intersections of power, geographical location, and social difference. By combining this methodology with a feminist-of-colour disability studies theoretical framework, which emphasises the institutional and cultural relations that doubly disadvantage certain bodies, the article will trouble distinctions between 'health' and 'disability' in order to reimagine the place of diagnosis for asylum seekers with disabilities.

Keywords: Mexico, United States, refugee, disability, feminist-of-colour

INTRODUCTION

Roughly ten years ago, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities sparked increasing awareness of the issues that migrants with disabilities face at the border, and, in July 2011, the UNHCR responded with specific policy guidance on the matter.[1] Understanding protocols for the identification of disability as foundational for securing access to disability-related services at refugee camps, the UNHCR updated and revised its *Resettlement Handbook* and *Resettlement Assessment Tool* to reflect new insights on the social and environmental factors that shape a person's experience with disability in border zones (Smith-Khan and Crock, 2015: 41). In 2015, Laura Smith-Khan and her colleagues explored the use of these policy developments and mechanisms for identifying those with disabilities at different refugee camps in Indonesia, Malaysia, Uganda, and Pakistan (Smith-Khan and Crock, 2015: 41). Alongside recent developments, her research suggests a need to consider the particular situations of migrants with disabilities at the United States-Mexico border. From the complications associated with the Migrant Protection Protocols to recent reports that United States immigration detention centres are operating at almost quadruple their capacity, news clip after news clip features another story of bodies being violated at the border. Headlines from the past two years alone report instances of asylum seekers struggling to access basic healthcare services, of tear gas being used on migrants, of migrant caravans staging hunger strikes as a means of protest and, more recently, of migrant children being deported during the coronavirus pandemic. Under United

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[1] The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities took place in Brussels on January 22, 2011. The goal of the meeting was to establish an international minimum standard for the treatment of people with disabilities. Recognising the disproportionate risks and barriers that people with disabilities face, delegates identified strategies for reducing discrimination and expanding opportunities. Only a few months later, the UNHCR revised its *Resettlement Handbook* to acknowledge the specific resettlement needs of refugees with disabilities, citing the 2011 UN Convention as a basis for these changes.

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States law, any noncitizen can apply for protection, but recent processing policies at the border have complicated the immigration process, especially for migrants with disabilities.

With these narratives of displacement in mind, this article begins by examining disability and displacement in terms of both voluntary (migrant workers) and involuntary (refugees) migration at the United States-Mexico border, presenting an archive of forced displacement under the 'Remain in Mexico' policy, which suggests heightened consequences for migrants with disabilities and chronic health conditions. It will pay particular attention to contemporary critiques of accessible citizenship and the Humanitarian Asylum Review Process, which resulted in migrants with disabilities or medical conditions being held in deplorable and inaccessible conditions for several months. Next, the article will shift to an analysis of the particular obstacles and risks that asylum seekers with disabilities face there. As these policies are analysed, the methodology chosen is associated with anti-oppressive practice—which assumes that reducing social and structural disparities depends upon disentangling the complex intersections of power, geographical location, and social difference—to understand the specific experiences of a certain population: migrants with disabilities (Burke and Harrison, 2002: 132). Anti-oppressive practice focuses 'on both process and outcome… [to find ways of] structuring relationships between individuals, [so as to] empower users by reducing the negative effects of social hierarchies' (Burke and Harrison, 2002: 132). As a method, anti-oppressive practice presupposes that assessing a situation and determining the nature of possible interventions can only happen once we identify the unique needs of populations that are differently disadvantaged by overlapping power relations. By combining this methodology with a feminist-of-colour disability studies theoretical framework, which emphasises the institutional and cultural relations that doubly disadvantage certain bodies, this will trouble distinctions between 'health' and 'disability' in order to reimagine the place of diagnosis for asylum seekers with disabilities. Because migrants are often homogenised in both scholarship and immigration policy, the article will also point to a need for disability-centric, radical care initiatives outside of the state in an effort to increase the circulation of needed resources for this vulnerable population.

PART I: SCHOLARLY SILENCES

Few scholarly studies of migration and displacement attend to disability, even though the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlighted the precarious position of migrants with disabilities over a decade ago. In her Introduction to *Libre Acceso*, one of the earliest surveys of the topic, Beth E. Jörgensen explains that the 2013 bibliography of the Modern Language Association listed 579 publications under 'disability studies,' but only 'roughly a dozen [of these] were immediately identifiable as pertaining to Latin American topics' (Jörgensen, 2016: 7). Although the struggles that disabled migrants experience has been the focus of countless news reports and of field research conducted by non-profit organisations, disability studies remains remarkably Western-centric, even within the highly interdisciplinary subfield known as feminist disability studies. Scholars often extend a similar criticism to migration studies in terms of its treatment of disability. In 'Disability and Forced Migration,' Maria Pisani and Shaun Grech note that migrants are often treated 'with little or no alertness to context, culture, religion, gender, but especially dis/ability' (Pisani and Grech, 2015: 422). It is well known that refugees and asylum seekers face tremendous risks, but what additional dangers do migrants with disabilities face? As Pisani and Grech acknowledge, 'migration theory grows without the disabled person, disability studies without the migrant, and practice without the disabled migrant' (Pisani and Grech, 2015: 421). This article will engage a feminist-of-colour disability studies framework to address the increased hardships that migrants with disabilities face; in turn, it shifts dominant paradigms in disability studies that affirm sharp distinctions between health and disability to reveal ways in which attending to both health and disability can improve the circumstances that migrants with disabilities face at the border.

Scholarship at the intersection of disability studies and immigration studies highlights the long and enduring history of discriminatory immigrant selection processes across geographical contexts. Most of these policies determine entry on the basis of specific criteria that uniquely disadvantage immigrants with disabilities or chronic health conditions. In "Immigration and Disability,' for example, Yahya El-Lahib and Samantha Wehbi criticise immigration selection policies in Canada, which label people as 'preferred' or 'non-preferred' on the basis of a multi-part merit point system. All too often, immigrants cannot enter Canada because they fail to meet rigid selection criteria, which privileges the able-bodied and those with access to work or education (El-Lahib and Wehbi, 2011: 102). These structural components of the immigration selection process, which especially marginalise people with disabilities, have important implications for countries other than Canada, including the United States, where similar biases shape the migration experience. Recent scholarship by Douglas Baynton and Jay Dolmage traces immigrant selection and restriction in the United States and Europe back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Baynton notes, 'the concept of "selection," adapted from animal breeding and evolutionary science, was central to the eugenics project overall as well as specifically to immigration restriction' (Baynton, 2016: 6). Individuals who were seen as 'defective' or less desirable were often denied entry at the port. During this period,

forms of difference that we would not recognise as types of disability today, including poverty and 'deviant' sexuality, were often framed as forms of mental defect and used as grounds to exclude certain individuals from entering. These labels, as Jay Dolmage points out, shaped early American immigration policy in accordance with eugenic sentiments that persist today, which continue to have tangible effects for immigrants with disabilities seeking entry into the United States (Dolmage, 2018).

With the focus of this article in mind, it is worth noting that scholars working at this same intersection continue to debate the role of diagnosis within the immigration process. On one hand, as Karen Soldatic and L. Fiske establish in their study on the disproportional detainment of people with disabilities in Australian detention centres, health screenings and diagnosis can unfairly criminalise and justify the incarceration of immigrants with disabilities (Soldatic and Fisk, 2009: 14). On the other hand, as Sultan and O'Sullivan (2001) argue, reports of unfair diagnosis and misuses of medical discourse can actually function as an important step toward abolishing the detention system altogether (Sultan and O'Sullivan, 2001: 593-596). This article will apply a feminist-of-colour disability studies framework to reveal a third understanding of medical discourse and diagnosis: that diagnosis can facilitate access to needed resources within the detention system and can therefore play an important role in helping immigrants with disabilities manage some of the exceptional hardships that they experience at the US-Mexico border.

Without accepting the many flaws of the medical model of disability, it is important to acknowledge that diagnosis often secures access to standardised resources for migrants with disabilities. Feminist-of-colour disability studies shares with feminist disability studies a strained relationship with the traditional social model of disability, as both critical approaches emphasise instead the instability of the classic distinction between medicine and society when race and ethnicity are taken into account. The social model of disability remains widely embraced as an alternative to the medical model of disability. Above all else, the social model of disability assumes that the ability to make choices about and shape the direction of one's life directly results from improving access to and eliminating the social barriers that prevent those with disabilities from fully engaging with society, rather than from making changes to the body through medical interventions. Under the social model, for example, using a wheelchair does not make someone disabled—rather, entering a space without a ramp does. In contrast, the medical model of disability frames disability as impairment—as a defect or lack that requires treatment or care. Feminist critics of the social model tend to centralise the lived experience of disability, but they insist that the instinct to separate disability entirely from a medical context may not always be desirable. The slipperiness of both the medical and social models of disability therefore becomes especially apparent within the context of migration since migrants with disabilities may not always be diagnosed before they seek entry into the United States, and most migrants with disabilities cannot access quality medical care. In this sense, distance from the label of 'disability' 'is due less to viewing disability as a source of pride, or as a fluid state, and more to disparities…because of inequalities based on class, [ethnicity], language, and geographical barriers' (Ben-Moshe and Magana, 2014: 106).

For this reason, this article will combine anti-oppressive practice methods with a feminist-of-colour disability studies perspective when synthesising and analysing policies and reports about the treatment of migrants with disabilities at the United States-Mexico border. These frameworks attend to the lived experience of disability and to the political weight of reproducing inequality at the various intersections of human identity. Feminist-of-colour disability studies 'pays attention to the linkages between the ideologies of ability and the logics of gender and sexual regulation that undergird racialized resource deprivation" (Schalk and Kim, 2020: 38). Sami Schalk and Jina B. Kim, who named the subfield in 2020, attributed the Western focus within disability studies to the fact that 'feminist-of-color approaches to disability, illness, and health do not always align with the language, approaches, and perspectives within mainstream disability studies and disability rights activism' (Schalk and Kim, 2020: 32). Feminist-of-colour disability studies instead attends to the rhetorics of (dis)ability, activism, state violence, and health/care. State-sanctioned laws such as the Migrant Protection Protocols and the Humanitarian Asylum Review Process frame the nation-state as a place of security, but they often fail to defend the most vulnerable populations, including documented and undocumented migrants with disabilities. Both a feminist-of-colour disability studies framework and anti-oppressive practices centralise these forms of exclusion, but they also highlight what Rob Nixon calls 'slow violence,' that is less visible forms of violence that often build gradually, including neglect and citizenship-based obstacles to accessing medical care (Nixon, 2013).

PART II: AN ARCHIVE OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Per United Nations estimates for 2020, there were over 232 million migrants globally. Of these, 70.8 million were forcibly displaced,19.5 million are refugees, and 1.8 million are asylum seekers (Bešić and Hochgatterer, 2020: 1). Disability is widely regarded as one of the world's largest minority groups, with the World Health Organization maintaining that approximately 15% of people have a disability. While firm statistics on the number of migrants with disabilities are difficult to locate, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 'Global Trends' report indicates that over 10 million migrants have a disability ('Global Trends', 2021). Countries in the

Global South with the highest numbers of displaced individuals are also those that have significant percentages of people with disabilities (Pisani and Grech, 2017: 421). According to the UNHCR, 'refugees with disabilities are more likely to be sidelined in every aspect of humanitarian assistance due to physical, environmental and societal barriers against accessing information, health and rehabilitation services and human rights protection' ('Refugees and Migrants,' n.d.). Most disabled forced migrants are fleeing extreme poverty, wars, or environmental disasters. In this context, it is important to note that migrants with disabilities face an increased risk of violence and discrimination, but also that forced displacement may actually produce disability. For example, a 2020 Mexican Coalition for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (COAMEX) report based on the migration route from Mexico to the United States listed several high-risk situations that commonly cause disability, such as escaping a moving train in order to avoid arrest or speed up the journey, involvement in a collision or accident, or finding oneself the victim of violence ('Migration and Disability,' n.d.). Migrants pursuing employment opportunities across the border regularly encounter dangerous situations and have a higher risk of on-the-job injury, even though most of these workers do not have access to health care or disability insurance. As a result of these traumatic experiences, many migrants may develop anxiety, panic, or stress disorders, which can later give rise to a psychosocial disability or mental health conditions.

It is also important to note that migrants with disabilities from Central America are already fleeing dire conditions when they make their way to the border. In 2017, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reported that Hondurans with disabilities are often victims of gang-related violence and extortion, especially in the indigenous and rural communities wherein a large percentage of those with disabilities reside. Hondurans with disabilities may also experience forced hospitalisation ('Committee on the Rights,' 2017). The conditions for migrants with disabilities from Guatemala are no better, with the Committee indicating that psychiatric hospitals lacked necessary resources and that women with disabilities, in particular, suffered from heightened violence in the form of forced sterilisation ('Committee on the Rights,' 2017). In El Salvador, disability is largely understood as a human right, and the government passed legislation prohibiting disability-related discrimination in education, employment, and health care back in 2001, but it has struggled to enforce these policies (Hotra, 2008). In Central America as a whole, awareness of disability and equal access to opportunities for those with disabilities remains low, and those with disabilities frequently struggle to access basic resources.

It is no secret that migrants with disabilities have long been abused at the USA Southwest Border, but asylum seekers faced heightened precarity in January 2019 and in the two years leading up to the February 2021 announcement of the plan to phase out the Migrant Protection Protocols. Under Section 235 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, the United States government implemented the 'Remain in Mexico' policy on January 25, 2019. The policy drove over 71,000 migrants who were held at the United States-Mexico border back into Mexico, and because only 15 to 30 new applications were considered per day, most refugees waited for several months for their claims to be processed. 41,247 of these 71,000 cases were rejected during this waiting period (Hotra, 2008). Waiting in Mexico is highly dangerous because Mexican law enforcement is intertwined with organised crime. Journalist Lorelei Laird notes that those who were turned away at the border faced 'rampant crime in northern Mexico… [and were vulnerable] to the organized criminals they left their homes to escape' (Laird, 2019). Individuals with disabilities were especially susceptible to criminal violence. Official data on the extent of violence against migrants with disabilities is difficult to find, but we do know that these types of crimes are underreported. According to the United Nations, 'for many migrants, enduring violence may be the better choice than seeking protection from it, where doing so exposes them to risks of retaliation' ('Combatting Violence'). At the time the policy was filed, the Department of Homeland Security stipulated that migrants with special circumstances, including "known physical or mental health issues," could not be returned to Mexico ('Disability Rights Advocates,' 2020). However, Human Rights Watch researchers in the border city of Ciudad Juárez discovered that the Mexican government had no 'proper system in place…to screen and identify asylum seekers with disabilities and chronic health conditions,' so hundreds, even thousands of migrants with disabilities were forced to wait in Mexico, despite the fact that they should have been exempt from the process under the aforementioned provision ('Mexico: Risks at Border,' 2019). While these announcements mark the height of immigrant restriction in America, anti-immigrant rhetoric began in 2017, when, as Jay Dolmage points out, US President Donald Trump's order to build a wall and ban immigrants from Muslim countries had 'very powerful rhetorical effectiveness' (Dolmage, 2018: 3). Dolmage argues that even though these orders were reshaped, the US government's anti-immigrant rhetoric sparked forms of stigmatisation that recalled the eugenics movement of the early 1920s.

Combined with the USA Migrant Protection Protocols, the Trump Administration's 'Public Charge' rule further discriminated against migrants with disabilities until President Joseph R. Biden revoked it under the same February 2021 Executive Order. Authorised on August 12, 2019, the rule considered health and disability as factors in green card and visa application decisions. Many people with disabilities or chronic health conditions were deliberately denied admission to the United States because they might one day use public benefits, such as Medicaid or government housing assistance. Hoping to delay the law from taking effect, several states and advocacy groups

filed cases against 'public charge,' arguing that it violated federal disability law. While not all of these cases were successful, a federal district court in New York City prevented the rule from being applied during the COVID-19 pandemic. With that said, the rule caused disproportionate harm to people with disabilities and chronic health conditions, along with their families. According to the Center for Public Representation, the rule may have discouraged people from entering the United States, but it also likely dissuaded 'eligible families from using critical public services for fear of harming their immigration status' ('Public Charge', 2021). For Dolmage, the rhetoric of such a policy alone establishes its harm: 'When Donald Trump argues that Mexican or Muslim immigrants are violent or criminal, or that countries send their "worst" people as immigrants or refugees, he's not saying anything new. For over a hundred years…these claims have been made to stoke anti-immigrant sentiment' regardless of any legislation surrounding these claims (Dolmage, 2018: 3). As Biden dismantles the legacy of Trump's (racist) immigration policies, disability rights advocates are coordinating large-scale efforts to serve those who were denied protections under these laws, while also challenging the dangerous rhetoric that continues to exist amongst refugee encampments and impact upon lived conditions there.

In this legal context, it is not surprising that migrants with disabilities were rarely granted accommodations and faced obstacles securing access to basic food and health care at border zone holding facilities. While many shelters are privately managed, even the state-run Leona Vicario National Integration Center, which attributed at least one health problem to 86% of the up to 3,000 migrants at the shelter, reportedly has no accessible restrooms ('Mexico: Risks at Border,' 2019). Human Rights Watch researchers interviewed several migrants at these shelters in August and September of 2019. One migrant from Honduras reported that she was not given any medication for her high blood pressure, and another migrant from Uganda claimed that his shelter was unable to accommodate the fat-free diet that he needed due to an ulcer. As Mansha Mirza notes, 'food distribution in camp settings is characterized by long queues and jostling crowds…There is little evidence of disabled people being prioritized during food distribution or being given special food rations when needed' (Mirza, 2014: 422). Migrants with disabilities who secured food that fit within their dietary requirements or other needed services often paid out of pocket for these expenses because they were not made aware of the government's state health insurance program. To further confound these issues, Mirza points out that displacement camps actively excluded those with disabilities from 'livelihood opportunities.' 'For camp-dwelling refugees,' she says, 'few opportunities exist to live and work outside camps. Such opportunities, where they exist, favor young, educated, and able-bodied males while disadvantaging women, elderly people, and people with disabilities' (Mirza, 2014: 423). Literacy, education, and skills training courses at displacement camps rarely accommodate the learning needs of migrants with disabilities, and these individuals are therefore effectively barred from gaining certain livelihood opportunities.

Under the Prompt Asylum Claim Review (PACR) policy and Humanitarian Asylum Review Process (HARP), individuals who were not subject to the Migrant Protection Protocols faced prison-like conditions and the prospect of 'expedited removal' at the border.[2] Before October 2019, migrants who expressed concern over returning to their home country were granted an interview with an US government Asylum Officer regarding their case, and these individuals were sent to a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centre until the interview date. The individuals were also given time to contact an attorney and collect evidence in advance of the interview. However, after the United States government instituted the PACR and HARP programs, these individuals were locked in short-term detention facilities managed by the government immigration service Customs and Border Protection with 'only 30 minutes to an hour to contact a lawyer or family members before the credible fear interview' ('Policies Affecting Asylum Seekers,' 2020). After this brief period had expired, they were permitted to make additional phone calls. Migrants seeking protection and awaiting an interview with an Asylum Officer therefore had limited time to build a case for themselves before their situation was decided. Besides these difficulties, the PACR and HARP programs arguably forced individuals to endure dangerous living conditions until their hearings. According to a fact sheet prepared by the American Immigration Council,[3]

> … although CBP is not supposed to hold anyone in custody for more than 72 hours, individuals put through the PACR and HARP programs are often held for a week or longer. During this time, individuals may be forced to sleep on the floor for days at a time in freezing cells with limited access to hygiene and inadequate food and water' ('Policies Affecting Asylum Seekers,' 2020: 8).

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[2] Jointly piloted in October 2019, the PACR (for non-Mexican nationals) and HARP (for Mexican nationals) policies essentially expedited the asylum process, reducing the review process from months or even years to under 10 days. Critics of the programs pointed out that they made it more difficult for migrants to secure an attorney, framing the policies as a fast track to deportation. Both programs ended in March 2020. See the U.S. Government's January 2021 *Report to Congressional Requesters* for more details on PACR and HARP: https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-144.pdf#page=7.

[3] The American Immigration Council is a non-profit organisation committed to securing justice for all immigrants through litigation, advocacy, communication, and research.

Before detainees are placed in a prison cell, officers are required to 'visually inspect' detainees for signs of injury or for the presence of a mental, physical, or developmental disability ('U.S. Customs and Border Protection,' 2015). These searches are often cursory and fail to account for hidden health conditions and disabilities, such as autism, diabetes, or epilepsy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has helped to call attention to the deplorable conditions at US immigrant detention centres, even though much work remains to be done to improve circumstances. When the pandemic first began, civil rights legal organisations rushed to file injunctions in the US courts to protect the nearly 40,000 migrants in detention facilities from the spread of the virus. These motions were especially critical for migrants with disabilities, who were more likely to suffer from complications were they to contract the virus. Statements outlining early-pandemic facility conditions associated with one particular lawsuit, *Fraihat v. ICE*, pointed out that these environments did not support even the most basic public health guidelines, such as social distancing and access to PPE or hand sanitiser.[4] Disability Rights Advocates, a national non-profit disability rights group, published a report on the injunction, noting that 'Current ICE protocols do not even consider trying to identify high-risk individuals, much less take the significant steps necessary to reduce the risk of contagion, illness, serious complications, and death' ('National Standards,' 2015). Additionally, COAMEX[5] found that complying with public health guidelines was nearly impossible for many migrants with disabilities since the sinks in washrooms in the detention facilities were often physically inaccessible, which prevented adequate handwashing. Furthermore, many migrants with disabilities needed assistance putting on facemasks or performing daily tasks, so social distancing was not practical ('National Standards,' 2015). As COVID-19 accelerated, migrant shelters closed or reduced capacity, forcing some asylum seekers to set up improvised ad hoc shelters en route. Immigration and Custom Enforcement's failure to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and provide reasonable protections not only placed already medically-vulnerable populations under increased risk, but also exposed a history of unsafe conditions at detention facilities across the country.

PART III: APPLYING A FEMINIST-OF-COLOUR DISABILITY STUDIES FRAMEWORK TO THE MIGRATION CRISIS

A feminist-of-colour disability studies framework can offer a more nuanced perspective on the U.S. migration crisis for those with disabilities and chronic health conditions. In *The Rejected Body*, Susan Wendell, a feminist philosopher who writes about her experience living with myalgic encephalomyelitis, coins the 'healthy disabled' versus 'unhealthy disabled' binary (Wendell, 1996: 21). Wendell has the social model of disability in mind here: proponents of the social model of disability resist the way that the medical model frames disability as a matter of health that needs to be treated. She critiques the fact that the social model of disability separates health from disability, arguing that a person can have a disability and be healthy and that a person can have a health condition, but not have a disability. Yet, in considering the topic of migration among those with disabilities, it is not easy to untangle these widely accepted distinctions between 'health' and 'disability.' As I have already established, deficits in the process for diagnosing and identifying the medical or accommodation needs of refugees means that many migrants with disabilities cannot access basic resources, prescriptions, or medical supplies, which may exacerbate their conditions and turn a treatable health condition into a disability.

The feminist-of-colour disability studies framework put forth by Schalk and Kim in 2020 facilitates the kind of intersectional analysis that traditional, Eurocentric paradigms within the field of disability studies overlook. This is the kind of work that feminist disability studies scholars have been long rethinking, but not from the perspective of race, ethnicity, and migration: 'feminist disability studies scholars…have been prominent in acknowledging the need to rethink the rejection of the medical-industrial complex, adjusting approaches to the social model of disability, which was developed primarily by white heterosexual men with permanent, stable physical disabilities' (Schalk and Kim, 2020: 46). Disability is a fluid state; a person may experience disability at any point in his or her life, and while we need not go as far as support that idea that disability is 'treatable,' we cannot entirely reject considerations of health and medicine altogether. For example, in order to show how a feminist-of-colour disability studies methodology can help tease out the connections between race/ethnicity, class, gender, health, and ability, Schalk and Kim cite Judith K. Witherow, a Native American/Irish poet and essayist who writes about her experiences as a lesbian with a disability, explaining that:

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[4] A summary prepared by court staff on this case offers further information on the risks that detainees with disabilities faced within these environments and the way that the court classified the case. See the following link for details: https://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/opinions/2021/10/20/20-55634.pdf.

[5] COAMEX, or the Mexican Coalition for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, is an umbrella organization that unites different groups committed to supporting people with disabilities in Mexico.

> … coal mining companies and various factories polluted the land and water of my birthplace. Because of this environmental assault, my large family has many health problems. When you add generations of poverty, illiteracy, and abuse by the system, you don't need a crystal ball to determine your destiny (Witherow, 2002: 288).

Although Witherow is writing about the indigenous context, her experience highlights how disability and health cannot be separated from their social, economic, political, and environmental contexts. Like Witherow, many migrants face dangerous labour conditions, such as poverty, malnutrition, pollution, and an inability to access health care. Taken together, these multiple and connected disadvantages mean that accommodation or preventative care is not always an option, which can lead to high acuity situations.

We have seen how migrants with disability are multiply marginalised, but what a feminist-of-colour disability studies framework also demonstrates is the extent to which rhetoric related to health and ability seeps into the discourse surrounding immigration and its resulting policies. For Schalk and Kim, these rhetorical uses are unsurprising; the authors trace discourses of ability and disability back historically, to the institution of slavery in the United States, noting that slaveowners justified the institution by arguing that Black individuals were 'less susceptible to pain, more susceptible to disease, and inherently in need of white care and control' (Schalk and Kim, 2020: 40). Similar rhetoric also supported antiwelfare policies, including the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which framed disability as an illness. In the case of immigration, policies such as 'Public Charge' use the rhetoric of ability to justify a refugee's inadmissibility into the United States. Language such as 'self-sufficient' and 'individuals are inadmissible…if they are unable to care for themselves' frame those with disabilities and chronic health conditions as burdens on the nation and its resources ('Final Rule,' 2021). Not only are migrants with disabilities then framed as usurpers of public resources, but accepting welfare became stigmatised as a form of disability in and of itself. Ultimately, popular discourse pathologises disability, and this language finds its way into policies like the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act and 'Public Charge' rule. As immigration attorney Kathrin S. Mautino explains in Douglas Baynton's *Defectives in the Land*, '"consular and INS officers often look for other grounds' to justify exclusion, and 'one of the most common is the public charge provision"' (Baynton, 2016: 138). In practice, stereotypes shape officials' interpretations of the employability of a person with a disability. As much as disability studies scholars recognise health and disability as distinct states, the language of health and ability constantly mingle in immigration conversations and policies, shaping outcomes for those who attempt to enter the United States. A feminist-of-colour disability studies framework helpfully provides what a disability studies perspective alone cannot: a window into the extent to which the situation of migrants with disabilities is co-constituted by race/ethnicity, class, and other forms of identity, both at the level of language and at the level of public policy, and a sense that heightened attention to the intersections of health and disability might curtail certain forms of state violence.

These ableist immigration policies thwart admissibility, but they also contribute to state symbolic and actual violence in ways that can exacerbate or produce disability. From the George Floyd and Breonna Taylor police shootings to the fact that incarceration rates for Black Americans are over five times higher than they are for white Americans, instances of state violence are increasingly hitting our social media feeds and TV screens. But as Schalk and Kim point out, there are several forms of state violence that continually escape our notice, whether these take the shape of 'antiwelfare polic[ies], the school-to-prison pipeline, [or] infrastructural neglect' (Schalk and Kim, 2020: 44). The United Nations and other non-profit organisations have widely documented cases of physical violence and what Rob Nixon calls 'slow violence' against migrants with disabilities. Nixon defines slow violence as 'a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all' (Nixon, 2013: 2). Whether the result of racism, discrimination, and/or intolerance, migrants with disabilities are victims of border patrol and police attacks, in addition to threats from organised criminals, within both in transit and destination countries. Although they are writing about Somali, Iraqi, and Afghani asylum seekers in Finland, Karina Horsti and Päivi Pirkkalainen provide a relevant comparative account of the consequences of physical violence: '[f]orced removals may involve physical coercion,' they write, 'and those who carry them out can potentially abuse their powers' (Horsti and Pirkkalainen, 2021). Physical restraint can lead to severe injury and even death. In fact, the non-profit organisation Southern Border Communities Coalition reports that at least 122 people have died because of violence and abuse at the United States-Mexico border since 2010, and this figure does not account for the many others who received life-altering injuries ('Deaths by Border Patrol,' 2021). Brutality is the most obvious form of violence at the border, but this abuse manifests in less visible ways, too. For instance, we know that the Migrant Protection Protocols and 'Public Charge' rule heightened the threat of deportability for migrants with disabilities, which is a form of slow violence. Migrants with disabilities are also less likely to be able to access quality health care, and they face other forms of slow violence (many that migrants without disabilities also experience), including but not limited to verbal and psychological abuse, poor housing or homelessness, prison-like conditions within detention facilities, malnutrition, and difficulty accessing work and a liveable wage.

PART IV: UNRAVELLED INTERSECTIONS

Although non-profit organisations and news outlets continue to illustrate the dire situations that migrants with disabilities face at the United States-Mexico border with alarming concern, migrants with disabilities remain a hidden population. International human rights exist to protect people moving across borders, yet the needs of migrants with disabilities continue to fly under the radar. Despite the fact that it can be difficult to navigate the tension between who self-defines as or is defined as a person with a disability, migrants with disabilities are repeatedly overlooked within both disability studies and migration studies scholarship. These difficulties are only exacerbated by the fact that USA immigration policy is constantly changing.

Because migrants decide to seek entry into the United States in response to a host of different circumstances, the methods associated with anti-oppressive practice, combined with a feminist-of-colour disability studies theoretical framework, are most appropriate for considering the complex intersections between migrant health, rights, and treatment at ports of entry. Both migrants and people with disabilities often struggle to participate fully in society—whether in Mexico, in the United States, or in regions that they pass through during their journeys to the border. But the combination of disabled and migrant identity proves especially problematic, as migrants with disabilities struggle to access basic resources, health care, medical services, education, employment, housing, and food. With this context in mind, then, it is increasingly clear that we need to strive for a greater understanding of the everyday barriers that refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities face, so that we can begin to imagine appropriate reforms to ensure greater equality of access.

The elevated risks and dangers that migrants with disabilities confront at the US border demonstrates that states and governmental institutions enact and enforce policies that disproportionately affect racialised populations with disabilities. Migrants with disabilities currently manage extreme precarity as they attempt to enter the United States. The archive that this article takes up has indicated that most migrants with disabilities cannot easily or consistently access the resources they need to survive. Immigration policies have both recently and historically homogenised migrants, and procedures are designed with little to no attention to diversity, particularly in terms of disability. Many migrants with disabilities are unable to access standard resources and care because they are not identified as having a disability or health condition due to poor record keeping, language barriers, or the invisibility of their situation.

Given the long history of brutality enacted toward migrants with disabilities, reshaping policies within states and detention centres may not be the best solution to this crisis, and a feminist-of-colour disability studies framework offers important insights into how we can begin to address the complicated relationship between health and disability at the US-Mexico border. Feminist-of-colour disability studies takes 'into account cultural and religious perspectives on wellness and healing, which may run counter to mainstream white disability studies' (Schalk and Kim, 2020: 46). On the one hand, applying a feminist-of-colour disability studies perspective reveals that, when we centralise the racialised experience of disability at the border, diagnosis assumes more importance in promoting access to health care and other needed services. On the other hand, this same framework emphasises a need for disability-centric health and wellness initiatives in border regions—initiatives that do not depend on the state or government. In their article, Schalk and Kim briefly name two organisations that are already conducting similar work in other contexts: the National Latina Health Organization and Black Women's Wellness Day (Schalk and Kim, 2020: 46). Short-term or localised public-health initiatives that acknowledge the specific racial or ethnic circumstances that shape both health and disability challenge the firm distinctions that disability studies scholars uphold between health and disability, but these initiatives would also improve the lived experiences of this hidden population by bringing to light disabled migrants' universal human rights to protection and quality care.

We can look to Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's experiments in curating collective care for a precedent here—for an image of hope and support beyond the state. In her manifesto, *Care Work*, which details efforts to facilitate access to care through informal networks across the United States and Canada, Piepzna-Samarasinha asks: 'What does it mean to shift our ideas about access and care…from an individual chore, an unfortunate cost of having an unfortunate body, to a collective responsibility that's maybe even deeply joyful? What does it mean for our movements? Our communities/fam? Ourselves and our own lived experiences of disability and chronic illness?' (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018: 17). Piepzna-Samarasinha assembles narratives of Black and brown queer networks of survival–networks entirely independent of the state, that span the course of a decade. Piepzna-Samarasinha presents example after example of forms of vulnerability that overlap with the lived experiences highlighted in this article. She references individuals who struggle to access state resources without medical corroboration and those grappling with citizenship-related barriers that preclude the use of state-based accommodations. With these barriers in mind, Piepzna-Samarasinha reiterates that 'state systems are failing, yet "community" is not a magic unicorn, a one-stop shop that always helps us do the laundry and be held in need' (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018: 18). For Piepzna-Samarasinha, community is part of the answer—but not the entire answer. Nevertheless, considering these experiments in collective care with migrants with disabilities in mind

suggests that reform is not an all-or-nothing project: short-term, community-minded and strategic forms of radical care at or near ports of entry can be important first steps in enacting changes that address the disproportionate harm that migrants with disabilities face at the US-Mexico border.

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Homing and Bodies: Arab Queer Encounters

Lamiae Bouqentar ¹*

ABSTRACT

This article explores issues of homing, nostalgia, and queer Arab bodies by writing through encounters, precisely through encounters with the self and with others. Writing through encounters here is understood as a mode of co-presence of multiple registers of voices and perspectives, never fully stabilised and never quite finished (Ahmed, 2006; Berlant, 2019; Probyn, 2016; Stewart, 2017). Following a 'theory in the flesh' (Anzaldúa, 1987), the self is understood as relational (Probyn, 1996), and embedded in a migratory context, navigating streets in Montreal and two countries (Canada and Morocco). The article writing style is composed of heterogenous fragments, vignettes, personal narratives and academic paragraphs to interweave what it means to 'make home' for us—queer Arab migrants.

Keywords: Arab queer, migration, vignettes, home, encounters, autoethnography

INTRODUCTION

In *It Must Be Heaven*, Palestinian filmmaker, Elia Suleiman, famous for inventing the 'comedy conflict about Palestine' subgenre and using silence in most of his movies, plays his alter ego. Suleiman travels from Palestine to France and New York City¹ in a quest for 'home' away from home. Suleiman proceeds to draw an image of fragmented Arabness, inhabited by different flux and intensities (with themes such as terrorism, love, violence, defiance, suspicion, militarisation). Indeed, through engaging in some physical, political and epistemological *flânage;* every movement is important as it points the viewer in the direction of a political situation (Ide, 2020). Deliberately lacking a punchline, the movie could be considered as an attempt to represent an Arabness that is not captured through a unitary master discourse.

Suleiman's critics typically say that his films are 'Not Palestinian Enough', or that it could use more Palestinian elements (Ide, 2021). Oddly enough, throughout the whole movie, his alter-ego pronounces three sentences, one of them while in a cab in New York City, 'I am Palestinian' to answer the driver's question who asks the director/actor where he is from (Kohn, 2019).

In the promotional movie poster, Elya is seen facing the ocean. Perhaps a metaphor for a fluid site holding the work of memory, a nostalgia of what has been and what will be, all at the same time.

Why am I talking about *It Must Be Heaven*? Because along its involvement with Arabness and home in migratory contexts, the way the movie is conceived has inspired my proceedings for my ongoing doctoral thesis, including this article. In this vein, I offer to weave together vignettes and personal narratives, in what I refer to as encounters with the self and with other queer Arab migrants; to interweave glimpses of homing and embodiment that does not aim to produce a unitary coherent discourse.

What if we imagine writing as a form of inquiry (St. Pierre, 2015)? That is, a writing which is not merely used as a way to convey findings, knowledge and methods of doing, but writings where, under multiple forms, fragments, vignettes, academic paragraphs, all collide and co-mingle. What if these different encounters became a way of generating knowledge by notably breaking with dominant and linear, progressive ways of structuring, doing and making research? This is the aim of the following article.

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¹ The filmmaker insists on specifying that the movement from one country to another is not touristic (Trembley, 2020).
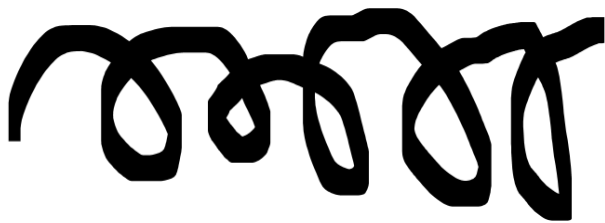
¹ *Université de Montréal*, CANADA
***Corresponding Author:** lamiae.bouqentar@umontreal.ca

Figure 1. 'Looping'. Sketch by Lamiae Bouqentar

WRITING THROUGH ENCOUNTERS

> *Here in Quebec, I talk and write differently. I am the other. The other that nobody understands. The other who writes and talk in a weird way. the other who does not feel at home nowhere really. the other that might as well exist only through her dé-tours.²*

In engaging in such a creative practice, I draw from feminist and queer literary theories that have paved the way for situated, personal knowledges, as a way to resist and counter master narratives, that are white, male-centred, and heteronormative (Anzaldúa, 1987; Haraway, 1988; McRobbie, 1982; Nelson, 2015; Probyn, 1995).

Through encounters with autoethnographic literature, I have learned that autoethnography is designed to provide a sense of context. In this regard, it seeks to put forward a 'reflexive self-with' (Adams and Holman Jones, 2011) which is always and already involved in ethnographic fields: the streets, institutions and recreational and digital spaces that we dwell on and that we enact are all entangled in political and cultural relations (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005; Probyn, 1995, 2016). The self, then, is always writing through encounters. Such statement would suggest that although autoethnographic techniques are based on self and personal oriented writing, it is never truly uniquely centred around the self. Indeed, this autoethnographic writing is based on a permanent relationship with other objects and humans. When I write myself, I recall with others. In other words, it's 'I / we write', I think, I exchange, I borrow, I / we do with others. The I of writing is then never alone, it is eminently more than one, constantly mediated (Ahmed, 1999; Atay, 2018; St. Pierre, 2005). During the creative process, we always write with other perspectives, readings, objects, snippets, other fragments from exchanges with others, humans and non-humans. We are constantly swimming in different oceans. So, during this self-narrativising process, we write of encounters with others, and even (non) humans.

Following these postulates, a writing created from such encounters is a practice that recognises that we produce meaning through life stories as well as through the ways in which we construct them, the discourses and affects that flow through them (Andrews, Squire and Tambokou, 2008; Trahar, 2009). I put forward a writing with memories from back home and strands of exchanges with Arab queer migrants encountered in Montreal. Borrowing from Adams and Jones (2011) who evoke 'a bearing witness together', I write 'making home together' that allows, for racially and sexually minoritised groups, to make room for new questions, new ambiguities - but also for new discomforts. In this regard, writing through encounters, inspired from an autoethnographic tradition, does provide pertinent ways for me, as an Arab queer researcher, to tell and show all the ways I experience such entanglements of identifications such as Arabness, queerness, migration and homing. I hope to find a way to reclaim space as a member of a community who has been in the margins (**Figure 1**).

NOSTALGIC MODE: IMPOSSIBLE RETURNS

<div align="right">

You appeared like a flash,
A shooting star that promises to return
And 1 and 2 and 3, there goes the shift of horizon
Do you know my love that my heart has turned to yours?
Of its own accord, or of the pull of desire, if one were to make Sara Ahmed speak
In my native language we call this state the Qibla: القبلة
Qibla comes from the word Kabala/ قابل: to encounter
And you are the most euphoric and beautiful encounter

</div>

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² Throughout the manuscript, I adopt different font styles to distinguish between different writing forms. In this case the writing as quotation in italic corresponds to fragments of encounters with the self and with others.

Figure 2. 'Layers of nostalgia'. Photograph by Lamiae Bouqentar

10 years now that I live in Montreal. I feel more and more at home. I make it more and more at home.

and each time I go for a walk, I can't help but think of the way, as a female, I did not have the opportunity to stroll in the streets, back home, totally escaping the male gaze.

I remember how the Moroccan street was a place of interesting, gendered encounters. Men frequenting the terraces of cafés in diverse neighbourhoods at all hours of the day. They dwelled in every corner of different streets, spoke loudly, made jokes among themselves or on female passers-by (veiled or not), making themselves seen. These [males] sported a proud and firm posture. Their gaze always turned towards the 'other': gendered, or racialised. Women, on the other hand, displayed a more timid, more discreet posture. Many of them walked with their eyes riveted on the ground, as if a weight was pulling them downwards.

'What is Home for me? I don't know, it's not Montreal or Canada for that matter, it's not Jordan either, when I go back there, I feel in some kind of décalage³… things are constantly changing, the vocabulary, the jokes…and I have a hard time keeping up with these changes (…),' Zak⁴, a 23-year-old Jordanian queer man living in Montreal.

'When I return here (in Montreal), I feel so torn, Yes I can live as a queer woman…yet I feel like I'm shrinking. I have been living here for 4 years, and it's not only the weather that is cold here….'

When you⁵ tell me 'I think of how our vacations will be delayed and my heart gets sad.' The return to my land, to the sea, represents a recharging of my battery, 'I need my Morocco' I would reply. This statement is an embodiment. You are from here and I am from here and there.

'Us Arabs are soo dramatic,' Kay, 22-year-old Egyptian female queer living in Montreal.

'Yes, يبافور⁶' Kenzi, a 37 years old Egyptian female queer living in Montreal.

'We have experienced the Nakba⁷ after all,' Jana, an 18-year-old Palestinian female queer living in Montreal.

The famous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwich has a poem called الحنين which means nostalgia in Arabic. الحنين is also related to حنان which means tenderness to something or someone. Marcel Khalifa, a famous Lebanese singer that I discovered as a child through the music tapes we listened to in the car, whilst traveling with my parents, hums in his most famous song أمي/my mother: أحن إلى خبز أمي و قهوة أمي which would translate to 'I long for my mother's bread and my mother's coffee'. Fayrouz sings 'راجعين يا هوى': (we will be back my love) Hawa/ هوى in

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³ 'Décalage' translates directly as 'gap' but has the wider connotation of being in limbo or in a liminal space.
⁴ All names in this article have been anonymised.
⁵ The 'you' being invoked here refers to my girlfriend.
⁶ Egyptian slang for 'over the top'
⁷ The 1948 war uprooted 700,000 Palestinians from their homes, producing a refugee crisis that is still not resolved. Palestinians call this mass eviction the Nakba — Arabic for 'catastrophe' (Sa'di and Abu-Lughod, 2007)

Arabic means air but also a state of love. Being enamoured. She also sings يا جبل لي بعيد خلفك حباينا /'Oh distant mountain: our loved ones are behind you'.

With my mother, during our mother/daughter escapades, we listened to Amr Diab's songs over and over. 'Amr's songs hold all of my memories' she would share with me. When my parents would play those tapes of Arabic music, I couldn't wait for the songs to end so I could put on my Britney Spears and Celine Dion tapes. Throughout my adolescence and early adulthood, I promised myself to stay away from any Arabic music or art production, which I felt, at the time, was muzzled and stereotyped.

Oddly enough, I reconciled with Arab music when I came to Montreal and became a migrant experiencing الغربة- estrangement and الحنين: a longing. And so now, when comes the months of January, February, and winter has worn me out, the first thing I would do in the morning is listen to Amr Diab and Fayruz songs, as it makes me feel closer to my mother and my homeland.

The Moroccan gay writer Abdallah Taia writes in his book *Arab Melancholy* that his character is told 'you Arabs love sadness too much!'. Such evocations would give the impression that nostalgia is an Arab characteristic.

> *'It's purely an Arab thing, every Arab will tell you that,' Kenzi, a 27-year-old Egyptian queer woman would assert while we were walking in Côte des Neiges, a multi-ethnic neighbourhood in Montreal.*

> *'Well maybe it's because of all the wars, the conflicts and the absurd politics happening in our region,' Zak, another participant would say.*

> *'Montreal is where home is, but when I go back to Tunis I remember how it really feels like home,' Kareem, a 42 year old queer Tunisian man.*

> *I go to Adonis, an Arab supermarket in the suburb of Montreal. Fayruz's song is playing in the background. Baklawa, Kebbe, foul, labne, I feel nostalgic and miss my home in Morocco. It's more than my hometown that I miss, I miss my Arabness. I go there with my [white] partner. Two interracial queer women coming from a queer friendly neighbourhood in Montreal, I feel the straight lines in this place (Ahmed, 2006). I find myself behaving a certain way, refraining from touching my girlfriend, refraining from kissing her on the mouth, refraining from displaying any out-of-line behaviour.*

> *Those brown brick buildings, functional, solid, staying firm at the face of the cold weather. Those brown buildings adjusting well to the gloomy weather, I stand outside of what I see, refusing to be devoured by this architecture. Feeling a stranger to these familiar streets. Will I live here forever? Can I? Would I? I look at the face of my partner and the sensation of discomfort dissipates…Maybe home is a person and not a place.*

The term nostalgia is derived from two Greek terms: *nóstos* (homecoming) and *álgos* (pain). Boym (2001) explains that in the Western context, the term nostalgia first appeared in Switzerland in the 16th century, in the medical field. Nostalgia made its entrance in the medical science as a problem that needs to be solved, since it was understood as a physical disease attacking the body in the same way as a virus. In other words, homesickness was then understood in its literal sense:

> Just as today genetic researchers hope to identify genes coding for medical conditions, social behavior, and even sexual orientation, so the doctors in the 18th and 19th centuries looked for a single cause, for one 'pathological bone.' Yet they failed to find the locus of nostalgia in their patient's mind or body. One doctor claimed that nostalgia was a 'hypochondria of the heart,' which thrives on its symptoms. From a treatable sickness, nostalgia turned into an incurable disease. A provincial ailment, a *maladie du pays*, turned into a disease of the modern age, a *mal du siècle*. (Boym, 2001: 3)

Since then, its definition has evolved and is now found in several literary, poetic, philosophical, cinematographic fields, to an extent where it is very difficult to find a single definition. However, often its *nóstos* and *álgos* inscribes an affective dimension, pain and desire of returning home.

Conceived this way, the cultural and artistic expressions posed at the beginning of this article, would entail an uprooting of a point of origin where the subject was 'at home' in coherence (corresponding to him/her), content, amongst his community (his/her people) which shares his language, his culture and his reference marks. Home would then also be a space of warmth but also be friction-lessness (Fathi, 2020).

Nostalgia would be a desire for a home that has been, and has been lost in the present (Boym, 2001). It would also be characterised by an absence in a present time. Home would then be the homeland that we would have left behind, and that would haunt us through memories, places, songs, faces, perfumes, food and people and other human and non-human objects [that we had left behind]. The nostalgic subject has her eyes riveted to the past. She would be trapped in a past scenario. Her rear-view mirror shows only what is behind, lost, crumbled.

In this sense, the nostalgia to the homeland would be a nostalgia to something substantial, having a status of ground, a firm space through which the desire and suffering towards a localised home unfolds. Such a vision, Ahmed (1999) argues, implies the postulate that the 'original home' would be a static space conceived as authentic and uncontaminated.

Nevertheless, nostalgia here is not only conceived as a state that would refer to the homesickness or to the lack of assimilation in the host-society. Obviously, this is not about simply denying the affective dimension that accompanies the remembered past, rather it is about avoiding an essentialised conception of nostalgia, by pointing out to its situated characteristic. Boym explains that nostalgia in the cinematic image can only be a double-image superimposed on a present and a past, a home and an elsewhere - a double movement (Boym, 2001). For Boym (2001), nostalgia can be as much a moment of crisis as of progress, but also a movement that goes aside, astray. Keightley and Pickering (2012) conceptualise nostalgia 'as a composite framing of loss, lack and longing' (Keightley and Pickering, 2012: 116) with these three dimensions having different temporal orientations. Nostalgia would then involve dwelling in cross-temporal alienation where different temporal regimes get reworked to disturb any chronological ordering of life and being (Fathi, 2020; Probyn, 1995).

In 'Suspended Beginnings: Of Childhood and Nostalgia', Elspeth Probyn (1995) approached nostalgia in its temporal dimension, that of the return. It is the return to childhood that the author sought to problematise, and in particular the pure return to a childhood through the act of remembering, in order to offer a critique on the discourse of origin that would characterise this return. This last, is often seized, as linear (direct return to an 'intact' childhood, that is to say a pure return which would operate in particular through the nostalgia of the past. Instead, Probyn argues that memories 'are there and they are not there, they are beginnings that are constantly wiped out, forcing me to begin again and again' (Probyn, 1995: 445).

I borrow from these authors (Ahmed, 1999; Boym, 2001; Keightley and Pickering, 2012; Probyn, 1995) in order to think of nostalgia as an impossibility of being, rooted completely and entirely in a single home; it is a variation between bitter and sweet (Keightley and Pickering, 2012), two states that are not supposed to coincide. In choosing such lineage of theorising nostalgia, I seek to point to the incompleteness and the shift/décalage in the migratory nostalgic experience and at the same time deconstruct, a supposed linear return, which would be just impossible (since one never returns to a land of origin that would be static, unchanged, untouched, and already there). Understood in this way, nostalgia would be understood here as the impossibility of locating pure origins of home. The migrant subject is condemned to be placed in a movement (composed of human and non-human assemblages) of dis-continuous going back and forth between what is lost and re-created in this assemblage of human and non-human. I thus use such theorisations to reflect on ways of inhabiting and embodying/incorporating a home that always and already encounters a certain queerness - without necessarily attaching this home to a point of origin. So what would be the effects of this impossibility of returning on the conception of 'home'? Is it possible to conceive of ways of living and embodying / incorporating a home that always and already meets a certain queerness without necessarily attaching this home to a point of origin?

For example, to take a Deleuzian approach, nostalgia is not a static state but a force that embarks on lines of flight (Deleuze, 1975). It can be productive, generating new avenues, new arrangements, new orientations. Thus, nostalgia puts the subject in an unstoppable mode that goes beyond the past. It is embodied in as much a return between and towards the past, the present and the future. It is thus deployed like a practice which performs temporal identities, a remembered identity but also a present one (Borges, 2018; Fathi, 2020).

From then on, one could also ask how migrant subjects approach new places of attachment, of belonging and how previous belongings (back home) are reworked? How can this queer Arabic nostalgia composed of the multi-root, be understood as emancipatory?

In the next section, I argue that since homing is an embodied reality, then it cannot be conceived without bodies. Queer Arab bodies are inserted in a web of lines.

QUEER BODIES AND HOMING AS RESISTANCE

'You're so weird,' said a friend of mine when I confessed to her my dislike for national-religious holidays - Arab or Western.

These forced celebrations that a whole community should comply with, at a given moment. These celebrations that are supposed to outline happiness. It's like saying: ok today we put you in a celebratory mode! Get up and be happy! But what if today I feel sick, or simply not in the mood? Or what if I don't fit in? I don't feel in the norm? This is also what I mean by a queer encounter with self. The self does not fit a specific mode of getting together. This is because this get-together includes a specific way of orienting bodies, organically, a specific way of gendering them.

Those roles that follow us and haunt queer Arab bodies.

'The day I returned to Cairo with a shaved head, my mum thought that I've lost my mind,' Kay, a 22-year-old female Egyptian queer living in Montreal, tells me during our conversation at Parc Laurier, not far from where she lives, mile-end, a neighbourhood that she likes and refers to it as queer friendly. Kay chose to deliberately get rid of one crucial aspect of feminine performativity: long hair. We walk together Laurier Avenue and I tell her, in turn, how, at times, I have my own episodes of (mis)gender panics, with my parents. How I become disoriented in relation to certain norms of feminine performativity.

I remembered how I was supposed to take care of my body: apply creams, and wear makeup, pluck its hair, keep it smooth and soft. Butler (1990) would say that it was my duty to gender it (my body), to discipline it, to insert it into lines of subjectivation, but also out of my control since there is no doer behind it. 'Body', an inconsistent set of contradictory data that had to be reconciled in form. I remembered the folds in some clothes, too tight, making me feel claustrophobic and the immense relief that took hold of my skin when I took off dresses and layers of makeup. First queer expressions of gender: 'You have to suffer to be beautiful' my aunts and female friends in Morocco used to tell me.

Still, when I return to Morocco, I feminise myself. I return to a style of dress that performs a femininity that I have buried in Montreal. 'I was shopping the other day, and I found a lot of dresses that I thought would look really good on you' my mother shares with me during one of our daily Facetime™ calls. I hold my breath for a second, and find myself nodding:

– 'Oh thanks Mom! I have enough clothes though, you know!'

– 'Yes, I know, but it's going to fit you so well! I miss you, we miss you and I've already pictured you in these dresses, you know!'

– 'Ok, perfect mom, I can't wait to wear it'.

How did I end up telling her such lies? My family perceives me as someone who has strong opinions and who is not influenced by societal expectations. Through this gesture of buying dresses, it was her way of making me understand that she was still thinking about me, that even if a whole ocean separated us, nothing had changed. That I am still here, by her side. So how can I decline her gendered gifts?

To give in, to leave a part of yourself for love.

To repeat and repeat, but not without change.

Last summer, I wore this green dress that she (my mother) sewed for me. We went out for a coffee. While in the car, I look at myself in a make-up mirror (which my mother always leaves in the car). I don't recognise myself. Who is this feminised girl? I quickly let go of this mirror which distorts me. We stop at the red light; I look the other way and find myself looking at the black car next to ours. My gaze meets that of a man, sitting in that same car. He rolls down the window, sticks out his tongue in an attempt to hit on me. The whole thing happens in less than two minutes. I am stuck between a desire to curl up on myself but also an impulse to spread my legs to tear up this piece of fabric that was suffocating me.

– 'I HATE this dress, why do you insist on making me wear it? I hate all dresses!'

– 'Oh my god, what's going on? I thought you wanted to wear it. It's okay now I get it.' My mother replied.

In spite of all my efforts to perform femininity, the belonging is never complete. During the family gathering of *al aid* last summer, I perceive snatches of inquisitive glances from family members, aunts, cousins, when their eyes meet my tattoos. As for me, I sit there politely and notice how each guest occupies the space, each one puts their body around the dinner table. With, on the one hand, masculine bodies, spreading out, taking space, and on the other hand other feminine ones (feminising themselves through make-up and high heels) inhabiting constraint. Where do I fit in this strict binary gender expression that I am witnessing and taking part in?

The hostess (my mother) spends her time going back and forth between her 'kingdom'[8] and the dining table. Their insistent looks penetrate me, even when I try to resist it.

When I came back from my trip back home, I attended a creative writing workshop on Zoom™ destined for Arab queer migrants in Toronto and Montreal. A total of twelve Arab queer people gathered online to write and share their writing, be it poetry, prose or interrogations.

It was previously decided to conduct the workshop in an immanent/embodied fashion where we would write about any topic/story that we reckoned relevant for our practice and see what would emerge. Yet, most of us ended up writing about what it meant for us to be Arab and queer at the same time, and how it does translate for

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[8] I borrow the word from Fatima Daas in her book *La Petite Dernière* when describing her mother's space--the kitchen.

us in everyday life. Terms like homeland, experiences with family (nuclear but also chosen), and Nostalgia emerged and ended up reshaping our writings and conversations.

> *'For me, "home" is Montreal, Casablanca, my books, my French, Moroccan and Arab culture. It is also my music, my son and my girlfriend'* (Sara)

> *'Seriously, guys I just want say how glad I am to be among all of you today, (even though it's only virtual… the raw sharing of vulnerabilities and struggles makes me feel at home! So again thank you'* (Sana)

During this three-hour Zoom™ encounter, we engaged in a reflexive creative writing practice in order to talk about our bodies, and our experiences as queer Arab migrants living abroad. Throughout it all, we were also creating a sense of homemaking. That is weaving a breathing space where fear, struggles and love can be shared in all safety (Atay, 2018). Homing is an active process that certainly involve nostalgia, but also can look towards the future. Making, reaching out, to meet, to forge new connections with people, but also with objects.

> *On a video call, Nour, a 33-year-old non-binary Arab migrant living in Montreal, tells us about their return to Lebanon but not to their small hometown. They tell us about their rediscovery of Beirut since they started hanging out with queer people in Beirut 'I discovered bars, private parties, and there I started to reappreciate Lebanon. Before migrating, Lebanon was for me my small village-too narrow-too religious (…)'*

While listening to Nour, I realised that through new encounters in a new space, Nour is recreating a new home along with a home in Montreal.

For some home is a threat characterised by a fear of a return to the homeland as it is a space of systemic and familial violence:

> *'If you don't behave I am going to send you back home, my father would threaten each time he reckoned I was out of line,' recalls Ghina.*

> *'Yeah, this fear of going back, I know what it is.' Joe replies.*

> *'Yet there are many things that we miss back there,' Soundous adds.*

> *I share that I have this recurring dream, where I am back to Morocco, either to my home university or to the house that I grew up in. Should I call it 'home'? I should probably mention that whenever I dream of 'home', it's my childhood home and its surrounding that pops up and not my actual [Moroccan] house that we moved to 15 years ago. I dream that I am back to my homeland, and the images, albeit varied, are almost always accompanied by a fear of a permanent return, a fear of being stuck there-here forever and not being able to move beyond what is made available to me. The ocean is also always a part of this reverie.*

> *'I try to work on my walk, adopt a more fem posture back home, and to be less manly,' Hajar adds.*

Such gender-performing strategies are representative of our survival, our resistance and negotiation of homing. Yet, if some bodies can and do pass, others cannot. Some simply do not have the privilege of passing, since they are too marked, deemed as unworthy, undesirable. They simply cannot be inserted within a straight line (Ahmed, 2006).

> *'Unlike you guys, I do not have the choice. My body betrays me, it cannot act other ways,' Momo, a 37-year-old non-binary Tunisian refugee, reminds us during our collective sharing of strategies we deploy to function safely back home.*

This oppositional statement from Momo is illuminating and got me thinking of how Judith Butler's (1990) concept of performativity is misread by some liberal queers who believe that one can perform gender voluntarily, as if one can simply wake up, each day, and choose which gender to perform or to pick, just the way we pick our clothing (Salih, 2002). Such liberal individualistic readings would infer that there is a mastermind behind the expression of gender, while Butler stresses out that *there's no doer behind the doing.* That is: gender agency works within the realm of subjectivation (Butler, 1990).

We close up on our online video encounter with me stating:

> *Let's toast to those days when embodiment fails us. Let's toast to those moments of non-correspondence. Not being able to meet, not coinciding, not corresponding. This is also what I mean by a queer encounter.*

CONCLUSION

Throughout this article, I have argued that writing through encounters fosters particular modes of inscriptions that contribute to narrate us, to situate us, to orient us socio-historically. I have suggested that such proceeding can be understood as a performative and meaningful practices that open up new possibilities for self-representation in the cultural field (Boucher and Digrazia, 2005).

My encounters with Arab queer migrants in Montreal and our conversations about 'home' were the hardest ones to grasp. Engaging in recreating and negotiating multiple levels of homing and embodiment, multitudes of nuanced, diverse answers about what it means for us to feel at home. Some would refer to home as 'the homeland that will always remain (…)' emphasising the nostalgic appeal of home. Others described it as a feeling, some as both Canada/Montreal and the country of origin, others as *'nowhere really', 'in-between', 'not belonging anywhere really'. 'I go back there [homeland] as much as I can, and each time I can't help but feel some kind of décalage with regard to my surroundings, the jokes they make, the issues they raise, the topics they address (…)'.* I argued that the movement of migrant subjects not only deconstructs the home as something static, but something which also reconfigures the borders and spatiality of the homes. It is also worth noting that the processes of homing are perhaps never-ending, for racialised migrants who embody marginalised genders and sexualities (Fathi, 2020; Borges, 2021); we face multiple struggles but also multiple hopes.

Since home can be conceived as more of a lived locality (Ahmed, 1999), it would then be more relevant to reflect and discuss Arab queerness not in terms of essential fixed points of origin that would be locatable in an [Arab] country more than another, but rather in terms of the plurality of meeting places, times, and belonging. Nevertheless, an issue remains: as an Arab queer migrant researcher doing research on Arab queer migration: how do I articulate my own privileges (being within academia and not an asylum seeker living in destitution)—with the community of Arab queer migrants (here in Montreal), a community that is far from being homogeneous?

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Reclaiming a Space in American History with the Collective Voices of the Japanese Picture Brides in Julie Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic*

Soyeon Kim [1]*

ABSTRACT

Julie Otsuka's 2011 novel *The Buddha in the Attic* documents the history of 'picture brides' who were some of the earliest Japanese female immigrants to the USA and whose narratives remain unwritten, forgotten, and erased. The collective voice of the picture brides in *Buddha* narrativises the women's collective loss and effectively delivers a transgressive gesture of resistance toward a national history that refuses to provide a space for those narratives. This paper focuses on *Buddha*'s literary strategies of using the first-person plural narrative and the repetition of 'we', instead of the 'I' voice that show how the picture brides failed to be recognised as individual national subjects in the USA and at the same time shows that these voices refuse to be constrained in a singular narrative. This article argues that Otsuka uses a collective voice as a tool with which to inscribe the shared experience of loss, carving out narratives of the picture brides as a subversive alternative to mainstream versions of American history and further claim that collectivity can be a significantly powerful means of occupying a narrative space in the novel.

Keywords: World War II, diaspora, picture brides, historical fiction, collective loss

INTRODUCTION

As young women in their kimonos slowly disembarked from the ship that had seized their bodies for months, they were taking their very first steps onto American land. After exchanging photographs along with family genealogy, wealth, and education, the heads of family executed the marriage and the brides were betrothed, carrying only a little knowledge of what lay ahead. These young women, who were one of the early female Japanese immigrants to America, were called picture brides. While these women were among the earliest female Japanese immigrants[1] to the US, much of their life remains unknown. During the early 1900s, the most common way for Japanese women to enter America was through marriage. From 1885 to 1907 when mostly male emigrants left Japan for the U.S., their initial departure was promoted by the nation-state during a time in which the government of *Meiji* provided ways for the fallen rural Japanese to achieve material wealth and fulfilment that could not be found in their immediate surroundings. Japanese men 'preferred to go to the continental United States without [their] [wives]' (Azuma, 2005: 29), and remigrated from Hawaii to the American West based on their short-term contract of three years. While some women got married in Japan and immigrated to the US with their husbands, the picture bride ritual was considered the most common and most 'effective' way for Japanese women to get married and emigrate to the U.S. when taking into account the time and cost involved in the marriage.

In the USA, although the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Page Act of 1885 was targeted towards immigrants from China, racial antagonism towards Asians and Americans of Asian descent was widespread at the dawn of the 20th century. In 1906, the San Francisco Board of Education attempted to segregate Japanese and

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[1] The history of Japanese diaspora, along with the term 'immigrants' to refer to the early pioneers at the American frontier, is complicated by the global politics that is intertwined with the colonial expansion of the Japanese empire, government treaties and laws that championed the influx of cheap Japanese labour force, and anti-Asian sentiments that were cemented into exclusionary tactics to prevent their settlement, leading to their detainment after the outbreak of the WWII. Tracing the transnational history of Japanese picture brides as early immigrants to the U.S. is to highlight their fluidity and multiplicity as 'transmigrants' as well as refusing to be confined within national histories but at the same time carving out narratives of the picture brides as a subversive alternative to the dominant narrative of American history represented by cultural memories embedded in White America.

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Korean American children from attending public schools, which led the Japanese government to enact the Gentlemen's Agreement in 1907 and give the U.S. government the right to deny passports and entrance to Japanese immigrants, particularly that of labourers. Racist sentiments continued to rise and the exclusionary Immigration Act of 1924, despite applying quotas to all immigrants, barred immigration for Asian nationals in particular.

Despite many immigration laws that kept Asian nationals from entering the country, Japanese immigration continued to show rapid growth from the 1900s to the 1920s. Distinctively, the number of married Japanese women in the Japanese immigrant community dramatically increased:

> In 1900 there were only 410 married women in immigrant society. This number increased to 5,581 by 1910 and leaped to 22,193 by 1920. These women enabled many immigrant men to enjoy a settled family life which socially reinforced the economic foundation of permanent settlement (Ichioka, 1988: 164).

The dramatic increase of married Japanese women in the 1900s cannot be explained without taking into account that there was an influx of Japanese women migrating to the U.S. despite these hostile immigration laws. Until 1924 when the quotas were enforced to more strictly restrict immigrants from Asia, Japanese women were able to gain an advantage of the loophole in the agreement and find their way into the U.S.

Julie Otsuka's 2011 novel *The Buddha in the Attic* documents the history of picture brides who were some of the earliest Japanese female immigrants to the U.S and whose narratives remain unwritten, forgotten, and erased. As a third-generation Japanese American who has not lived through the trauma of incarceration but has embodied the memories of her mother and grandmother who has, Otsuka continues in the gesture to vocalise the silenced memories of the exiled through Japanese and Japanese Americans that still resonate today in the US With powerful stories of the Japanese picture brides, Otsuka breaks the silence and intervenes in American history. Otsuka, however, was not the first to bring the memories of the picture brides to life by narrativising their journey to America. Yoshiko Uchida published a novel entitled *Picture Bride* in 1997 that vividly depicts the life of a young picture bride in 1917 that follows a fictional narrative of a 21-year-old Hana Omiya. Julie Otsuka's novel, on the other hand, portrays the lives of multiple Japanese picture brides during the time without introducing characters with names. *Buddha* demonstrates a distinct way of illustrating the lives of the picture brides by introducing disjointed narratives that braid together under the anonymous 'we' voice.

The use of the collective voice is a unique literary strategy that raises questions about the role of historical fiction and fictional testimonies in their attempt to testify and remember collectively. *Buddha* uses a collective voice that leaves the picture brides and their narratives anonymous, raising questions about what it means to narrate collectively and what is lost or left at the end of the narrative. The repetition of 'we,' instead of the 'I' voice in *Buddha* demonstrates the ways in which the picture brides fail to be recognised as individual national subjects and, at the same time, shows that these voices refuse to be constrained in the singular. In this article, I argue that Otsuka uses the collective voice as a tool with which to inscribe the shared experience of the Japanese picture brides and their loss to further demonstrate that collectivity can be a significantly powerful means of occupying a narrative space in a novel. Although I am aware of the ways in which collectivity for Asian/Americans[2] as the racial Other is tied to the history of assimilation and failure of successful integration to White America, this article is not interested in redeeming individual agency or individuality as a way of gaining American identity and citizenship. Instead, this article looks at the ways in which Otsuka plays with the relationship between collectivity and individuality, challenging whether the collective, generalised image of the picture brides is in fact the reader's unconscious at work to make sweeping generalisations of Asian/Americans as a homogenous group.

I also acknowledge that writing about Japanese picture brides as neither a generation who has experienced the loss and trauma of dislocation and incarceration during the early 20th century, nor a descendant of the Japanese picture brides, may raise potential questions on the authenticity of my historical and literary representation. As an Asian but not an American, an 'alien' living in the US who is not a legal citizen, I do not boldly claim myself as a part of the 'we' voice of the Japanese picture brides. Instead, my responsibility as a literary scholar is to amplify the voices of the misrepresented and underrepresented Asian/American women in American history during a time in which anti-Asian sentiment continues to threaten the lives of Asian/Americans in the US - regardless of one's status of legal citizenship, turning Asian/American literature into an unfinished political project towards American citizenship, beyond the legal perimeters. In *Buddha*, the stories that are narrated, using the first-person plural 'we' voice, bring attention to how literature becomes a battle site for historical representations and methods to occupy those spaces. The collective voice of the picture brides not only signifies Otsuka's alternative way of narrating

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[2] Except for instances in which there is a need to distinguish Asian immigrants who were not considered American citizens during a specific time in history, I use the term 'Asian/American' acknowledging the complicated history of Asians and Americans of Asian ancestry in the US and in agreement with David Palumbo-Liu's argument that the term 'marks both the distinction installed between "Asian" and "American" and a dynamic, unsettled, and inclusive movement' (Palumbo-Liu, 1999: 1).

national history but the collectivised narrative that comes to exceed the sum of individual narratives, which, in turn, suggests the power of collectivity in reclaiming a historical narrative for individuals whose voices have been muted by repressive, ghettoising social forces performatively locking American history into a narrowly defined, hegemonic set piece.

INVESTING IN A HISTORY OF LOSS

Buddha is a narrative about remembering and memorialising those whose lives have been erased from history, this is a story about those who have perished, and therefore, been forgotten. Otsuka makes it clear in the epigram that *Buddha* is a narrative about remembrance and memorialising those who disappeared from history:

> There be of them, that have left a name behind them, that their praises might be reported. And some there be, which have no memorial; who are perished, as though they had never been; and are become as though they had never been born; and their children after them.
>
> — Ecclesiasticus 44:8–9 (Otsuka, 2013).

The epigram calls attention to the line that exists between those who have left a name behind and those who have not. In *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, Judith Butler refers to this line as 'grievability' that distinguishes certain forms of lives and deaths as grievable and others as 'unthinkable and ungrievable' (Butler, 2004: xiv). Butler argues that this form of national melancholia, the inability to mourn certain losses, results from 'the erasure from public representation of the names, images, and narrative of those the US has killed' (Butler, 2004: xiv). The public imagery of the sovereign nation is constituted upon the active forgetting of those who have no memorial. Memorialising is a way of constructing history and national histories are sites of politicised facts in which historical events are subsumed into narratives that engage with stories told subjectively by victors. As a way of talking about the existence and absence of memories that get engraved in national narratives, Marita Sturken, for instance, argues that the forgetting of the past in one culture is 'often highly organized and strategic' (Sturken, 1997: 8) in order to build a coherent nationalistic narrative. Forgetting is an active process required to sustain the imagined nation that subsists through this perpetual state of melancholia.

Along with many muted voices and forgotten stories that attain little recognition in American history, Otsuka allows access to narratives that have been lost by rewriting American history with the collective voice of the 'invisible unsung women' (Yuhas, 2012: 1) who 'didn't make it into the pages of the history books' (Yuhas, 2012: 1). *Buddha* illustrates the loss experienced by the picture brides that begins and ends with their two forced migrations—arrival in America and, thereafter, the forced dislocations from their new neighbourhood homes in America to internment camps (Calisphere: University of California, 2005). During World War II, Japanese and Japanese Americans were subject to extreme political suspicion under Executive Order 9066, which laid out the premise for incarceration and its policies of indefinite detention was authorised for the protection of US citizens 'against espionage and against sabotage' during World War II. It further outlined how:

> … any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate Military Commander may impose in his discretion (The United States, Executive Office of the President, 1942: 1407).

This order directly caused 112,000 civilians of Japanese ancestry [of which two-thirds were American citizens] to be forcibly relocated and incarcerated at internment camps. The failure of the state to protect its citizens raises the question of who is defined as a 'citizen' in America when some of its legitimate citizens were stigmatised as agents of 'espionage' and 'sabotage.' It is only when construing citizenship beyond its legal definitions, and through the interrogation of Orientalist discourses that turn Asian/Americans into the Other, that we come to understand not only the loss, displacement, and fragmentation but also the sense of betrayal and abandonment that must have been experienced by Asian/Americans who were denizens and citizens at the time. Such Orientalist discourses overbore the legal definitions of citizenship, turning Asian/Americans into a threatening Other. Edward Said, in his seminal work *Orientalism*, defines Orientalism as 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (Said, 2003: 3), indicating the ways in which the nation provides itself with seemingly legitimate grounds to preserve the Western civilization from invasion. The nation's Oriental mission to bring 'order and civility' continues in the US in the forms of the cultural misrepresentation of Asian and Asian Americans as subhumans in history textbooks, literature, media, and popular images.

A nation legitimises itself by situating racial Others in the margins, if not erasing them from the national narrative, it requires that citizens also actively participate in the imaginative procedures of racialisation. Racialisation

for Asian/Americans has meant being converted into the stereotype of the 'Orient' by immigration laws that barred them from successful assimilation, media representation that ridicules or exoticises them by making them into the racial Other, and Asian/Americans themselves who have been conditioned to respond to those stereotypes. In the introduction to Chinese and Japanese literature of *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian American Writers*, Frank Chin *et al.* note, 'What America published was, with rare exception, not only offensive to Chinese and Japanese America but was *actively inoffensive* to white sensibilities' (Chin et al., 2019: 4). In response to the mainstream representation of Asian/Americans, Asian/American writers have worked within and against institutionalised racism, making Asian/American literature often a project of reclaiming and recovering the loss experienced by these racialised subjects. Similarly, Patricia Chu emphasises the role of Asian/American literature as a source that 'imaginatively transform[s] readers and protagonists into national subjects by erasing or containing their particular difference' (Chu, 2000: 3) to show how literature works as a means of asserting one's relationship to the nation and reclaiming their citizenship.

Although critics such as King-Kok Cheung, Lisa Lowe, Oscar Campomanes, Shirley Lim, and R. Radhakrishnan acknowledge that the major shift to 'heterogeneity and diaspora' (Cheung, 1997: 1) has occurred in Asian American literary scholarship, the shift does not negate the demand for the earlier exigencies to 'claim America' and understand loss experienced by subjects within the national boundaries. Rather, the commitment to taking the exiles and diasporic subjects into the field of Asian/American literature raises the need to invest in loss and displacement, beyond national borders. As a result, there has been a plethora of Asian/American literature and scholarship that has dealt with racialised loss, which to an extent has been pointed out as the limits of Asian/American literature. For instance, Colleen Lye criticises that Asian/American literary culture is 'still understood as a reaction-formation to American racism' (Lye, 2005: 454), arguing that Asian/American scholarship must move beyond discourses on loss and mourning.

Then the question is why must we persist in the investigation of racialised loss when decades of Asian/American studies scholarship has already invested so much energy into loss, displacement, and melancholia? Despite the limitations of focusing on loss and mourning, I believe that it is still too soon to move on from talking about this loss. The effort to persist in the narrative of loss is not to acquiesce in the subjection but to further unveil the lost narratives that otherwise perish. Melancholia has worked as a compelling concept for understanding the conditions of loss for people of colour and other groups that have been marginalised in the US. Asian/American scholars have departed from Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' and used melancholia as a theoretical tool to interrogate the process of assimilation and racialisation in the US. Unlike Freud who defined melancholia as a 'pathological disposition' (Freud, 1948: 243) of the individual unconscious, cultural critics Anne Anlin Cheng and David L. Eng, and psychotherapist Shinhee Han developed a theory of racial melancholia as key to addressing group identification associated with the white culture's rejection of the racial other in the process of assimilation. Eng and Han point out that the ideals of whiteness have been unattainable for racial minorities, seeing how melancholia functions on a national level as 'an unresolved process that might usefully describe the unstable immigration and suspended assimilation of Asian Americans into the national fabric' (Eng and Han, 2000: 671). Similarly, Cheng criticises that the nation operated within a 'melancholic bind between incorporation and rejection' (Cheng, 2001: 10) – the idea that the nation rejects the racial other but has a constant attachment with the racialised subject that has been suspended. In this sense, loss is more than grief experienced by the suspended individuals; it is a history inscribed on bodies.

Understanding loss and displacement as experienced by the picture brides is a way of reimagining the picture brides' history of migration. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong maintains that Japanese Americans have established a historically distinct spatial expression that is characterised by their dislocation (Wong, 1993: 120). In *Buddha*, as the women embark on a boat to America, they regard their homes in Japan as a past that they leave behind, recognising that 'there was no going back' (Otsuka, 2013: 12). The boat is always moving and nothing is guaranteed on the other end of the voyage, the expedition itself being perilous and precarious. They were sent off without any knowledge of their destination. In *Asian American Literature,* Elaine Kim states that the lives of the *Issei* (first-generation) immigrants are in a state of 'perpetual limbo' as their status remains 'suspended between two worlds, neither of which they could claim as their own' (Kim, 1982: 128). Immigration for these women is not a successful transition from an old home to a new settlement but an unyielding break that cuts ties to their families back at home, having suspended them from integrating into a new society. In fact, many picture brides did not immigrate to the US with the intention of settling down permanently but instead were initially driven by the monetary gain that would better the conditions of their families once they return to their homes in Japan.

After their arrival in America, however, the picture brides lose their connection with their families back at home. The picture brides recognise the broken familial ties when they note '[they] knew [the mothers] could not hear [them]' (Otsuka, 2013: 34). Although some of the picture brides dream that they would be able to go back to their homes after saving up enough money, the dream that they have of reuniting with their families is futile. In the dream, the picture brides remain the little girls that they were when they left their homeland:

> And when we'd saved up enough money to help our parents live a more comfortable life we would pack up our things and go back home to Japan. It would be autumn, and our fathers would be out threshing in the big loquat tree and the old lotus pond, where we used to catch tadpoles in spring. Our dogs would come running up to us. Our neighbors would wave. Our mothers would be sitting by the well with their sleeves tied up, washing the evening's rice. And when they saw us they would just stand up and stare. "Little girl," they would say to us, "where in the world have you been?" (Otsuka, 2013: 53).

As it was difficult for the picture brides to maintain their connection with their families in Japan, the dreams that the picture brides have of their home also remains the same, since their departure. Time also remains suspended in the dreams of the picture brides, *Buddha* reflects the suspension, displacement, and isolation that the picture brides experience with their migration to America.

Otsuka's depictions of the picture brides trace their narrative from a point at which we see them first approaching the place that will all too soon marginalise these non-American subjects, non-white racial Others; readers watch these Japanese women on the boat as the boat slowly approaches America. The fragmented voices become a collective entity as each chapter of the novel is a collection of the women's totemic experiences in the US, such as 'first night', 'encountering the neighbours' 'giving birth' and so on. Unlike the chapters with titles like 'First Night,' 'Whites,' 'Babies,' and 'Children' that concisely summarise theme and content, the title of the first chapter—'Come, Japanese!'—does not adequately reflect the women's experience on the boat coming to America. 'Come, Japanese!' simply happens to be one of the books that the women carry with them. It is also an exception to the rest of the titles, for the picture brides are not the ones who seem to be the agents of the title, and it is deliberately ambiguous as to who is summoning the picture brides. The positional discrepancy once again raises the issue of agency over one's historical narrative: can the picture brides claim the narrative as theirs, despite having lost authority over the title of the chapter? If so, how do they reclaim their narrative and assert it within a specifically American history?

ERASURE OF SPACE WITHIN THE NATION/NARRATIVE

In order to gain access to a part of American history that has been muted, it is necessary to first interrogate the history of the citizenry within sovereign spaces, that is, those places which are 'juridically legislated, territorially situated, and culturally embodied' (Lowe, 1996: 2). The history of space being turned into place entails a history of permissions being overwritten across terrains, so that only legalised citizens are permitted to reside within the borders of the nation, those without citizenship remaining tentative others, as tenants, susceptible to deportation and exile. Examining how space was circumscribed for Asian Americans within official history allows for some insight into the ways in which citizenship is tied to the right to occupy land. At the beginning of the 20th century, Alien Land Laws were enacted in the American West to prohibit Japanese immigrants from ownership of agricultural land. The laws were implemented with the intent to hinder the settlement of immigrants of Japanese immigrants but later expanded to other Asian nationals such as Chinese, Indian, and Korean immigrants.

With California first passing its Alien Land Law in 1913, the Supreme Court approved the state's decision to deny Japanese immigrants from owning agricultural land. When farming was the predominant occupation for Japanese immigrants during this time, the Supreme Court's ruling reflects a nationwide fear prevalent at the time of being conquered by the 'Yellow Peril', the Alien Land Laws were enacted as a response to protect the nation-state. The fear of the Yellow Peril began with the Chinese immigrants who landed in California during the 1800s Gold Rush, and then transgressed to Japanese immigrants with the decrease of Chinese immigrants after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The animosity displayed towards the Asian Other continued to grow with legal, political, sociocultural systems that worked to protect white America from allegedly being 'invaded' by Asian immigrants. In the House and Senate document published in 1921, Alien Land Law specified Japanese immigrants as 'ineligible to citizenship' (The United States, 1921: 4) and argued that it was an economic imperative to prohibit Japanese immigrants from owning land:

> It is the duty of our Government to protect itself and its citizens from foreign invasion and commercial and industrial exploitation, whether they come in the shape of bombarding men-of-war and devastating armies or in the shape of passenger and freight ships carrying cheap labor and cheap goods.
>
> The West is being invaded. The process of invasion has been aptly termed 'peaceful penetration.' The invasion is by an alien people. They are a people unassimilable by marriage. They are a people who are a race unto themselves, and by virtue of that very fact ever will be a race and a nation unto themselves, it matters not what may be the land of their birth. (The United States, 1921: 4)

By specifying and distinguishing Japanese immigrants as unassimilable aliens, Congress provides the rationale for the racist agenda. The urgent language being used in the document reflects dominant fears of Japanese immigrants taking control over land on the West coast during the time. The fear that the Japanese immigrants would eventually dominate the American West allowed this sinister image of the 'Yellow Peril' to disseminate and justify discriminating against immigrants of Asian descent. The fear that many white Americans had towards the Japanese immigrants inevitably revolved around the issue of land ownership and occupancy, which became a central issue of citizenship.

The law applied exclusively to *Issei* immigrants who were not legal citizens of the U.S. however families found ways around this law. In the chapter 'Babies,' *Buddha* demonstrates the ways in which the picture brides and their families managed to own land under their *Nisei* (second-generation) children's names who were US-born citizens when they 'gave birth to babies that were American citizens and in whose names [they] could finally lease land' (Otsuka, 2013: 58). *Buddha* shows how the denial of land ownership is closely tied to the rejection of legal citizenship by highlighting the discursive practices of the Yellow Peril. In *Buddha*, the picture brides are aware of their inability to assimilate into the dominant society and white hostility when they note, '[The whites] did not want us as neighbors in their valleys. They did not want us as friends. We lived in unsightly shacks and could not speak plain English' (Otsuka, 2013: 35). Instead of being able to successfully integrate into the white society, the Japanese immigrants remain isolated in their unsightly shacks.

While the widespread fear of the Yellow Peril provided legal and political grounds for the state to prohibit Japanese immigrants from land ownership and occupancy, the myth of the model minority worked towards inhibiting access to the dominant society. Being a model minority does not produce a positive image of the racial Other but instead pressures individuals to self-discipline themselves and conform, for example to work harder for a cheaper wage. Although the term 'model minority' has been disseminated into US society since the mid-1960s, the history of the problematic term traces back to the turn of the twentieth century and the ways in which the Japanese immigrant community responded to the threat of being racialised as the 'Yellow Peril.'

U.S. racialised discourse continuously maintained its hostility towards 'Oriental' minorities, but also shifted its hostility towards one specific immigrant group or another depending on global politics. Exclusionary politics that targeted the Chinese in the mid-1800s gradually moved onto Japanese and other Asiatic ethnic groups. In the early 20th century, when the Japanese Exclusion policy was not actively in force, the primary social agenda of the Japanese community was 'to avoid the fate of Chinese in the United States—legal-political illegitimacy, cultural degradation, and social marginality' (Wu, 2014: 19). Japanese minorities strived to resemble middle-class White American values and attempted to separate themselves apart from the Chinese. In *Buddha*, the Japanese picture brides struggle to show their distinct civility and morality, segregating themselves from other immigrant groups:

> We were faster than the Filipinos and less arrogant than the Hindus. We were more disciplined than the Koreans. We were more soberer than the Mexicans. We were cheaper to feed than the Okies and Arkies, both the light and the dark. *A Japanese can live on a teaspoonful of rice a day.* We were the best breed of worker they had ever hired in their lives (Otsuka, 2013: 29).

By working harder than other immigrant groups, the picture brides embrace the values of *Issei* visionaries in the hopes of successful integration. Well aware of the dangers that may fall upon them should they be seen as the Yellow Peril, the picture brides continue to make themselves small and invisible before the white society:

> Whenever we left J-town and wandered through the broad, clean streets of their cities we tried not to draw attention to ourselves. We dressed like they did. We walked like they did. We made sure not to travel in large groups. We made ourselves small for them—*If you stay in your place they'll leave you alone*—and did our best not to offend. Still, they gave us a hard time (Otsuka, 2013: 52).

The picture brides try to mimic the White American ways; they avoid traveling in large groups in order to avoid being seen as a threat.

By the 1940s, the Japanese Exclusion regime was solidified and the media began to actively produce hostile images of the Japanese in the U.S. In an issue of 1941 *Time Magazine*, an article titled 'How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs' referred to the Chinese immigrants as friends while portraying the Japanese as enemies. In *Buddha*, the picture brides are constantly pushed to the margins of society. The picture brides and their families are only allowed to 'settle on the edges of [the white people's] towns' (Otsuka, 2013: 23), and when they were not allowed to reside in even the restricted parts of the towns they 'traveled on' (Otsuka, 2013: 23). The picture brides are rarely provided with the space that they feel safe and at peace. It is only when the whole house is empty and quiet that the picture brides can affirm, 'We felt calmer then. Less afraid. We felt, for once, like ourselves' (Otsuka, 2013: 42). The moment that the picture brides hold ownership of their house and agency of self is evanescent. Despite

their struggles, the Japanese picture brides were not able to avoid the similar fate of the Chinese Exclusion and became a symbol of the Yellow Peril.

AMERICAN HISTORY: HOW TO OCCUPY, (RE)CLAIM, AND NARRATIVISE

Asian/American history has been misrepresented and underrepresented throughout US culture, on the pages of history textbooks and outside the classroom in public arts, popular images, media, and national monuments. In *Margins and Mainstreams: Asian American History and Culture*, Gary Okihiro maintains that Asian/American history is 'more than an assemblage of dates' (Okihiro, 2014: 93). Examining the ways in which Asian/American family memoirs provide access to memories and past that would otherwise be absent, Okihiro defines Asian/American history as the aspiration 'to speak in the vernacular by including the activities of the ordinary and lowly, and plunge unapologetically into the teeming sea of human experience and daily life' (Okihiro, 2014: 93). Similarly, Rocío G. Davis notes the importance of Asian/American autobiographies as a source that 'crosses the frontier into history and promotes collective memory' (Davis, 2011: 3) to show the ways in which forms of personal writings can produce intersections between the personal and the public by engaging in specific moments in history. Taking a personal and local approach to history by looking at how collective memories are constructed or erased from the dominant historical narratives is a way of weaving the histories that would otherwise remain forgotten into the existing dominant narrative, initiating an intergenerational and a transnational connection with the oppressed, abjected, and diasporic subjects formerly excluded.

For Asian/American women writers, however, they are often burdened with the role to fulfil historical accuracy when narrativising their experiences. In *Articulate Silences*, King-Kok Cheung emphasises the burden that falls upon Asian/American women writers who become responsible as a 'spokesperson for the ethnic group as a whole' (Cheung, 1995: 12) to accurately represent and reproduce the history of the Asian/American communities. Instead of accepting historical fiction written by Asian/American women writers as one version of the author's historical revision, they are pressured into being 'representative'. Since the publication of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* in the 1990s, this provoked debates on authenticity and critiques of *The Woman Warrior* created conflicts between Chinese American male critics including Frank Chin and feminist scholars including King-Kok Cheung (Cheung, 1990: 234–251). Years later, in *Chinese American Literature Without Borders*, Cheung revisits the debate between Chin and feminist scholars and seeks for a kind of reconciliation between Chin and Kingston by acknowledging the struggles Asian American men and women faced in negotiating issues of race, gender, and sexuality in the New World. Although the debate on historical and cultural authenticity is no longer rigorously ongoing in Asian/American literary scholarship, Asian/American writers continue to seek ways to record and document their version of history utilising distinct literary strategies and genres.

Asian/American literature 'shifts and marks alternatives to the national terrain by occupying other spaces, imagining different narratives and critical historiographies, and enacting practices that give rise to new forms of subjectivity and new ways of questioning the government of human life by the national state' (Lowe, 1996: 29). As a way of mapping the landscape of American racial conflict and contradictory conditions of racial representation, Asian American literature has developed unique literary forms and styles. For instance, Amy Tang argues that focusing on an analysis of literary form works as 'a gateway to—rather than a retreat from—historical inquiry' (Tang, 2016: 30). The stylised aesthetics or strategies of historicising and politicising Asian American experience produces varying affective responses to the narrative, thus providing new ways into reading and problematising national history.

Narrating the stories of the picture brides by using the collective 'we' voice, *Buddha* establishes a distinct way of narrativising the history of loss experienced by the racialised and gendered bodies that have been denied citizenship in the US. An odd declaration made by the picture brides opens the narrative of *Buddha*: 'On the boat we were mostly virgins' (Otsuka, 2013: 3). With only some exceptions, paragraphs in the first chapter begin with the phrase 'on the boat,' describing the lives of the women on the boat anonymously using this collective voice. For Asian/Americans, collectivity has been used as a problematic framework that indicates the absence of individuality (seen as a distinctively American trait). Yuko Kawai notes that the dominant stereotyping of Japanese/Americans has erased individuality and forced a collective by 'exaggerating and fixing difference in order to make a substantial and concrete other' (Kawai, 2005: 123). This is despite American Asian immigrants finding ways to assert their 'Americanness.' Otsuka's choice of narrative style continues a literary gesture of *Sansei* (third-generation) writers who linked their work to political agendas, 'reject[ing] traditional forms in favor of styles forged from their own experiences or those of other people of color in the United States as well as internationally' (Yogi, 1997: 140). The collective voice works toward narrativising these immigrant experiences and delivers a transgressive gesture of resistance toward a national history that refuses to provide a space for those narratives.

Otsuka refuses to have the stories of the picture brides generalised into a single narrative. In *Buddha*, it is the moment in which the women get off the boat and stand on American soil that they realise that they have been

deceived. The fantasies that these women had created about their new American lives were shattered as they witness that their prospective husbands they had married upon coming to America lied to them about their age, occupation, and wealth. As such, the first chapter titled 'Come, Japanese!' begins with a fraudulent invitation to the American Dream. Out of the many items that the women carry with them in their trunks, 'Come, Japanese!,' 'Guidance for Going to America,' and 'Ten Ways to Please a Man' are the books that the women bring on the boat. From these books, the picture brides imagine America as an ideal place where 'the women [do] not have to work in the field' (Otsuka, 2013: 7) and there is 'plenty of rice and firewood for all' (Otsuka, 2013: 7). However, as soon as they get off the boat, they realise that they have been deceived by their husbands, and the America they were promised and imagined does not exist. The reality that awaited them was often the opposite of their expectations, filled with harsh labour that drove some of them to into loveless marriages, often accompanied by sexual and physical violence that ended in death. Declaring '*This is America*' (Otsuka, 2013: 18), the picture brides claim ownership of their narrative, making *Buddha* a reclamation of the picture brides' stories. With this declaration, Otsuka opens up a space within which these women begin to actively write their own history of loss instead of the American Dream foisted upon them.

The voices on the boat are not coherent enough to tell a singular story but become a collective story through the narrative's development and thematic relevance. Otsuka first presents the image of the picture brides with the collective voice: 'We had long black hair and flat wide feet and we were not very tall' (Otsuka, 2013: 3). Then in the next sentence, she lists the different features that the young women have, describing that some of them have 'slightly bowed legs' (Otsuka, 2013: 3). She also shows a wide range of classes by showing that while some of the women wear 'stylish city clothes' (Otsuka, 2013: 3), others wear the 'same old kimonos [they]'d been wearing for years' (Otsuka, 2013: 3). The picture brides range diversely in terms of age, the youngest being twelve and the oldest thirty-seven, and come from all parts of Japan with different class backgrounds. Although she uses the collective voice, she averts from generalising the women as homogenous and monolithic by making subtle variations of the women's appearances, juxtaposing unique, distinct lives lived and experienced by the picture brides. Shifting through 'we,' 'some of us,' and 'one of us,' she creates multiple exceptions to the collective image that has been established by the initial homogenisation of the picture brides. Otsuka allows the women's voices to braid together. Otsuka shifts back and forth from 'we,' 'some of us,' and 'one of us' and the repetitions of these words at the beginning of the sentences create a thematic echo. *Buddha* shows a gestalt in which the collectivised testimonies become a powerful historical narrative greater than the sum of its constituent parts. Each sentence is dedicated to telling one woman's narrative and it is the echo of the individual sentences that make up the collective paragraph. Diverse individual experiences come together through the collective voice and the repetition of 'we' adds more power to the individual voices. The collective voice, in the end, becomes a tool to amplify the voices of the individuals.

THE PRECARIOUS INDIVIDUAL, A COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE

Buddha shows the ways in which the picture brides reclaim the narrative and take over the white American version of history that began deceitfully with the book 'Come, Japanese!' by using the collective voice to force a narrative space. Although their effort to occupy ends on a bleak note with the picture brides and their families disappearing one by one, *Buddha* demonstrates the power of collective memories that disturb the White American narratives of national coherence. *Buddha* becomes a collection of anonymous individual narratives, making it impossible for the readers to follow a specific individual character or a singular narrative. As those without names in history perish 'as though they had never been,' the anonymity of the picture brides raises important questions on whose stories get told in the American history textbooks and how one can accurately build a relationship with the past to remember.

Rarely, there are few instances in the text in which the picture brides are given names. The Japanese picture brides establish a different relationship with the white women in the neighbourhood. The women also call the picture brides by names - but with the new American names they gave to them: 'They gave us new names. They called us Helen and Lily. They called us Margaret. They called us Pearl' (Otsuka, 2013: 40). The white women help with assimilation by teaching them practical household skills - what they 'most needed to know' (Otsuka, 2013: 38) - such as ways to turn on the stove, make the bed, answer a door, and everything that an American housewife is to do. However, it soon becomes clear for the picture brides that they cannot '*be*' (Otsuka, 2013: 39) the white women, for teaching them the skills they could use in the house does not mean that the picture brides can simply '*be*' (Otsuka, 2013: 39) American wives. The Americanised names that are given to them only ends up highlighting the racialised bodies that could not be 'taught' to change. The image of their 'tiny figures and long, shiny black hair' (Otsuka, 2013: 40), creates an ironic disparity between the two.

The different spaces in which the white women and the picture brides reside shows the failure of the picture brides to assimilate into American society. While the white women 'seemed so at home in the world' (Otsuka, 2013: 39), the picture brides remain in the background:

> We were there when they needed us and when they did not, poof, we were gone. We stayed in the background, quietly mopping their floors, waxing their furniture, bathing their children, cleaning the parts of their houses that nobody but us could see (Otsuka, 2013: 44).

The picture brides became another source of labour, and they often used the skills taught to them to help with chores around the house. The white women 'took little notice' (Otsuka, 2013: 44) of the Japanese picture brides and the picture brides who were once given names in the narrative become anonymous.

Similarly, in the chapters 'Babies' and 'The Children,' *Buddha* illustrates the difference between the *Issei* parents and their *Nisei* children with the use of names. For instance, in the chapter 'Babies,' the Japanese mothers who give birth to their American babies remain nameless. The first part of the chapter focuses on the women's act of giving birth as to where, how, and when they gave birth, and the remaining half of the chapter lists the names of the new-born babies. *Buddha* shows the unyielding gap between these two generations when the children choose to abandon the Japanese names given to them at birth and adopt American names for themselves - which the picture brides 'could barely pronounce' (Otsuka, 2013: 73). Shifting from the 'we' voice for the first time and using 'one' to capture the lives of the children, *Buddha* displays a sense of individuality that is granted to the *Nisei* children who are US-born citizens unlike their parents:

> One swore she would one day marry a preacher so she wouldn't have to pick berries on Sundays. One wanted to save up enough money to buy his own farm. One wanted to become a tomato grower like his father . . . One wanted to become a doctor. One wanted to become his sister. One wanted to become a gangster. One wanted to become a star. And even though we saw darkness coming we said nothing and let them dream on (Otsuka, 2013: 78–79).

While the transition from the collective 'we' to an individual 'one' is worth noting, the children's narratives also remain anonymous and denied a space in American history. With nothing but a blank canvas on page 80, the narratives of the *Nisei* children get erased from the text. The moment in which these *Nisei* children narrate their stories as individuals is temporary, the individual narratives of the children soon disappear into a blank page as if they have never existed at all, their narratives erased from pages of history books.

In 'Traitors,' Otsuka marks a significant historical transition with the outbreak of World War II that affected not only the Japanese picture brides but their U.S.-born children as well. *Buddha* illustrates detainment by showing the destruction of homes and properties owned by the picture brides. Demolition that began in the margins of the neighbourhood progresses into the centre and closer to their homes. First, gravestones topple over in their neighbourhood cemeteries, barn doors fly open, and tin roofs rattle. Then we see the insides of their homes destroyed when the picture brides describe, '[c]urtains ripped. Glass shattered. Wedding dresses smashed to the floor' (104). The picture brides know it is only a matter of time before they themselves disappear.

One by one, the picture brides, their families, and neighbours are removed from their homes and detained. It is only after having been marked as 'traitors,' the names of the picture brides begin to appear incessantly:

> Chiyomi's husband began going to sleep with his clothes on, just in case tonight was the night. Because the most shameful thing, he had told her, would be to be taken away in his pajamas. (Eiko's husband had been taken away in his pajamas. Asako's husband had become obsessed with his shoes. *He polishes them every night to a high shine and lines them up at the foot of the bed.* Yuriko's husband, a traveling fertilizer salesman who had been less than faithful to her over the years, could only fall asleep now if she was right there by his side. … Masumi's husband suffered from nightmares (Otsuka, 2013: 87–88).

With more Japanese/Americans detained in camps, the picture brides notice that the 'numbers continued to dwindle' (94), yet as they disappear from the neighbourhood, more names are added to the list of people forcefully removed from their homes:

> Mineko's husband was gone. Takeko's husband was gone. Mitsue's husband was gone. They found a bullet in the dirt behind his woodshed. Omiyo's husband was pulled over on the highway for being out on the road five minutes after curfew. Hanayo's husband was arrested at his own dinner table for reasons unknown. 'The worst thing he ever did was get a parking ticket,' she said. And Shimako's husband, a truck driver for the Union Fruit Company whom none of us had ever heard utter a word, was

apprehended in the dairy aisle of the local grocery for being a spy for the enemy high command (Otsuka, 2013: 94–95).

The narratives are no longer anonymous.

The next chapter, 'Last Day,' is narrated in one long paragraph without any spaces between paragraphs. Otsuka structures the last chapter to demonstrate how the picture brides can no longer occupy sufficient narrative space. Each departure of the picture bride and their families is narrated individually and the readers follow the story of each individual woman until they disappear into history. The picture brides become detached from their communities as they get detained in camps and disappear from the neighbourhood. Otsuka cleverly shows the gradual process of removal in four steps by starting the narrative in different repetitive phrases —'Some of us,' 'One man,' the picture bride's individual names, and 'There was.' The chapter begins with repeating 'Some of us,' moves on to 'One man,' and to providing each of the picture brides with individual names for each story. In the end, the narrative begins with 'There was' to indicate that all the picture brides and their families have been removed from the neighbourhood. The stories of the picture brides are concluded by an unknown narrator – presumably by one or several White American residents who were not impacted by the incarceration of the Japanese/Americans. With the narrators completely shifting from the picture brides to the neighbours, the picture brides and their voices has completely disappeared.

In the last chapter, the remaining neighbours reminisce about the picture brides and their families, but the picture brides are soon forgotten as new people begin to move into their houses. *Buddha* ends with a kind of narrative amnesia when the chapter ends on an apathetic tone: 'All we know is that the Japanese are out there somewhere, in one place or another, and we shall probably not meet them again in this world (Otsuka, 2013: 129). The title of the last chapter—'A Disappearance'—illustrates that the disappearance of the picture brides is not the only story that has gone missing, suggesting to readers that there have been and will be more disappearances in American history. By ending the text on this bleak note, showing the difficulties of the picture brides temporarily reclaiming their narrative and yet losing their voices in the end, Otsuka urges for a collective effort in remembering the stories of the picture brides. The readers become a crucial part of remembering the collective loss and amplifying the collective voices of the picture brides, in order to reconfigure a more inclusive narrative of American history.

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Immigration Detention, the Patriarchal State and the Politics of Disgust in the Hands of Street-level Bureaucrats

Alethia Fernández de la Reguera [1*]

ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of ethnographic research conducted in the southern border of Mexico from 2017 to 2019, specifically at the *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI* [XXI Century Immigration Station], which is one of the biggest and most important detention centres in the country. It analyses the functioning of an immigration detention centre as a 'total institution' where street-level bureaucrats enforce practices of biopolitics through daily deprivation of access to vital resources and the protection of the law. The article depicts how women are treated within a detention centre and provides an explanation focusing on observing gendered power relations and practices of disgust and contempt by the *Instituto Nacional de Migración*, a State-organised institution in the hands of street-level local bureaucrats who work in precarious conditions. Finally, the article demonstrates the dehumanisation practices in immigration detention that are deployed as a deterrence policy through operational strategies in *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI,* located in Tapachula, Chiapas.

Keywords: disgust, migrant women, immigration detention, patriarchal state, total institution

INTRODUCTION

Due to increasingly restrictive policies for seeking asylum in the United States, especially since the Migration Protection Protocols or 'Remain in Mexico Program'[1] was inaugurated by the Trump administration, Mexico has increasingly become a containment state for transit forced migration (París Pombo, 2017).

> At the borders of rich countries, migrants and deprived populations are not merely left to die; they have to face deadly scenarios from which they must escape to survive; necropower pushes migrants and the poor towards harmful sites where life is precarious or even impossible (Estevez, 2022: 1).

As a result, Mexico is currently an obligatory destination for thousands of people seeking to reach the United States from Central America and various countries in the Latin American region, who are stranded in Mexican territory, exposed to detention and deportation.

Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Haiti are the leading countries of origin. In addition, asylum petitions in Mexico have exponentially increased between 2013 and 2021 from 1,524 to 123,187 cases.[2] (nearly 39% are women) (COMAR, 2018; 2021). In 2019, Mexico's current administration under Andrés Manuel López Obrador announced a policy of 'regular, orderly and safe migration' parallel to the Global Compact for Migration and the alleged human rights and gender approach of the Law on Migration[3] and the Law on Refugees,

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[1] This programme started in January 2019. It requires migrants seeking asylum in the USA to remain in Mexico until their US immigration court date. Between March 2019 and January 2021, a total of 71,071 cases of people participating in this program were reported (Syracuse University, 2021).

[2] Total of cases reported between January and November 2021.

[3] Article 2 of the Migration Law includes the gender perspective within the principles of migration policy, and Article 30 of the Law provides for the coordination of inter-institutional actions with *INMUJERES* [National Institute for Women], especially in the area of gender equality training. Furthermore, articles 225 and 226 of the Regulations of the Migration Law stipulate that the human rights of all persons shall be respected in migration stations and that no discrimination based on gender shall be allowed. Furthermore, article 230 of the Regulations stipulates the adoption of protective measures for migrant women, especially pregnant women, such as, for example, giving priority to their stay in specialised institutions; and Article

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Complementary Protection, and Political Asylum, both framed in the 2011 Constitutional reform on human rights. However, criminalisation of migration and immigration controls along national territory and particularly at the southern border, implemented more than ten years ago, have recently been reinforced with the increasing participation of the National Guard in migratory control operations, resulting in further violations of migrants' human rights. Between January and October 2021, the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* [National Institute of Migration] (INM) reported 228,115 detentions and 82,627 deportations (84.4% and 96.4% from Central American countries, respectively). In this period, 54,344 women from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua were taken to immigration detention centres.

Based on an ethnographic approach, this article presents the results of a study conducted at Mexico's southern border from 2017 to 2019, specifically at the *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI* [XXI Century Immigration Station], one of the biggest and most important detention centres in the country with a capacity of nearly 960 irregular immigrants. The project included participant observation and in-depth interviews with (active and former) immigration agents and officers, immigrants, governmental officials, staff from international organisations, and NGOs.[4] As the researcher, I paid intermittent visits to the *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI* in Tapachula, Chiapas, and I interviewed immigrants at this place who had been previously detained and at the time of the interview were asylum seekers assisted by NGOs. I could not interview senior officers of the *Instituto Nacional de Migración*, and the active agents I talked to were cautious with the information they shared. The most thorough interviews were with former immigration agents. I present testimonies obtained in fieldwork with migrants in detention and retired and active immigration agents throughout the text. My focus was to understand the scope of immigration agents' subjectivities in the enforcement of immigration policy within the management of a detention centre.

In this article, I will analyse the functioning of an immigration detention centre as a *total institution* where street-level bureaucrats enforce practices of biopolitics through daily deprivation of access to vital resources and the protection of the law. Furthermore, I depict how women are treated within a detention centre and provide an explanation focusing on gendered power relations and practices of disgust and contempt by the *Instituto Nacional de Migración*, a State-organised institution in the hands of street-level local bureaucrats who work in precarious conditions. Finally, I am interested in demonstrating the dehumanisation practices in immigration detention that are deployed as a deterrence policy through the case of the operation of the immigration detention centre called *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI*.

The study took place in the context of a humanitarian border (Dijstelbloem and van der Veer, 2019), a concept that describes an increasingly common border area that is characterised by the presence of a diversity of state actors, international organisations, civil society organisations, and local actors that simultaneously exercise a policy of control or security actions and humanitarian aid. It is a phenomenon observed in many countries receiving forced migration. It illustrates the constant tension between deterrent and restrictive migration policies versus the mandatory principles of governments to comply with international protection measures. The American-Canadian scholar of international refugee law James Hathaway explains that:

> […] restricting the mobility of refugees by detention or similar practices (often accompanied by other harsh treatment post-arrival) is seen as a second-best means for a State to send a signal that they are not open to the arrival of refugees (2016: 95).

Such is the case for Mexico, a nation state that employs detention and deportation of refugees and asylum seekers as a strategy to avoid international protection compliance.

The article is divided into four parts. First, is presented the context of forced migration and particular risks experienced by Central American women arriving in Mexico; second, will be discussed detention as a biopolitical practice (Foucault, 2009) embedded in immigration regimes, particularly in a migration prison that functions as a *total institution* (Goffman, 2011) with the aim of dehumanising and criminalising female immigrants who experience unhealthy and repugnant conditions during detention. Later, based on Wendy Brown's feminist critique of the State (2019), is presented some critical findings on power, gender relations, and daily practices of mistreatment among agents and between agents and immigrant women at the *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI*. Finally, the article concludes with remarks on the patriarchal State and its masculine forms of power and biopolitics.

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144 stipulates the regularisation of the migration status of pregnant women when their degree of vulnerability does not allow them to be deported. Moreover, Article 2 of the Planning Law stipulates that the federal public administration must be carried out with an intercultural and gender perspective.

[4] I carried out 14 interviews and participant observations at the offices of the National Immigration Institute in Tapachula, Mexico City, and Tijuana; more than 30 interviews with migrants in detention, three interviews with former public officials, six interviews with staff from different agencies, such as *Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados* [Mexican Commission for Refugees], *Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos* [National Commission for Human Rights], *Comisión Estatal de Derechos Humanos de Chiapas* [Chiapas State Commission of Human Rights], and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

MEXICO: AN UNDESIRED DESTINATION COUNTRY FOR MIGRANT WOMEN

Displaced people and asylum seekers from Central America flee from poverty, criminal violence, climate change, and natural disasters. In addition, nation state-based violence and gender-based violence encountered in domestic and community settings, including femicides (Varela, 2017), make Central American women seek asylum in Mexico or the United States. The *Encuesta Nacional de Personas Migrantes en Tránsito por México* [National Survey of Migrants in Transit Through Mexico] (UNAM, 2017) shows that in 2016, the main reasons for migrating to Mexico provided by women coming from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala were lack of safety and violence (46%), followed by financial reasons (32%); the figures are reversed for men. Because they are more exposed to sexual violence, eight of ten women reported having left their country accompanied. In addition, it is pretty standard for women to hire the services of a *coyote* or smuggler and then be abandoned on the route, which poses more significant risks, such as becoming victims of human trafficking.

Consequently, women use different strategies for safer travel; generally, they opt to hire the services of a smuggler, obtain false documents, travel by highways instead of by train ('La Bestia'), and stay in hotels rather than shelters (Díaz Prieto and Kuhner, 2015). The strategy of traveling by highway usually means the women being subject to extortion by Mexican authorities and sexual violence. 'If the aim is to avoid checkpoints along the highways, women must use even more sub rosa travel strategies which imply other risks, such as sexual violence, kidnapping, issues associated with human smuggling and trafficking' (Díaz Prieto and Kuhner, 2015: 25). In turn, the fact that women decide not to board the train, considering the proximity of the shelters to the railroad, results in few women visiting the migrant shelters. In southern Mexico, the percentage of female shelter users in 2011 oscillated between 10 and 15%, which decreased in central and northern regions. The situation generates an underrepresentation of data about migrant women because most of the surveys are carried out along traditional migrant routes, which are riskier spaces for women.

The 2018 and 2019 migrant caravans were used as strategies predominantly by the most vulnerable groups, such as women traveling alone or with their children, unaccompanied children and adolescents, people with disabilities, seniors, and individuals living in such extreme poverty that, despite urgently needing to leave their points of origin, they lacked the resources to pay transportation costs. Their power focused on giving a mass protection (the biggest caravans were 3,000 to 13,000 people) to the high risks (kidnapping, sexual violence, extortion, and murder) experienced by migrants in transit through Mexico (Gandini, Fernández de la Reguera, and Narváez, 2020) .

Migrants, especially women, encounter different obstacles when reporting and denouncing the violence they experienced before leaving their country and in Mexico as a transit or destination point (Human Rights Center, UC Berkeley School of Law, UNHCR, and Regional Safe Spaces Network, 2018). The main issues expressed when reporting violence are cultural norms and social stigmatisation, normalisation of violence at both the point of origin and the southern Mexican border, violence-associated trauma, not enough time to file a report because they need to keep on traveling, lack of awareness of their rights and services available, fear, especially when the perpetrators are police officers, the National Guard or immigration agents, or if they believe filing the report might affect their asylum petition, and perceived low capacity response of assistance providers to victims of violence.

In 2018, the Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) issued specific recommendations to the Mexican Government concerning the violence experienced by female migrants in Mexico. The CEDAW Committee was concerned mainly about: the risks faced by female migrants because of the automatic detention policy outlined in the Migration Law; barriers for requesting asylum; partial implementation of the Detention Alternative Program; obstacles for accessing health services, housing, and employment by female asylum seekers and refugees; and the effective investigation of the forced disappearance of female migrants (CEDAW, 2018).

IMMIGRATION DETENTION: A TOTAL INSTITUTION RUN BY STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRATS

Judith Butler (2016) reflects on the existence of grievable lives compared to other lives lost that do not matter. She asks which lives are worth saving and defending and which are not. Taking the vulnerability of all bodies as the starting point and their relationship and dependence on existing social and institutional conditions to persist, some bodies are more injured than others. There are bodies for which we feel responsible and other bodies utterly alien to us, whose rejection and oversight are reinforced through interpretative acts and affective responses: 'the interpretation does not arise as a spontaneous act of the mind but as a consequence of certain intelligibility field that helps shape and frame our capacity to respond to the world […]' (Butler, 2016: 59). Migrants, and asylum seekers in particular, from hazardous environments co-opted by criminal violence and poverty, such as Central

Americans going to Mexico, represent the bodies that do not matter and the lives that neither the State of origin nor the receptor deems worthy of saving or defending.

According to the Global Detention Project[5], Mexico has one of the largest immigration detention systems in the world, with some 60 immigration detention centres (30 immigration stations and 24 temporary detention facilities) (Global Detention, 2021), most were installed between 2000 and 2010. Following Article 3 of the 2011 Mexican Migration Law, an immigration station[6] is a physical facility established by the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* to 'temporarily host foreigners that fail to prove regular migratory status, until their migratory situation is resolved'. These centres operate in a very similar way to prisons and refugee camps. A typical situation observed during fieldwork was the enforcement of Article 111 of the Mexican Migration Law, which states that when migrating individuals file an administrative or legal recourse claiming issues inherent to their immigration status on national territory, the 15-day immigration detention limit can be exceeded, which in practice can result in detentions of up to ten months. It means that individuals who file a legal or administrative petition (usually represented by attorneys) must accept indefinite detention[7] which leaves them highly vulnerable to human rights violations.

In the so-called immigration stations, migrants who have entered Mexico irregularly are detained, which under Mexican law is not a crime but an administrative offense. There are two main groups in these prisons: irregular migrants waiting for deportation and asylum seekers, and even documented cases of refugees who have been taken to detention centres. Moreover, until December 2020, an essential legal reform was put in place to prohibit the detention of minors. Still, before that, the arrest of children and adolescents with or without their families was a common practice.

The testimonials collected during the fieldwork show that on many occasions the temporary detention[8] of foreigners at the *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI* implies violent punishment and, in some cases, even torture (GICDMT, 2018). This place is representative because it receives detained migrants from all over the country to be deported through the southern border of Mexico and functions as the articulating axis of the extended detention practices in the entire State of Chiapas, where about 44% of all detentions in Mexico take place. It operates according to what Erving Goffman (2001), an American sociologist, calls a *total institution*: a social space that absorbs individuals not just in terms of time and rules but to create a world of their own for the detainees. It is a type of institution that intends to protect a community from a group that represents potential danger, in this case, irregular migrants stigmatised as criminals and sick people (Fernández de la Reguera, 2020). This theory prioritises the micro-social approach to analyse the functioning of the state-organised institutions that reproduce street-level bureaucrats' precarious working conditions and hire unqualified people as first respondents. Two antagonistic groups organise a *total institution*: the detainees and the custodians, and each group holds strong stereotypes of, and is often hostile to, the other. He studies the systematic management of populations in everyday interactions so that subjectivities are shaped and subjected to institutional regimes that function through the antagonism of divided and classified spaces.

In parallel to Goffman's theory of *total institutions*, French philosopher Michel Foucault's analysis of architectural devices, disciplinary regulations, and internal organisation of liberty-deprivation spaces is the basis for studying the micro-power relationships taking place in daily interactions between immigration agents and detainees. Immigration detention serves, according to Foucault's concept of *dispositif* or a network of discursive and non-discursive elements, including laws, institutions, and infrastructure to maintain power (Estevez, 2022). In these places,

> … all who held a measure of authority are placed in a state of perpetual alert, which the dispositions, the precautions taken, the interplay of punishments and responsibilities never ceased to reiterate (Foucault, 2000: 38).

The disciplined subjects in a *total institution* are classified as normal or deviants. This classification (agents/national security safeguards vs. migrants/criminals) creates a dichotomic normative structure that works under exceptionality so that street-level bureaucrats can discretionally violate the human rights of the deviants through practices of exclusion, discrimination, racism, and social injustice (Fernández de la Reguera, 2020).

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[5] The Global Detention Project is a non-profit organisation based in Geneva that promotes the human rights of people who have been detained for reasons related to their non-citizen status. For more information visit http://www.globaldetentionproject.org.

[6] In this article, I use the terms immigration station, detention centre, and migrant prison interchangeably because immigration stations function as prisons in practical terms.

[7] Indefinite detention is strictly forbidden by both international and national law. Art. 111 indicates that Mexican immigration laws seem to be based on international human rights standards but not entirely. In second paragraphs or provisions regulating procedural operations, the fundamental norms and principles of the rule of law are infringed upon.

[8] Under the Mexican Immigration Law, immigration detention should not last more than 15 days, except in some instances where it may be extended to 60 days. However, I have documented cases of individuals detained for ten months.

Once the inmate is admitted to these institutions, she faces '[...] a series of depressions, degradations, humiliations, and profanations of the self' (Goffman, 2001: 27). During the detention process, it is common for immigration authorities to omit actions that ensure that the detained migrant individuals, particularly women, can exercise their right to due process by receiving timely information, petitioning for asylum, and contacting civil society organisations that offer psycho-legal assistance. For Goffman (2001), admission to a *total institution* definitively breaks with the social roles of the subjects since the separation between the inmate and the world lasts all day long. It is common to prohibit the privilege of receiving visits or contact with the outside world, ensuring isolation and stripping the inmate's social role.

A former female immigration officer explained the following:

> I saw abuse from immigration agents, as they'd said: "Today, you will not sleep, I will not give you a blanket" Why? Just because; "You are not having breakfast today because breakfast was at 9:30 and it's now 9:35, so you can't come in"; "You don't watch T.V. today"; "You don't speak with your family today"; "You don't have the right to a phone call today"; "You can't see your family today". Migrants are the most vulnerable (former female INM officer, 37 years old).

Upon entering a *total institution*, the person is stripped of her usual appearance, thus suffering a personal deconfiguration. 'Clothes, combs, thread and needle, cosmetics, towels, soap, shaving razors, toiletries, all of these can be taken away or denied' (Goffman, 2011: 32). Women in detention tend to suffer more psychological than physical violence, especially as they are caregivers of their children and endure the lack of medicines, healthy food, clean toilets, access to diapers and sanitary pads (Abji and Larios, 2021). The *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI* is generally overcrowded, in unsanitary conditions and substandard nutrition, all of which are elements that sustain a *total institution*.

> They give us – women – almost nothing for personal care, for shaving, things like that; they don't allow any of that. So, for example, I never combed my hair in the 17 days I was there; they don't even let in a comb (Honduran woman in immigration detention, 23 years old).

Moreover, one of the essential characteristics for the functioning of a *total institution* is the lack of access to information on individuals' most fundamental rights and the facilities' rules. For example, the Mexican National Human Rights Commission published a Special Report about immigration stations in Mexico, stating that inside the facilities:

> [...] In common areas, where migrants can talk and reflect on their immigration status, there is no visible information about their rights during detention, no telephone numbers of institutions that could help them, they are not aware of the requirements to regularize their immigration status, neither the requirements for applying for refugee status or asylum in Mexico, because that information is available exclusively in areas leading to the offices, therefore, migrants can only see it as they enter the Immigration Station or Provisional Stay Facility (2019: 227).

To understand immigration detention as a biopolitical *dispositif* of the State to decide on the life and death of subjects, it is necessary to analyse the functioning of the *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI* within an institutional culture of military order in coexistence with precarious working conditions of street-level bureaucrats. Three profiles of people work in this place. On the one hand, there are the agents of the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* who are in charge of the enforcement of immigration policies and the administration of detention centres, in addition, there is the Federal Police, and finally, the custodians from private companies hired for the close and permanent surveillance of immigrants. All of them usually have low salaries and poor-quality training. On the other hand, the immigration detention system is structured in hierarchies and procedures. It disciplines bureaucratic personnel. In turn, street-level bureaucrats punish migrants; at times, they may infantilise or humiliate to dehumanise them. Just as in a military hierarchy, immigration bureaucracy depersonalises, depoliticises, and wears down its members in a vertical structure where there is always someone lower down to mistreat.

> When I was trying to do my job, my boss would come to me and say: "You're an asshole. Why are you getting involved in things that don't concern you?" (Former immigration female agent).

In turn, labour precariousness and the depersonalisation of bureaucracies impact daily work and the implementation of the migration policy of dissuasion and criminalisation of migrants. Moreover, immigration detention procedures usually function under the rule of exception where immigration bureaucrats, using ambiguity and discretionary power, suspend or apply the norm based on whether or not it suits the dehumanisation intention. In other words, law enforcement is produced by the non-application of the norm through a legal loophole.

> As public servants, they have an obligation and have to comply with that obligation. There have been several cases where federal migration agents are in judicial proceedings because they extrapolated in their functions. After all, another public servant in higher command told them, "You sign here". (National Human Rights Commission official).

> It is tough for us, and that is what the Government does not see. They say: "There is a lot of corruption". It is true, there is corruption, but people have to eat, they have families, and it is not enough (immigration female agent, 37 years old).

A report published by the *Consejo Ciudadano del Instituto Nacional de Migración* [National Citizen Council of the National Migration Institute], confirms, after reviewing more than one hundred records at different Immigration Stations, that despite differences in the volume of cases managed at INM delegations, the average review time of the cases is 55 minutes from their filing to their final resolution. The speed proves that detained migrants would find it difficult to access accurate information and file any legal recourse to avoid deportation.

> In the files reviewed, we did not find, neither content nor justification, of any assessment that makes it possible to find out, at the time of repatriation, why the return or deportation was applied (Consejo Ciudadano del Instituto Nacional de Migración, 2017: 82).

Indifference, negligence, and mistreatment are everyday practices at different management levels in immigration detention places. Bureaucracy works under particular rules; most common is technical language, division of tasks, and responsibilities, so there is no comprehensive knowledge of processes. Only when the offices are understaffed a single immigration agent oversees detentions, records, interviews, and deportations. Usually, tasks are assigned using a vertical organisational structure, where each bureaucrat follows the orders of their immediate superior. Power relations among INM personnel are established by the position of individuals within the organisation, by gender, age, social class, and ethnicity.

The *Instituto Nacional de Migración* functions as a social space that, following a hetero-patriarchal logic, generates regulated, subordinated, and disciplined subjects which reproduces hetero-patriarchal relations with migrants as part of the bureaucratic machinery (Fernández de la Reguera, 2020). This order is not reflected merely in relations with migrants but in the development of the INM's work itself, the procedures, infrastructure, and relationships among bureaucrats (Ferguson, 1984). Individuals at lower organisational levels are usually subordinated and even mistreated by their superiors. The following testimonials come from former INM agents who shared their experiences of mistreatment at work and burnout.

> Shortly before leaving the INM, I felt that my hands were tied. My boss would say: "You're a moron/asshole", "Keep your nose out of it; it's none of your business". So, it wreaked havoc on me, too (former female INM agent, 27 years old).

> Many of those stories about inequality were repeated inside because these are people with very little education, not much understanding of which was their actual job. At the instant, they get a taste of power when a person is detained and under their care; they abuse them in any way possible (former female INM officer, 37 years old).

During my research, I observed that INM female agents work in conditions unequal to those of their male counterparts because, as migrant women, they are also caregivers, many of them single mothers. The work hours and type of work are also strenuous and stressful. Just as I documented cases of migrant women who stopped menstruating throughout their detention because of stress, I also met a former immigration agent whose menstruation stopped for three months due to work-related stress.

> It would never compare with what I lived in INM, I mean, the emotional pain. I got gastritis, and my body was affected; I stopped menstruating for 3 or 4 months (former female INM agent, 27 years old).

> At the *Iztapalapa* station, there was a woman whose shift ended at 3 in the afternoon, and she would run home to make food for her three children because her husband was useless (former female INM officer, 37 years old).

> It's tough because I'm not from here; I moved to Mexico City. My job gets very complicated because of the schedules with my daughters; I don't have anyone to help me care for them. I want to change my plan; supposedly, my shift is until six in the afternoon, but I never get out at that time. My girls come in the afternoons when there is no one here. Sometimes, it is midnight, and they are just finishing their homework, then going to sleep, and then getting up early again (female INM agent, 42 years old).

> Women security guards are being moved to other stations; one guard had been there for more than two months. One time, my child fell and hit his forehead. She (the guard) started crying because he reminded her of her children. She hadn't seen her children for more than two months; she lived four hours away from that place and couldn't see her children; she didn't have enough time. And with such low salary they were paying, she couldn't make it (woman from Honduras in immigration detention, 23 years old).

IMMIGRATION DETENTION AND PRACTICES OF DISGUST AND CONTEMPT

'Dirt offends against order' is a well-known quote by Mary Douglas (1973), a British anthropologist, to point out the instrumental effects of the ideas of pollution; that is, how they affect people's behaviour and, in turn, the symbolic power of the relationship between the object or polluting object and the risk of being polluted in a specific social order. The immigration deterrence, control, and detention policy at the Mexico-Guatemala border reveal how the criminalisation and stigmatisation of migrants as criminals, sick, and dirty individuals offend the alleged immigration-control order. The discursive and symbolic associations between pollution and immigrants subject them to a system of exclusion and human rights violations.

As shown, the exclusionary and racist practices that occur daily between a local agent and a migrant person reveal body disciplining techniques and dehumanising aspects of institutional control such as the imposition of non-privacy unsanitary conditions that dehumanise the subjects. Based on Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics as the sovereign capacity to dictate who can live and who can die, the Mexican State enforces necropolitical practices by maintaining State-organised immigration detention centres. 'To exercise sovereignty is to exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power' (Mbembe, 2003: 11). One of the questions posed by Mbembe is: How are life, death, and the human body inscribed in the order of power? There is an instrumental use of power to determine human existence and the material destruction of those bodies, for which Butler (2016) calls for dignity and shared responsibilities. According to Mbembe, 'Letting die' means restricting access to healthcare, safety, justice, and due process.

Adam Ramadan, a British geographer, describes refugee camps as places that are:

> […] under-protected, vilified and hated by some, always at risk of attack and erasure. They are marginalized, poor, overcrowded, often filthy and unhealthy places to live (2013: 67).

While there are some generalised hostile practices during detention for both men and women, such as the impossibility of making a phone call, lack of information, and access to legal counsel, women suffer even more from the material conditions of housing and access to health services. Lack of privacy and deprivation of essential services mainly affect women.

A specific finding of this research is the practices of contempt and humiliation toward migrants extending the social distance between immigration agents and migrants through disgust; that is, immigration detention generates unhealthy conditions, and individuals are punished by limiting their access to water, bathrooms, ventilation, privacy, forcing them to sleep in overcrowded conditions on dirty and bug-ridden mats. Migrants, in turn, experience unhealthy conditions and disgust as a form of punishment. They feel punished as they cannot wash, shave, and have to sleep, urinate and defecate in such filthy places.

The *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI* deploys a technological infrastructure for immigration control and good facilities. However, according to Goffman (2001), in *total institutions* there is a clear difference between the spaces occupied by detainees and guards. In this case, there is an excellent contrast between the material and hygienic conditions in both spaces. The official argument for some of the material deprivations and low maintenance of the facilities are underfunding, lack of personnel, and in the case of poor-quality food, the hiring of private companies to provide this service. However, I observed some intentional forms of mistreatment practices, such as the case of a urinating bucket in the entrance hall of the men's area. Moreover, the place is on the coast of Chiapas, a scorching location where it is necessary to fumigate the facilities regularly. Unfortunately, in 2019 fumigation was temporarily suspended due to a budget cutback, generating a plague of insects inside the facilities.

> The people there half wash themselves, splash some water on, and then put on the same clothes (Honduran woman in immigration detention, 27 years old).

Disgust is an emotion that, from a moral, cultural, social, and subjective standpoint, justifies contempt (Nussbaum, 2004), as it can become internalised as a survival emotion, which hinders the process of reflection, generating instead an immediate and visceral reaction to the object and subject considered polluting. Immigration Stations generate:

> […] a necessary form of social prophylaxis; that is, interventions fundamentally concerning the health, the security/safety and in some cases even the 'improvement' of the social and political body of the nation (Minca, 2015: 76).

Migrants are conceived by the State as threats to security, economy, and health. Furthermore, disgust creates social and political distance; it makes people/observers believe that they are morally superior to those considered pollutants (Miller, 1998). 'It legitimizes the 'affective' rejection of the lower classes for carrying dirt, ugliness, and evil under a biologist racialist-naturalist logic' (Asselborn, 2012: 26). Migrants are considered health risks to the destination countries because of the widespread belief that they come from unhealthy places and perform tasks that put their health at risk (Round and Kuznetsova, 2016), a situation that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated.

Reports from civil society organisations, CNDH [National Human Rights Commission], and the INM's *Consejo Ciudadano* [Citizen Council] show that unsanitary conditions at immigration stations cause constant suffering and deprivation. They report lack of water, overcrowding, infestations, limited access to cleaning kits; women are provided with one sanitary pad a day, and one diaper a day for babies (Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos, 2019; Consejo Ciudadano del Instituto Nacional de Migración, 2017; Fernández de la Reguera, 2020; Macías Delgadillo *et al.*, 2013). Most of the migrant women interviewed while in immigration detention have had some ailment, especially gastrointestinal illnesses, skin conditions, or respiratory problems. It is common for them to become ill while in custody, whether because of high daytime temperature and low night-time temperature, lack of enough blankets, food quality, and unsanitary conditions of the spaces they inhabit in detention centres.

> We just looked at the pile of mats, and as we grabbed one mat, they stank so badly. They were full of lice, urine, everything! I mean, it stank, and the foul smell was noticeable because they were all piled up. Later, we saw that there were rats there. There were giant rats on top of the mats, and well, we couldn't sleep at all that night (woman from El Salvador in immigration detention, 23 years old).

> My daughter got diarrhoea, and I kept asking for diapers. The agent answered: "Didn't I just give you one? I already gave you one". I said: "Yes, I have a sick child" (Guatemalan woman in immigration detention, 21 years old).

> When I saw the officer coming with gloves and a mask, I was like […] What do these people have? Why do they come, like this, with disgust? When she opened the cell, she brought the food with disgust looking at these people (woman from Honduras, 25 years old).

What is the function of disgust in this place? It is an emotion that triggers the power device that despises and humiliates migrants viewed as polluting beings, thus, facilitating discrimination and dehumanisation. According to Martha Nussbaum,

> […] most societies teach the avoidance of certain groups of people as physically disgusting, bearers of a contamination that the healthy element of society must keep away (2004: 72).

The State, through public discourse and practices, conveys messages regarding who should be considered carriers of contamination, which includes migrants.

GENDER INEQUALITIES IN IMMIGRATION DETENTION AND THE PATRIARCHAL STATE

The nation state, naturally, is a geo-political institution permeated by gender (state elites are normally comprised mainly by men) and performs activities associated with regulating gender relations, such as maintaining a gender division of labour, control over sexuality, reproduction technologies, and holding the life cycle at different levels and institutions of social life and public life. 'The patriarchal state can be seen, then, not as the manifestation of a patriarchal essence, but as the center of a reverberating set of power relations and political processes in which patriarchy is both constructed and contested' (Connell, 1987: 130). Critical feminist perspectives are essential to map intimacy and everyday practices of exclusion in state institutions; its analytical focus includes geography and historicisation to understand struggles and structural injustices (Mountz, 2011).

In this case study, I studied gender-regime functioning in street-level bureaucracies, especially in *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI* which revealed a profound intersectional discriminatory system based on gender, ethnicity, age, and nationality. Upon arrival to immigration stations, women usually need specialised services and trained personnel to help them. It generally does not happen, for one reason due to the lack of training of INM personnel,

negligence, and the lack of budget. All of these deprivations are reinforced by the enormous social and moral distance between migratory agents and migrants. Women migrate with far fewer resources (of all types) than men: less money, less information, less access to a Smartphone, support networks, and scant or no documents to prove well-founded fear in asylum processes. Further, they are more exposed to sexual violence during the migratory transit; moreover, they migrate as caregivers for their children, nephews, nieces, or other dependents. Gender-based risks and the sexual division of labour lead to vast differences in detention processing and adequate access to international protection (Esposito *et al.*, 2019):

> If they (female guards) see a woman alone who will not defend herself, they attack you and humiliate you. This is because they know which person will stand up for herself, which person will file a complaint with Human Rights, and which people will not (woman from El Salvador in immigration detention, 27 years old).

> I met underage girls alone; there were many of them. When I interviewed them, they would say: "It's just that I don't know, officer, I just don't know". I would ask: "But, when did you leave your country of origin?" They answered: "I don't know; I don't remember. "To which city in the United States were you going?" They answered: "I don't know; my dad knows" or "My boyfriend knows". They knew nothing else (former INM female agent, 27 years old)

The feminist critical theory of the liberal, capitalist, and bureaucratic nation state identifies the masculinist elements of the State as power devices and forms of privilege rooted in male domination, not only exercised by men (Brown, 2019). The U.S. philosopher and political scientist Wendy Brown argues that women are justified to mistrust State protection policies. As a starting point of the notion that women need male protection, which has functioned as a basis for excluding women from public life, there is also a symbolic relationship that associates femininity with privileged classes, such as white women's 'daintiness'. Brown shows that state protection policies reinforce a division and classification of women by setting apart those who are constructed as vulnerable and needing protection (the good and feminine women) from those that supposedly generate their own helpless condition (the sex workers, the non-feminine women); that is, they are invulnerable because of their sexual availability. According to Brown:

> Protection codes are therefore key technologies in regulating privileged women, as well as intensifying the vulnerability and degradation of those on the unprotected side of the constructed divide between light and dark, the wives from the prostitutes, good girls from bad ones (2019: 305).

Protection from the state is not available for black, poor, migrant women. Immigration agents or guards are not the only ones engaging in human rights violations. There is a strong connection between the power wielded by security forces and immigration bureaucrats and the power exercised by medical staff who care for migrant women inside and outside the *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI*. It is not related to underfunding but to structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1969; 1996) in providing medical services. There is an explicit and implicit collaboration of many sorts. Rodrigo Parrini (2015), Chilean anthropologist, explains complex forms of governability that exercise power over migrant populations through scientific-technical devices and interventions at the southern Mexican border. In Tenosique, Tabasco, a scenario quite similar to that of Tapachula, Chiapas, Parrini analysed the role of medical devices in migration governance in what he calls zones of abandonment, characterised by legal regulations mixed with biopolitical rules. 'The policeman, let's say, is the shadow of the physician and vice-versa' (Parrini, 2015: 115). These zones are shown in the testimonies of migrant women who require medical services, both in and out of detention. During the interviews, a former INM female agent explained that in immigration detention centres, there is usually no proper medical follow-up, gynaecological check-ups, pregnancy tests, - not even for raped women who arrived at the station already pregnant. The following are testimonies of detained women at *Estación Migratoria Siglo XXI*:

> When we went in to see the doctor, from the moment one goes in, well, one has the right to be examined by the doctor. But the doctor didn't check me at all, nor my children; he didn't check them at all; he asked me only: "Were you raped?" "Have you had surgery?" "How did you give birth?" (woman from El Salvador in immigration detention, 25 years old).

> The only thing the doctor said was: "You will be deported; you are going back to Honduras". And I said to him: "Why if we are refugees? I will fight, so UNHCR hears my case". But he said: "You are going to Honduras again". So a pedantic doctor made us afraid (migrant woman from Honduras in immigration detention, 23 years old).

> I had an emergency with my babies, and it was terrible! They would only latch the door the first few days but didn't use a lock. At night, they fill the place with people, with women, mats, and we were left locked in the cells. Just before they released us, my baby became very ill. I don't know if it was congestion; I don't know what happened; he started vomiting all night, vomiting and vomiting, and high fever. I started yelling for the officers. You can hear everything in there; impossible for them not to listen to me. No one came. I was scared. After all, I didn't know what to do because I wanted to take my child to the doctor. My baby was throwing up, and with fever, he had a fever all night long (woman from El Salvador in immigration detention, 28 years old).

Usually, the women who reach immigration detention centres lack access to any kind of psychological care. Further, their mental health often deteriorates because of several factors, such as uncertainty and misinformation about why they were detained, lack of supporting documents for their asylum petition, insufficient control over their records; as, regularly, when they migrate as a family, the authorities themselves prioritise dealing with and interviewing their partners. Another common issue is the precarious shelter conditions and problems they face to meet their children's basic needs (good nutrition, rest, clean water, and requirements to maintain minimal hygiene). As a result, the research documented many cases of women with mental health problems, evidently displaying symptoms of mainly anxiety and post-traumatic stress.

The abuse from authorities experienced by women in detention is closely related to their caregiver role. Unlike men, who share other forms of institutional violence stemming from their interaction with other migrants (threats or physical violence), and indifference from authorities; or, for example, as a result of being forced to sell cigarettes or lack of access to information—the women face psychological violence by not having assistance to care for their children and limited material conditions in detention. Women commonly migrate as caregivers, whether traveling with their children, nephews, nieces, or dependent individuals, or have left their children and parents behind in their places of origin. As single mothers, they migrate as providers and often and foremost flee domestic and community violence in their countries of origin. Yet, once in Mexico, they face a *continuum* of violence perpetrated by the State:

> I had an incident with an officer who got angry because of my children. She told me that she would lock me up day and night and would keep me locked up in my cell, my children, and me because, she said, they were hyperactive (Honduran migrant woman in immigration detention, 23 years old).

> When we got here, everything was very different; we were imprisoned. When they moved us, they took everything away. They only left me with a few of my baby's things. I have two babies! I needed their bottles, milk, clothes. I changed their clothes in the day and at night, and if they got dirty during the day, then I changed them again (woman from Honduras in immigration detention, 23 years old)

Such testimonies can demonstrate that cross-cutting gender perspectives through public policies are inadequate, especially in institutions that, in theory, should serve vulnerable populations, such as migrant women, LGBT+ migrants, accompanied or unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents. The *Instituto Nacional de Migración* has adopted the inclusion of gender perspectives through two main mechanisms: by primarily online training for a maximum of 40 hours, and hiring female agents to do immigration verification and regulation when dealing with any female and infant subjects. The lack of professional training in gender awareness results in the re-victimisation of migrants, poor handling of cases, and the impossibility of identifying additional risks and activating protection mechanisms.

> Women are re-victimized every time they speak with them. They are asked: "Were you raped? Oh hon, but why?" Many immigration agents are older women who have no clue what their job is, what it's like to be there, and what migrants are going through (former female INM officer).

> To be an OPI agent [Childhood Protection Officer], they just train you; you aren't a college grad with pedagogical skills or some knowledge of psychology or something to do with children. Instead, you are a random guy who finished high school and, by sheer luck, work in an immigration station because there was an opening position (former female INM officer).

> Most, if not all, field agents are men. So, I had to go in deportations that included a woman or a gay person on the bus. I remember a man who classified himself as a woman; he said he was a girl. They sent me along because homosexuals couldn't ride with only men, so a woman has to go because this person is classified as a woman and must be treated accordingly (former female INM agent).

The lack of awareness of gender perspectives reinforces inequalities within the institution's bureaucracy and directly degrades the care provided to migrant women and the LGBT+ population. Even though the Migration Law and its regulations establish the obligation of the INM to apply NOM 046, which is the Official Mexican Norm to address family and sexual violence and violence against women, the protocols to implement it are not adequately carried out. The protocols are not properly applied within the migratory stations, and as in other cases, NOM 046 enforcement is limited to the discretion of the bureaucrat on duty.

One of the interviews documents the testimonial of a former INM officer who described the case of a 24-year-old Japanese woman married to a Mexican man who used to lock her in their house, would not let her get a job, beat her, and forced her to have sex. She arrived at the Mexico City immigration station because her mother-in-law had reported a 'Japanese woman working illegally'. The woman spoke a little Spanish but could communicate very well, as she also spoke some English. However, INM agents argued that they did not understand her, which was why they had not provided the necessary services.

There are many other similar cases of women without access to translation services who are left exposed to greater violence or life-threatening deportation. It is common for immigration authorities not to ask migrant women in detention if they have been victims of gender-based violence or of any crime in Mexican territory. If they were, it generates an obligation on the Mexican Government to grant them a visa for humanitarian reasons, a form of immigration regulation. Throughout my research, I have documented many cases of women who have been physically and sexually assaulted by various actors in national territory who are not identified as victims of the crime.

Gender inequality permeates the entire institution from the top levels of management to the migrants. In addition, the labour burnout resulting from the poor working conditions, endless overtime, inadequate training in gender and human rights, and mistreatment by superiors, facilitates INM personnel to replicate forms of abuse, contempt, and humiliation towards migrants. All of this adds up to an increasingly present context of xenophobia.

CONCLUSION

In a migratory scenario characterised by forced displacements and increasing barriers to access the right to asylum in receiving countries, disgust functions as a mechanism that dehumanises migrants, further widening the social, moral, and political gap between the State and its obligations to guarantee the protection of the human rights of migrants and asylum seekers. This ethnographic research demonstrates that despite the existence of a Migration Law that stipulates non-discrimination and special measures to protect vulnerable groups, especially pregnant women, detention processes regularly dehumanise and break people physically and psychically as an effective form of deterrence.

Through different complex and heterogeneous mechanisms and devices of masculinised power, the hetero-patriarchal nation state ranks populations, defines the bodies worthy of living and bodies it lets die; defines sick and contaminating bodies, bodies predestined to sexual violence and abuse of power. These are the bodies of migrants, women, children, adolescents, transgender women and men, seniors, disabled individuals, infants born in transit or immigration detention. Mexico is one of the countries with the most immigration detention centres in Latin America; in 2019, there are 60 centres, plus those added on a temporary or provisional basis as part of a strategy for the militarisation of immigration controls enforced in 2019.

Immigration bureaucracy works within a global system that depersonalises and depoliticizes its personnel. Women and men are subordinated to their superiors, are themselves excluded and racialised. In turn, they are able to mistreat and abuse migrants because they work in isolated locations, in conditions of exceptionality, with rules that allow them to use the law as they please with negligence. A precarious organisational culture prioritises expedited hiring and training over the urgent need for trained federal agents to serve the most vulnerable. A nation state that considers that gender perspective is limited to hiring women employees, without considering how serious the human rights violations to which migrant women and their families are exposed every day, cannot comply with its obligations on international protection of women. The oppressive, hetero-patriarchal State abandons and repudiates the filthy presence of ungrievable bodies in its territory.

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Embodied Selves/Disembodied Subjects: Homing the Body in NoViolet Bulawayo's
We Need New Names

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have focused on NoViolet Bulawayo's novel *We Need New Names* through its depictions of Africa, borders, and humanitarian aid, but have not yet fully engaged with the gendered aspects of displacement and home in the novel. Central to the text is the main character, Darling's, longing for a sense of home. Drawing on the concept of 'homing', this article examines how Darling's search for a home is tied to her body and the gendered bodies that surround her. This article argues that Darling can be read as undergoing a journey towards embodiment as she strives to find a home, in both her own body and in the USA; Darling's body comes to serve as a fraught home, a site where seemingly different worlds collide. It is not until she begins to accept her body and her new destination in the USA that she becomes embodied and moves towards a feeling of home. Ultimately, Bulawayo's text demonstrates how attention to gendered notions of displacement better allows the reader to understand contemporary migrant experiences in literature.

Keywords: home, narratives of displacement, NoViolet Bulawayo, embodiment, gendered bodies

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, an influx of widely circulated and celebrated transnational novels reached their first audiences in the United States. Works presenting 'relatable' international characters to U.S. readers (including Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah,* Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia,* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*) were released within months of each other. NoViolet Bulawayo's debut work, *We Need New Names,* originates from this same literary moment. In *We Need New Names,* Bulawayo grapples with the ongoing search for a sense of 'home' as experienced by female migrants. She presents the journey to feeling at home as both a psychological and physical experience. She captures this through the layering of memories, experiences, and places in the main character, Darling's, life. Darling's conception of home and her conception of self are linked to her relationships with other women's bodies. Yet, Bulawayo hides Darling's body from the reader by avoiding descriptions of her appearance and making her a passive subject rather than an active agent in scenes where her physicality functions as a bridge. It is only in the final chapter when Darling accepts a limited sense of home in her body and in the U.S. that readers receive a glimpse of her appearance, reflecting her shift to embodiment.

Upon release, *We Need New Names* received praise in literary circles alongside controversial mainstream reviews. Despite winning the Hemingway Foundation/Pen Award for a debut work of fiction, a review by Helon Habila in the UK newspaper *The Guardian* labelled Bulawayo's novel 'poverty porn.' Habila claimed that Bulawayo's creation of 'suffering African' images 'lead to a desensitization to the reality that is being represented' (Habila, 2013). This was not the only critical review of the novel, with other mixed reviews appearing in *The New York Times* where reviewers critiqued representations of Africa as well, while also claiming the writing becomes 'less vibrant' as Darling 'becomes an American' (Iweala, 2013).[1] Yet, the book still appealed to readers and achieved commercial success and acclaim.

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[1] A second review in *The New York Times* from Michiko Kakutani praised the novel but did call attention to Bulawayo's privileged position in writing it, referring to Bulawayo's life as 'a dream achieved.' See https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/16/books/we-need-new-names-by-noviolet-bulawayo.html.

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Given the mixed reception, it comes as no surprise that a robust collection of writing on the novel has emerged in recent years, ranging across disciplines including postcolonial studies, border studies, and African studies. Few have taken Habila's side (Ndlovu, 2016; Sibanda, 2018), while the majority of scholars have challenged the novel's dismissal by the literary establishment, and attempted to reinstate its importance (Arnett, 2016; Brooks, 2018; Frassinelli, 2015; and Moji, 2015). These latter readings have explored how Africa and African migrants have historically been represented in relation to Bulawayo's text and offer possibilities for future literary representations. However, there has been a notable lack of scholarship that accounts for the gendered aspects of the novel, and Anna Chitando's[2] research stands alone. Chitando's piece views the novel as a work of Zimbabwean childhood literature and proposes that Bulawayo's construction of girlhood in the character of Darling demonstrates the resilience of Zimbabwean children. To further the conversation on gender as it relates to *We Need New Names,* I will contend that Bulawayo's novel is one of significance, aiming to go beyond accusations of 'poverty porn,' in order to focus on providing an affective, gendered reading of her presentation of themes of migrancy, home, and self.

I will argue that Darling's search for a home in her body and the world around her is fundamentally a journey towards embodiment. My argument centres on the role gendered bodies play in constructing home, the homing of gendered bodies, and seeing the potential for embodiment as disruptive. I look at 'affective homing' as it arises in the intimate moments between Darling and other women in Zimbabwe. Then, I explore how the distinction between dichotomies of public and private, past and present, living in the USA and Zimbabwe, become blurred through Darling's gendered positionality. Through the manipulation of Darling's presence in the text and the erasure of her body, Bulawayo continually subjects the reader to the feeling of 'homing' as an ongoing and perhaps delayed practice, emulating the ways in which homing is experienced by gendered selves in conditions of displacement. The article will conclude with Bulawayo's manipulation of the narrative function as a means for critically engaging with gendered narratives of displacement as presented in contemporary literature and in the character of Darling in particular.

NOVEL SYNOPSIS

A contemporary coming-of-age story, *We Need New Names* follows the young Zimbabwean protagonist, Darling, from age ten into her adolescence across national borders as she travels from Zimbabwe to the U.S. suburbs. Opening in a Zimbabwean town of tin shacks misleadingly named Paradise, Darling and her friends, with colourful names such as Godknows, Bastard, and Chipo, navigate the chaos of everyday life in the poverty-stricken landscape. In these early chapters, Darling provides a 'child's-eye view of a world where there is talk of elections and democracy but where chaos and degradation become everyday reality' (Busby, 2013). The children dream of one day escaping, and Darling seems to actualise their desires when the opportunity arises to move to Detroit, Michigan with her Aunt Fostalina. However, the transition to life in the United States is much more complicated than Darling could have ever imagined as she faces life as an undocumented migrant, the challenges of adolescence, and the longing for home. The novel's title succinctly offers 'new ways of imagining our realities' for those diasporic subjects whose names no longer resonate with the same meaning (Bulawayo, 2013). In calling for 'new names,' Bulawayo draws attention to the inability for migrants to seamlessly blend into a new culture without the risk of losing a part their identity.[3]

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HOME AND THE GENDERED BODY

The nature of home exists both symbolically within the imagination and as a lived experience. As stated by Devika Chawla and Stacy Holman Jones, 'the home is viewed as a multidimensional theoretical concept that can have contradictory meanings' (Chawla and Jones, 2015: xi). Homes can be understood as spaces, which Doreen Massey defines as the 'dimension of the world through which we live, as well as places, which might be thought of as specific physical locations or destinations' (Massey, 2013). Homes may be associated with feelings, practices, and active states of being and moving in the world and are not stationary in definition. There is a tendency to think of home as grounded in a structure, but this is not always true. Avtar Brah similarly describes the complexity of

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[2] In 2020 conference proceedings from the International Conference on Education and Social Sciences held in Dubai from January 20-22, Elizabeth A. Omotayo, Omolola A. Ladele, and Charles O. Ogbulogo also engage with the gendered aspect of the novel. They question how Bulawayo's presentation of female characters compares to that of male authors, arguing that Bulawayo enervates her female characters.

[3] Bulawayo further discusses the title and her relationship to Zimbabwe in conversation with Ekene Oboko for the African Writers Trust. See https://africanwriterstrust.org/2013/06/13/noviolet-bulawayo-discusses-why-we-need-new-names/#:~:text=The%20title%20of%20her%20novel,ways%20of%20imagining%20our%20realities%E2%80%9D.

the site of home, writing that on the 'one hand, "home" is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination (…) On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality' (Brah, 1996: 192). For Brah, the home is paradoxically both based on life in a physical location, while on another level it can also be thought of as a mental construction, and symbolic. These two understandings are simultaneously valid, pointing to how home is both physically and psychologically constructed. Homes of the past and present influence one another forming, according to Salman Rushdie, imaginary homelands. Rushdie states:

> But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge… that our physical alienation (...) almost inevitably means we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands (Rushdie, 1991: 9).

In migration, the remnants of lived experiences combine with new hopes, spaces, and memories; the result is a pluralistic notion of home and identity which is associated with these imaginary homelands. When a migrant turns back to look at where they migrated from, they must recognise the influence of their new experiences on their memories. The homeland becomes a combination of memories influenced as much by the past as by the present.

While the homeland may be constructed of memories from the past and present, the act of 'homing' suggests movement towards a future home. 'Homing,' or the process of home-building, links with gendered, affective qualities of home as well as these memories. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller describe this phenomenon in their introduction to *Uprootings Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration.* They write, 'affective qualities of home, and the world of memory in their making cannot be divorced from the more concrete materiality (…) Homing, then, depends on the reclaiming and reprocessing of habits, objects, names and histories that have been uprooted' (Ahmed et al., 2003: 9). In thinking through the process of homing as intertwined with memory and longing for security, homing is innately connected to the temporality of home, with the past, the present, and the future colliding, a network of potential insecurities for a migrant. The making of home is about '*creating* both pasts and futures through inhabiting the grounds of the present,' a duty that falls heavily on the female migrant (Ahmed *et al.,* 2003: 9). Homing is, thus, a 'continuous act of production and reproduction,' making it an inherently gendered process (Gedalof, 2003: 106). Tied to the female body, homing is a never-ending process for women, both those who travel beyond their initial homelands and those who work to maintain a sense of home in a fixed place. Homing can also be applied to the cultivation of a home within oneself, a movement towards feeling 'at home' within one's gendered body and identity.

In the novel, in the leading character Darling's case, both senses of homing are true. Reflecting how the concept of homing is tied to the gendered body, Darling's narrative voice layers memories, times, and places with women's bodies, attempting to 'home' these seemingly unrelated moments for the reader. While Darling's body is representationally absent throughout the novel, she goes to great lengths to describe the female bodies that surround her both in Zimbabwe and in the United States. In Zimbabwe, Darling finds home and comfort in Mother of Bones' body. Mother of Bones functions in the narrative structure as a guardian figure who looks after her while Darling's parents are away; Darling simultaneously fears and respects her. In the house, preparing for church, Mother of Bones occupies the centre of Bulawayo's descriptions. Darling describes how Mother of Bones lays out her dress, hangs the photos and the curtains, and how she desperately counts their money. Darling also describes Mother of Bones' face carefully: 'Mother of Bones' face is the color of the shacks, a dirty brown (…) There are deep lines on it; when I was little I thought somebody had taken a mirror and carved and carved and carved' (Bulawayo, 2013: 27). Mother of Bones' body is the centre of action moving through the house; the chapter's lingering attention on her face connects it to Darling's younger days. Mother of Bones' body/face comes to be associated with a certain type of home: a home without Darling's parents that is filled with comforts, but also subjected to economic strife. There is a longing and comfort for the days of the past associated with Mother of Bones, and Darling's nostalgic reconstruction provides a fictional account of the clash between homes of the past and the home of the present.

Moreover, Darling's interactions with other women's bodies in Zimbabwe provides ambivalent accounts of herself and home. In the scene where a woman is violently sexually assaulted at the church, Darling is filled with 'shame' as she watches (Bulawayo, 2013: 41), vividly recalling the woman's dress, knickers, and skin. She describes the woman as 'the devil' wearing, 'a purple dress that's riding up her thighs and revealing smooth flawless skin like maybe she is an angel (…) I'm worried about her dress and knickers, about her skin getting scratched' (Bulawayo, 2013: 40). Darling views the scene with childhood innocence, and it is never explicitly identified as an assault or rape. Nonetheless, Darling acknowledges that what she is witnessing should not happen to a woman's body. She describes the woman after the event as 'look[ing] like a rag now, the prettiness gone, her strength gone. I'm careful not to look at her face anymore because I don't want her to find me looking at her like this' (Bulawayo, 2013: 42). Similarly, when the children stumble upon a dead woman hanging from a noose, Darling is petrified and forces her eyes away from the corpse. She says, 'it's almost beautiful (…) But still everything is just scary, and I want to

run but I don't want to run alone' (Bulawayo, 2013: 18). She is shocked by the beauty of these women's bodies and the horror they face, and she struggles to place herself in these contexts.

This horror becomes inescapable and closer to her when Chipo, one of Darling's eleven-year-old friends, becomes pregnant. Chipo's pregnant body becomes a site of pain and terror which Darling and her friends attempt to destroy as they believe that bad things happen to pregnant women and mothers. Darling states, 'We're getting rid of Chipo's stomach once and for all (…) if we let her have the baby, she will just die' (Bulawayo, 2013: 80). Chipo's swollen stomach becomes a focal point as she is quite certain Chipo's pregnant belly is a source of pain that must be removed. Darling and her friends prepare to perform an abortion on Chipo, and in doing so, disassociate from themselves and take on the names and roles of characters from a famous U.S. television medical drama *E.R.* Sbho states, 'This is what they do in *E.R.* (…) *E.R.* is what they do in a hospital in America. In order to do this right, we need new names' (Bulawayo, 2013: 84). In this role play, the children's bodies are symbolically replaced with fictional characters from television, as they disassociate in order to attempt the excision of the foetus. Their Zimbabwean identities do not fit the task at hand. In borrowing these new identities, the girls participate in a scene that is, according to Rushdie's terms, both fictional and real. In the moment, it is quite real for them, but the identities they draw from are based on people who never really existed. Darling and her friends abandon themselves and perform as these characters in order to protect themselves from their gendered fears.

A generational understanding of female pain and suffering is also expressed here, as the girls rely on second-hand information to conduct their 'operation'. Forgiveness, who adopts the title of 'Dr. Cutter' throughout the scene, uses knowledge she has gained from other women about the female body as she prepares to use a rusty coat hanger to rid Chipo of her pregnancy. She describes her medical knowledge, 'The clothes hanger goes up through the thing (…) I know because I overheard my sister and her friend talking about how it is done' (Bulawayo, 2013: 87). The other girls are stunned to discover how 'Dr. Cutter' knows what to do, but this is the only knowledge they have about how to terminate a pregnancy. In this moment, the girls are accessing generational responses to trauma as a means for survival. There is a collective aspect to the passing down of this information from older sister to younger sister, even if it is second hand. Presumably, the older sister gained this limited knowledge from older women in the village, and the ignorance of one's own body is clear here. As Jean Brandt puts it, 'the gendered aspects of trauma are experienced on the personal and collective level' (Brandt *et al.*, 2014: 370). By performing an abortion, the children are responding to the trauma they face on a collective and individual level - the trauma manifests itself on Chipo's body as she accepts this as the only answer for freeing herself. Darling describes Chipo's face while they prepare for the procedure as 'contorted, as if the hanger is inside her already. I notice her eyes are wide now, fearful. They remind me of the eyes of the woman dangling from the tree' (Bulawayo, 2013: 87). Darling recognises Chipo's fear as the same fear that was stuck in the dead woman's eyes; the tragedy of their circumstances becomes actualised with deadly consequences.

Despite the acts of disassociation experienced by the girls when preparing for the abortion, the terror of pregnancy and the procedure's dangers are still present in their bodily reactions and interactions with one another. It is only when an older woman in the village, MotherLove, stops the operation and saves Chipo from probable death, that motherhood returns to protect the girls. MotherLove embraces Chipo, and by sitting in her arms, Chipo becomes prepared to be a young mother. Chipo's body is ready to serve as a home for the child despite her fears through this transgenerational physical expression of love.

In these scenes, home in Zimbabwe carries an untitled danger for women's bodies. According to Brah, a location can 'articulate different "histories" and "home" can simultaneously be a place of safety and terror' (Brah, 1996: 180). Home, and the body by extension, can be a site of ambivalence, uncertainty, and (un)belonging. The women in Zimbabwe represent two versions of home for Darling – one of compassion and care and another defined by horror and lingering trauma. It is the same symbolic space with two distinct connotations.

HOMING THE BODY

Thinking through the role of the body as this paradoxical site of safety and terror, Elizabeth Grosz's definition of the body as paradoxical in and of itself provides a way to orient this reading of Darling within feminist philosophy. Grosz views the body as a 'peculiar thing' as it cannot be understood as just 'a thing,' but it also does not quite 'manage to rise above the status of thing' (Grosz, 1994: xi). The body exists as both a thing and a nonthing. Grosz also notes the body is the centre of 'perspective, insight, reflection, desire, [and] agency,' pointing towards the interiority of the body, making it an object that is able to comprehend itself as such (Grosz, 1994: xi). While the body is indeed a home for the individual as the place in which interiority takes place, it occupies this unique space between thing and nonthing. With Bulawayo writing Darling's physical body out of the text for most of the novel, the strained relationship between the interior self and the flesh is made more explicit. While her body is her home in the sense that it is the place in which her interiority is housed and the only consistent thread across nations,

the process of 'homing' her body is essentially a road to becoming embodied, which is a process that consolidates in the United States.

Darling witnesses other women undergo this process of attempting to find home in their bodies, specifically through the character of Aunt Fostalina. Darling's relationship with her body develops further through Aunt Fostalina's performance of U.S. femininity. Bulawayo presents Aunt Fostalina as obsessed with her weight and figure throughout the text. Darling describes her as hyperactive, 'always walking' and 'always moving' (Bulawayo, 2013: 153, 154). Darling recounts a scene between Aunt Fostalina and her husband, Uncle Kojo:

> Uncle Kojo looks at Aunt Fostalina walking in one place and folds his arms across his chest (…) What are you doing to yourself, Fostalina, really-exactly-what? And punch. And kick. And punch. Look at you, bones bones bones (…) They are not even African, those women you are doing like, shouldn't that tell you something (…) There is actually nothing African about a woman with no thighs, no hips, no belly, no behind (Bulawayo, 2013: 153).

Aunt Fostalina's relationship of denial with her body reflects her inability to feel at home in the United States. She continues to push herself by constantly working out, despite Uncle Kojo's objections, because she associates slimness with an ideal, white 'Americanness.' As Uncle Kojo and Darling's descriptions of her illustrate, she is already quite thin, and this constant movement is not good for her and is kind of cruel, as she will never actually achieve self-satisfaction; her imperfect physical body will never become a home of safety. At the end of her workout, Aunt Fostalina asks, 'You think I'm losing weight? Who is fatter, me or Aunt Da? Who is fatter, me or your mother?' (Bulawayo, 2013: 157). Through these questions, Aunt Fostalina is aspiring for a perfect body image associated with white U.S. femininity that Darling absorbs. So Darling's first experiences in the USA are associated with female insecurity, competition, and self-deprecation, reflecting a different type of danger and trauma for the female body than the type she faced back home.

These understandings of self-worth and relationship to physicality are then performed by Darling when her U.S. friends go shopping at the mall. When standing in a dressing room, Darling recalls the bodies of her friends in the mirror without exposing her own. She describes the one girl's breasts and the outfits of the others, but descriptions of herself are absent. Presumably, she is standing alongside her friends, looking in the mirror. Yet, the only description readers are given is of her shirt and how she is careful not to laugh at the jokes about her friend's appearance because she does not find herself acceptably comparable. This competition and comparison to other female figures strongly reflect the actions of Aunt Fostalina, who is constructing herself in relation to competitive femininity and western media ideals of beauty. Darling similarly does not see her own body as one which fits into the standards around her, drawing to light her body image. The body image, as Grosz understands it, sets the distinction between one's body, the space it inhabits, and other bodies while also mediating the connection, or disconnection in Darling's case, between one's mind and body (Grosz, 1994: 84). But the body image is 'always slightly temporally out of step with the current state of the subject's body' as a result of the projection of hegemonic ideals (Grosz, 1994: 84). This is especially seen in the case of gendered migrant bodies subject to additional internalised and external policing and heightened standards. It is for this reason that Darling finds her body an unacceptable home, as she finds her actual body image incompatible with such hetero-patriarchal practices as exhibited in her U.S. friends and Aunt Fostalina.

Darling does see Americanness as distorting the female body in an undesirable way. When first laying eyes upon an American bride at a wedding, Darling describes her as 'rolls and rolls of flesh; I cannot help staring, cannot help thinking, *But this is not just fatness*' (Bulawayo, 2013: 173). The novel continues to describe how she is unable to comprehend fatness in America, as it is 'a whole "nother level" of fatness' (Bulawayo, 2013: 173). Aunt Fostalina's reaction to the bride is bliss, as she, and others at the wedding, consider that they have a better appearance than the 'American' bride. While sitting in the bathroom, Darling also hears other Zimbabweans unkindly laughing about the bride and describing the difference between 'fat' and 'obese.' This wedding scene directly follows the chapter describing Aunt Fostalina's weight obsession, aligning the two scenes provides a focus on the public presentation of the female body. While one scene shows their internalised discomfort with American standards, the other shows how bodies that challenge conceptions of skinniness and beauty are judged by women who do conform to the societal standards. Readers never know where Darling falls on this assessment of 'appropriate' bodily size for women, as she keeps her own image hidden, while Aunt Fostalina is trapped in her never-ending competition with other women, and American white women are also presented as undesirable and ruled by uncontrolled appetites.

Yet, rich white girls her age play a different role. Specifically, the novel uses the character of Kate, her employer's daughter who has an eating disorder, to show how obsession with appearance can manifest within white privileged spaces. Darling finds herself unable to comprehend Kate's eating disorder, despite knowing that Kate has extensive mental health diagnoses from reading her diary. She states, 'She is not ugly; in fact, I think she is very, very pretty, so I don't know what her issue is' (Bulawayo, 2013: 269). In the scene to follow, Darling copes with this foreign

concept of 'eating disorder' by mentally returning to Zimbabwe, disconnecting her mind from her flesh. She pictures Kate's Cornell University shirt as belonging to her childhood friend, Bastard. She hopes that Bastard and her group of friends will appear with her in America, but her fantasy is disrupted by the striking figure of Kate holding a small plate with only a couple of raisins on it. Darling responds with laughter. She thinks, 'You have a fridge bloated with food so no matter how much you starve yourself, you'll never know real, true, hunger' (Bulawayo, 2013: 270). Darling reimagines her circumstances with her friends, who when she last saw them were starving, only to be brought back to the present through Kate's eating disorder. She is unable to comprehend the disconnectedness between the two worlds, one of privileged excess, one of famine, nor is she able to place herself in her present reality. The incompatibility in experience contributes to Darling's inability to fully place herself corporeally in the United States, despite her ongoing attempt to accept home in her body.

The work of making a home is an ongoing process, as Ahmed simply puts it, 'It takes time to feel at home' (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003: 9). For Darling, this is two-fold as she must make a home in both the United States and in herself. The impact of this is exhibited in her heavy reliance on consuming the image of other women's bodies for conceptions of home, the erasure of her own physical presentation and bodily movements, and the collisions of memories, places, and times in the narration that contribute to this sense of unhoming and ambivalence.

BODY AS A SITE OF COLLISION

Collisions between public/private, past/present, and Zimbabwe/USA binaries contribute toward Darling's struggle with her bodily identity. She struggles to find home in herself, while her body also finds itself used as a bridge, blurring dichotomies. These boundaries are reconstructed, challenged, and redefined as the world changes around Darling. While Darling grows, her relationships with her family, her community, and, eventually, U.S. society, are strained, producing anxiety. Linda McDowell views the female body as maintaining 'fluidity' and upsetting 'fixed and static binaries of space [and place]' (McDowell, 1997: 73). Darling's body is physically trapped between these binary spaces, existing instead in a type of borderline space, representing her psychological entrapment as well.

When her sick father lies in bed dying, Darling's body becomes the bridge between private and public worlds. Her mother tells her, 'You must not tell anyone, and I mean *an-y-one*' (Bulawayo, 2013: 95). Her friends come to the door to play, and her mother's words echo back. She stands, physically, between them and the door to her house, making up lies as to why she cannot play outside. When her friends attempt to break into the shack, Darling slams the door and places her body between her friends and her father. It is only when Darling accepts their knowledge of his existence that they can enter the building. When they enter, she takes a passive observational role, acting like she is 'just visiting' (Bulawayo, 2013: 102). She disassociates from her body, her friends' presence, and her father's dying body and merely exists. While serving as the bridge between worlds, she is unable to emotionally engage with the trauma of the present, instead, she passively bridges the spheres between the private and the public through the use of her reclusive feminine bodily presence.

The USA and Zimbabwe begin to collide thematically in the novel, as humanitarian aid organisations demand performances of private suffering in the public space, in order to mobilise western compassion. As James Arnett discusses in his piece, the dynamics of exchanging aid for suffering are uneven, and it places a toll on those forced to uphold the stereotypes, in a 'suffering fatigue' (Arnett, 2016: 169-170). For any of this performance to work, it relies on the public/private binary being conflated in a way that is amiable to western audiences. The children go from playing a game alone, to being the centre of attention as they begin 'singing and jumping' to show they are grateful for the gifts they will receive from the humanitarian people (Bulawayo, 2013: 52). As soon as the foreigners are on the scene, their cameras start flashing and the children perform their fake smiles, masking their private emotions. Darling describes the shame she and the other children feel at this, 'They don't care that we are embarrassed by our dirt and torn clothing, that we would prefer that they didn't do it' (Bulawayo, 2013: 54). The distance between Americans and Zimbabweans is explicitly maintained by the silent rules of their performance, they 'are careful not to touch the NGO people, though, because we can see that even though they are giving us things, they do not want to touch us or for us to touch them' (Bulawayo, 2013: 54). One of the children, Godknows, reminds them 'you are not supposed to laugh or smile' (Bulawayo, 2013: 54). The representation of their bodies will circulate to audiences beyond their control and are the site for this exchange of images for cash. As the camera flashes, Darling's narration takes on the collective 'we' in these scenes as she describes the children operating as one, reflecting her own passivity in the situation. When the performance shifts from one displayed for the benefit of the cameras, to one for the NGO workers handing out gifts, Darling attempts to show the NGO workers her knowledge of English by saying 'Thank you so much' as she is given her gifts. Shocked, the woman 'doesn't say anything back, like maybe I just barked' (Bulawayo, 2013: 57). She and the others grow silent again here, and perform conventional thankfulness by smiling and waving their gifts in the air as the NGO workers drive away. The role they are expected to play is a silent, grateful one, not one where they speak in English as equals. Her small

attempt at conversation goes unnoticed as it does not fit the script for the performance demanded of the children. There is not much that Darling can do to stop what is happening, but the shame she feels and the dissociation she experiences shows her agency as removed.

Although Darling disassociates from her body in these moments when public and private realms collide, her body is, ultimately, the place she strives to find home in, mimicking the conception of home she sees performed in the female bodies around her. She is never fully comfortable in any space she inhabits, body or place; she is a 'displaced person'. While in Zimbabwe, she longs for the USA; while in the USA, she longs for Zimbabwe. And while her body is a site of tension for her, it is a site of connection and transition for others.

When Darling boards the plane to travel to the USA, her 'personal space' is broken and part of her identity is stripped from her, forcing her body to serve as a collision of nations. She takes nothing with her other than the clothing on her back, and she is stripped of her 'weapon,' a harmless item meant for ancestral protection, that she was instructed to 'never take off' (Bulawayo, 2013: 152). McDowell and Sharp's understanding of the body as a boundary helps understand the importance of this scene. As they put it, 'gendered spatiality (…) [is] a boundary between the individual subject and that which is Other to it, as the container of individual identity, but also as a permeable boundary which leaks and bleeds and is penetrable' (McDowell and Sharp, 1997: 3). For Darling, her personal space, her body's boundary, is physically and psychologically violated by the screening at the airport. While she is removed from her homeland, her connection to the homeland is also removed from her, as her body is a 'permeable' boundary.

Collisions between time and place also manifest themselves through Darling's body, namely in moments when she is incapable of reconciling the realities she is positioned between. For instance, on a drive to the mall, Darling expresses a disconnect from the other girls and their fascination with U.S. popular culture. While the singer Rihanna is playing on the car radio, Darling describes the song as 'stupid' and expresses contempt that Rihanna is being treated like 'a humanitarian crisis, like it was the Sudan or something' (Bulawayo, 2013: 220). She, then, begins singing the lyrics to a song she and her friends in Zimbabwe sang to drown out the music. She describes herself as being 'transported,' 'no longer in America (…) I am home-home now, with my friends at school' as the words fall from her mouth (Bulawayo, 2013: 222). The separation between Darling and her American friends is made clear in this scene, as she holds a stronger relation to an imaginary moment constructed from memories of her friends, than to those actual friends surrounding her in the car. Importantly, she expresses that she is not at home in the USA, surrounded by her American friends, but her 'home-home' is back in Zimbabwe when she is surrounded by her school friends. In going to the United States, the mythic place of desire has been actualised, but it is not where she feels she belongs. It cannot live up to the expectations she painted for it back in Zimbabwe. She looks back in this scene and constructs an imaginary homeland based on her memories of her friends' bodies, placing herself in the centre of the mix, but without revealing her body's appearance or actions except in relation to others. Her inability to fully inhabit her locality is expressed in her disconnection to the present, leading her identity to be torn between how she sees herself in Zimbabwe and in the United States.

A comparable instance occurs while Darling and her U.S. friends are watching pornography, and her mother's call interrupts them. This is perhaps a rite of passage for young adults in western societies. Although she is in the USA, when she hears the chatter of her old friends' voices on the phone, she responds by constructing mental images of them and being transported back home. She states:

> I get goosebumps from hearing them talk. There is a strange feeling coming over me and I feel this dizziness and I have to sit down. Time dissolves like we are in a movie scene and I have maybe entered the telephone and travelled through the lines to home. I've never left and I am ten again (…) We're teasing Godknows for his buttocks, we're watching a fight, we're imitating church people, we're watching someone get buried (Bulawayo, 2013: 208).

What emerges from her disassociation is the privileging of Darling's nation of origin as the dominant frame of reference. In this instance, she reverts to the bodies and spaces she deems familiar to cope with the strangeness she is subjected to onscreen. What it calls attention to is how being trapped in the diaspora leads to competing understandings of self in relation to space and others. As Brah notes, '[Diasporas] are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble, and reconfigure' (Brah, 1996: 193). This scene illustrates the collision of memories and the present, and Darling's constant need to reconfigure and attempt to carve out space for herself in the present, past, and the imaginary homeland she constructs in order to comfort herself.

DIS/EMBODIMENT

Placing Seyla Benhabib and Elizabeth Grosz's definitions of embodiment in conversation with one another provides the framework for thinking through embodiment as it relates to displacement, home, and gendered bodies. Benhabib most simply defines embodiment as, 'the self develop[ing] an *embodied* identity, a certain mode of being in one's body and living that body…through the social-historical, symbolic constitution, and interpretation of the anatomical differences of the sexes' (Benhabib, 1992: 152). Hence, embodiment, to Benhabib, describes a state of existence that is not stagnant, but moves through discursive categories. Benhabib's definition does not necessarily connect to the fleshed body though. Grosz explicitly does this by linking embodiment to the corporeal body. She argues that embodiment and corporeality 'insist on alterity' (Grosz, 1994: 209). She then goes on to state that, 'Alterity is the very possibility and process of embodiment; it conditions but is also a product of the pliability or plasticity of bodies which makes them other than themselves, other than their 'nature,' their functions and identities' (Grosz, 1994: 209). It is through alterity that Grosz articulates how concrete, specific bodies emerge as something other than themselves through discourse as well as materiality. Alterity positions embodiment as both the means and the medium by which bodies become specific identities, but, alone, Grosz's definition leaves out the notion of embodiment as the body being lived in. In connecting Benhabib and Grosz's approaches to embodiment, one can better conceptualise embodiment as lived bodies, a corporeal body experienced in alterity.

In thinking through embodiment as it relates to forced and elective migration, Liisa Malkki extends a way to understand the severed relationship between the body, the space or place in which the individual is physically rooted, and the person's perception of these estrangements. Darling's lack of embodiment reflects her not feeling fully at home in her body nor in the spaces she inhabits; her desire for a home is internalised, and homing is a fraught process for her. Malkki's understanding of the internalised responses of the refugee, immigrant, or displaced person as a factor that psychologically impacts those who are experiencing harsh conditions or are removed from their place of origin is helpful in understanding Darling's state. She writes:

> Our sedentarist assumptions about attachment to place lead us to define displacement as not a fact about the sociopolitical context, but rather as an inner condition of the displaced (…) of not only bodily disconnection from homeland, but of disconnection between the body, space, and mind (Malkki, 1992: 33-34).

What Malkki is referencing here is the internal or psychical response to displacement, and how this is stimulated by our society's biased, sedentarist approach to the world. In other words, displacement does not only refer to the physical movement from homeland to foreign soil, but also to the psychological attempts to comprehend the self in these changed conditions. Bulawayo's decision to exclude Darling's body from most of the text is reflective of an attempt to capture the complexities of the diasporic experience. The juxtaposition of time and place throughout the novel illustrates this profound disconnect between spaces that Darling experiences.

In the final chapter of the novel, Darling's constructions of home shatter, when she is forced to confront herself. It is in this final phase of the novel where Darling's body enters the narrative. As Brah asks, 'When does a location *become* home? What is the difference between "feeling at home" and staking claim to a place as one's own?' (Brah, 1996: 193). Darling stakes claim to her body and her physical location in the USA as she becomes embodied in the face of conflict, rather than acting passively as she has in the past. She is forced to acknowledge her body and how her mind has become disconnected from her conceptions of both home and self. The break begins when she writes *iBio iyirabishi* on her bedroom wall and continues to decorate around it in red marker. The statement is a Ndebele English phrase meaning 'Biology is rubbish' an insult she is waging against the Biology assignment she is supposed to complete - but could also be read as an insult against her gendered body (Sibanda, 2018: 86). She realises what she has done and runs to get cleaning supplies to erase the words from the wall. It is here that Bulawayo begins to provide descriptions of her body. She runs directly into the kitchen table and the pain she feels is expressed, as is the feeling of her body moving through the house. When she returns to her room, she attempts to wipe the marker from the wall which results in the wall appearing as though it is bleeding, reflecting symbolically both her mental state and her relationship to the United States.

The following morning, in a panic, she covers the bloody walls with artifacts from Zimbabwe. Her movements are described as she rummages through the box, and she feels an ache in her heart. As this is happening, Darling's memories are swirling in the text, jumping from Zimbabwe, to her aunt's affair, to a scene of a club in the USA, with sexual dancing. She is unable to ground herself in the present until she calls her mother in Zimbabwe. Chipo answers and argues that Zimbabwe is no longer Darling's home. It is symbolic that Chipo delivers this message, with her daughter named after Darling by her side, showing a physical body replacing her old spot alongside her friend. The same child they attempted to abort is now grown and is Darling's replacement. Chipo says:

> You left it, Darling, my dear, you left the house burning and you have the guts to tell me in that stupid accent that you were not even born with, that doesn't even suit you, that this is your country? (Bulawayo, 2013: 288).

Darling attempts to reconcile this conversation by referencing the television news she saw on the BBC, but she realises she has become just as bad as the Americans that surround her. Chipo draws this to light stating, 'But you are not the one suffering (…) it's us who stayed here feeling the real suffering, so it's us who have a right to even say anything' (Bulawayo, 2013: 187). Darling's response is outlined entirely by her bodily movements and physical responses from here to the end of the chapter. Every movement she makes and every feeling she has is clearly denoted; her embodied self interrupts the passive, dissociative roles she was previously subjected to, and she gains a sense of home displayed through her embodied agency.

What Bulawayo accomplishes in this scene is the shattering of Darling's nostalgic perception of home in Zimbabwe and her perception of lost, childhood self. Before the call, Darling is beginning to own and control her body independently from others in the United States. Her bodily pain is thoroughly described, and she acts independently without relying on others' bodies. No one is around her when she decides to draw on the wall; it is all her own actions. But, as she is coming to own and understand herself, she loses her connection with her homeland. She attempts to reconcile this by using decorations to cover her actions, and by calling her mother for reassurance. The hanging of the decorations over the blood-coloured wall reflects the layering of her identity. This imbalance between her Zimbabwean and American identity has been her internal conflict throughout the novel, and here she physically confronts it. Yet, the phone call pushes her even further away from her past identity, and her community of origin no longer allows her to identify with them.

CONCLUSION

Bulawayo's construction of the lead character Darling in *We Need New Names* reflects the complex experiences of displacement for female migrants. By layering memories over the present moment and writing Darling's body out of the text, readers are subjected to the process of homing and experience Darling's conception of self and home as a journey towards embodiment. Mother of Bones and the women around Darling in Zimbabwe at the beginning of the novel lay the foundation for her conception of home, and by extension body, as a space of both comfort and danger. Her attempts at homing are two-fold, as she looks to other women for home and also must address home in her own body. Collisions of public/private, past/present, and Zimbabwe/USA capture the psychological toll and disassociation she faces as she struggles to accept her body as her home, as her body functions as a bridge between spheres. When she finally accepts embodiment and becomes somewhat at home with herself, her identity unravels, forcing her to be an active agent to claim her identity, rather than a passive, reactive reflection of others.

Originating out of a particularly rich literary moment, *We Need New Names* offers readers an intimate picture of how displacement and the search for home manifest themselves in gendered bodies. Future analyses may further explore the connection between *We Need New Names* and other transnational works of literature as they relate to gendered notions of homing and embodiment. Although Darling's life may be a fictionalised one, the commentary it provides is poignant. Bulawayo's work humanises how living in the diaspora impacts perceptions of the self and conveys previously unimaginable conditions and feelings to readers living outside the diaspora with raw, unique power.

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Domestic Contradictions: Race and Gendered Citizenship from Reconstruction to Welfare Reform

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Priya Kandaswamy's book *Domestic Contradictions* makes an important contribution to both intersectional thought and feminist analyses of the American welfare system. By juxtaposing the current welfare system to the work of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands in the first six years after the Civil War, the author compellingly argues that today's welfare system reforms aim at producing a class of lower wage workers whose identities mirror the racial discriminatory ideological presuppositions that have persisted since the Reconstruction Era. These enduring presuppositions themselves contribute to motivating those welfare reforms. According to Kandaswamy, in the aftermath of the Civil War the Freedman's Bureau was nominally instituted to assist freedpeople in becoming citizens by helping the transition from slavery to freedom, from being considered property to having citizenship, but reading the documents of the Bureau's archive in a different light allows one to account for the persistence of poverty and the failure of freedpeople to fully embody idealised heteropatriarchal roles.[1] The author's extensive archival research supports her hypothesis that the Freedman Bureau's officers were rather concerned with assuaging the anxieties that emancipation occasioned in the dominant, predominantly white part of society. Kandaswamy shows that the way in which citizenship and personhood were extended through labour and marriage contracts represents a direct response to such anxieties and constitutes an attempt to suppress alternative forms of embodying freedom.

While the archival work and the historical depth of Kandaswamy's text bring to light important aspects of the Reconstruction Era—from the process of naming and recording the identities of black people to the idiosyncratic ideas about freedom the Bureau's officials tried to impose on freedmen and freedwomen—*Domestic Contradiction* is neither comprised of a historical investigation nor of a linear chronological narration from the Reconstruction Era to today's welfare reforms. On the contrary, building on the idea of 'palimpsest' as articulated by M. Jacqui Alexander in her recent book *Pedagogies of Crossing*, Kandaswamy frees her work from the idea of historical progression and instead shows the persistence of past ideas, fears, and anxieties in recent welfare reforms. The metaphor that the concept of palimpsest offers—that of a text that has been only imperfectly erased and which confuses the words of the present—allows us to see in the narration of the past confusing, indistinct, and

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[1] Kandaswamy cites the work of Anjali Arondekar, who suggests the relevance of real-life effects in order to orient the reading of archival sources.

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disorganising forces still at work in the present rather than chronologically distinct events which may be identified as explanatory causes for present problems. It allows us to see, in the conflation of heteronormative ideals with the injunction to work to become a deserving citizen, the determination to maintain and secure a labour force that can be exploited as much as needed in the interests of those that perceive themselves as deserving citizens.

Accordingly, Kandaswamy shows that the persistence of systemic racism and inequality is easily ignored as the origin of black people's social and economic difficulties because the work of the Freedmen's Bureau projected such difficulties onto black bodies themselves; in fact, by pathologising their genders, sexual behaviours, and kinship relationships and by connecting these behaviours to socio-economical struggles, social reformers have kept black people in a state of perpetual scrutiny. Such scrutiny has invariably confirmed its own assumptions, and several reformers, scholars, and policy makers have ascribed the responsibility for black people's poverty and social difficulties to their family and kinship systems, to their 'failure' to live a settled life or to form heteronormative nuclear families, and in general, to their 'failure' to conform to sexual and gender norms.[2] While this supposed failure has been alternatively read either as a sign of black people's unworthiness to become citizens and members of society or as a residual effect of slavery's degradation, the responsibility for social and economic hardship is typically perceived as still lying with black people themselves. As a result, old and new reforms of public assistance programs all respond to hardship with an injunction to norm the bodies and lives of black people—black women in particular—instead of finding solutions for social and economic inequality.

Kandaswamy notices that present discourses about public assistance programs construe such reforms as innovative despite the recurrence of the same prejudices and stereotypes and the unvarying nature of these reforms' solutions. She suggests that this is possible precisely because the anxieties these reforms attempt to respond to remain unclear and are not explicitly linked, in the public and political sphere, to those that circulated in the aftermath of slavery. It is therefore a great contribution of Kandaswamy's book to link discourses about public assistance to the social inequality they actively contribute to maintain and the hierarchies of gender and race they attempt to naturalise. By uncovering these unspoken presuppositions and by compellingly arguing that they shape the current system, it becomes possible to read, in what appears as inclusion and assistance, new forms of subjugation.

These forms of subjugations rest on the stratifications of race, gender, and class that justified past structures of violence and past phenomena of oppression. The idea of 'seething presence' formulated by sociologist Avery Gordon in *Ghostly Matters* suggests that the social sphere is continuously haunted both by what these structures bring about and by what they try to erase or contain. By taking seriously the suggestion to pay attention to what surreptitiously invades our present, yet remains generally unrecognised, Kandaswamy identifies not only the actual aims of different welfare reforms, but also the alternative ideas of freedom that could have been and still can be embodied. While the obsession with work, financial autonomy, and the heteronormative family in welfare reform discourse reveals the shadow of the anxieties around restitution and integration that accompanied emancipation, the forms of life that these policies tried to reform can still lead the way towards alternative understandings of personhood, family, and freedom. Stigmatised figures such as the vagrant, the prostitute, or the welfare queen exemplify ideas of kinship that both threaten the domestic ideals of the nation and illuminate a different way of thinking and embodying freedom and citizenship. It is one of the great accomplishments of *Domestic Contradictions* to pay attention to these figures that appeared through archival research and to allow their voices to be heard, not as figures of resistance but as invitations to explore alternative ways of being. Because these alternatives directly defy the United States' ideal of heteropatriarchal family organisation, Kandaswamy suggest considering them as queer figures.[3]

Kandasamy's original archival research occupies the central three chapters of her book, while the first and last chapter of *Domestic Contradictions* establish and analyse the connection between the welfare reforms of the 90s and the work of the Freedmen's Bureau. The first chapter, 'Welfare Reform and the Afterlife of Slavery', establishes the point of departure for the author's research: the discourses and presentations of the welfare reforms during the Clinton and Bush administrations. These reforms, as well as the way they were presented, emphasised the importance of autonomy and of hard work. At the signing of the law in 1996, Lillie Harden, the woman chosen to represent a successful example of welfare-to-work programmes, declared herself grateful for the opportunity to work that had been given to her by the programme because she had been able to become the model of a hard-working person for her children. Kandaswamy teases out the ideological presupposition of these discourses around welfare reform and argues that the roles of mother and service worker are intertwined when it comes to black women, who are consistently pushed to become low-wage labourers.

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[2] Among other works and reports, Kandaswamy also cites the 1965 Moynihan Report. Kandaswamy's approach greatly resonates with and complements the analysis of the report by Hortense Spillers in her critical and fundamental text 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe'.

[3] Kandaswamy's suggestion to consider these figures as queer rests on Cathy Cohen's reflection. Cf. Cathy J. Cohen, 'Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens; the Radical Potential of Queer Politics?'.

Kandasamy's second chapter, 'Making State, Making Family,' shows that the gendered dichotomy of the public and private spheres does not allow us to understand the experience of black Americans since emancipation—in contrast to feminist analysis that have interpreted the welfare system as confining women to domesticity. In fact, while white women's role inside the house was protected, black women had to work outside of their homes in order to show their suitability to become free citizens. Indeed, when freedwomen tried to care for their families by choosing to stay at home they were accused of 'playing the lady'. Thus, white families could embody the gendered ideal of the family, while black people were in a permanent state of failure regarding the liberal notions of personhood, marriage, and the general heteropatriarchal organisation of society. Of course, black people had established and maintained complex family relations and kinship systems despite the violence of slavery and the forced separations they endured, but these alternative systems have been completely disregarded. Moreover, the attempt to search for family members that had been sold and moved to other parts of the country was considered with suspicion and perceived as a threat. As a result, black people that did not immediately conform to the dominant culture were punished for vagrancy. The Freedmen's Bureau encouraged both marriage and a sedentary life and the identities of freedpeople were often recorded upon the fulfilment of these two conditions.

While marriage was presented as a way to enter society and be acknowledged as a citizen, Kandaswamy shows in the following chapter, 'Marriage and the Making of Gendered Citizenship,' that it did not grant the privacy and independence to black people that it granted to white families. In fact, the Freedmen's Bureau's evaluations of requests for public assistance as well as the assessments of later welfare reforms appeared to justify a constant scrutiny of black people's most intimate lives and kinship organisation. Black people had to show their deservingness to be included in the social fabric of the nation by conforming to the dominant liberal culture's norms of heteropatriarchy and economic autonomy. However, as the material conditions of those that had been enslaved were extremely difficult, embodying liberal ideals of economic autonomy was practically impossible. In this context, Kandaswamy remarks that figures such as the vagrant or the prostitute appeared to threaten the social structure of the nation. As Kandaswamy shows, the vagrant needs to be considered as a queer figure because the persistence of such individuals challenged the natural necessity of masculine ideals of economic self-sufficiency and household mastery, as well as of feminine dependency. Kandaswamy argues that the vagrant was not simply presented as someone that was not settling, but as someone that refused his or her role in society in a way that specifically threatened gender models: vagrants were, for instance, sometimes imagined as men who, in shirking work, also took on ambiguously feminine attributes.

On the one hand, Kandaswamy is interested in tracing the trajectory of these figures to think about different ways to organise kinship and alternative ways to gain independence. On the other hand, it is important to trace the connection between these figures and the anxieties that produced them as well as the use of these images in society. Indeed, Kandaswamy remarks that the moral stigmatisation of vagrancy inhibited alternative modes of freedom, but it also became a legal pretext for recreating work relationships reminiscent of slavery: whomever was considered a vagrant would be fair game for forced labour, and whomever was not supervised by a white employer was a vagrant.[4] These labour relationships were structured through a perverse conflation of free contractual engagement and compulsory racial domination, in which subordination to white employers 'as before' emancipation was now given a pretext of voluntary engagement.

In chapter 4, titled 'Domestic Labor and the Politics of Reform' Kandaswamy assesses the fragilising impact on freedwomen of the double injunction to enter into marriage and labour contracts. On the one hand, black women were, unlike white women, discouraged from working solely for their families. As a result, black women could never enjoy the protection that working within their homes and communities would have granted them. On the other hand, because of the stereotypical gender roles of marriage contracts, black married women did not gain any independence by becoming wage workers. For instance, black women's labour contracts could be signed by their husbands, who were therefore able to relegate their wives to conditions that were similar to those of slavery. Although the gendered images of dependency and domesticity that black women were now supposed to embody were incompatible with wage work, domestic work in white households resolved this contradiction. As a consequence, white employers of domestic workers came to see themselves as supervising black women's morally uplifting path into gender normativity, citizenship, and social uprightness. Kandaswamy shows that the opening of schools that trained black women to become domestic workers attests to such conflation of education with gender norms and exploitation. It is noteworthy that while these roles as domestic workers were conceived as edifying and presented as direct alternatives to debasing life choices, such as vagrancy or prostitution, the relationship with white employers inside white, autonomous, and unregulated households exposed black women to rapes and sexual abuses that had been a considerable part of slavery.

In the last chapter of the book, 'The Chains of Welfare', Kandaswamy compares the work of the Freedmen's Bureau to welfare reforms of the twentieth century like the 1996 law. She shows that neither system responds to

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[4] Kandaswamy's analysis of the Reconstruction Era and of the new forms of subjugation that were invented to recreate conditions similar to those of slavery also rests on W. E. B. Du Bois' work in *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935).

the difficult material conditions of black families and black women. Both in the Reconstruction Era as much as at the end of the twentieth century it appears that public assistance responds to anxieties about undisciplined black bodies and operates in a social environment that considers that black women need to work in a subservient position in order to learn proper feminine virtues. Work outside of their own homes, far from their children, and in no connection to their communities is then presented as the only way to ensure the moral uprightness of black women and their suitability as mothers and citizens. In other words, Kandaswamy argues that the anxiety around black bodies continues to this day to reform society in such a way that instead of materially helping black women in need it only disciplines them.

Kandaswamy's book greatly contributes to feminist intersectional thought and her research is critical in helping understand instances of social oppression that continue to appear in our present. In fact, the conflation between gender norms, moral values, and exploitation is at work whenever a specific group appears as a threat to the social order. Kandaswamy's book challenges the idea of deservingness that justifies the constant scrutiny of such groups as migrants, refugees, lower class workers, racial minorities, women, and queer people. Moreover, the author shows that dominant social values can be particularly dangerous when their historical dimension is concealed and when they are perceived as neutral or natural. In fact, this perception is the condition of their dominance and of their power to obscure alternative ways of embodying freedom.

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Against White Feminism

Geetha Marcus [1]*

Book's Author: Rafia Zakaria

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Once you see the world through the lens of patriarchy, the thought naturally arises: what would the world be like if it weren't there? In pursuit of this question, women have attempted to re-imagine another world. Some feminists have argued that if women gain equal rights in society, patriarchy will be at least sufficiently tempered. Others have argued that even if equality were achieved, patriarchy would still exist, because human institutions–political, legal, educational, cultural–are themselves, in their bones, patriarchal structures. White supremacy is one such enduring system, and within it, to the exclusion of all other women, lie mainly white feminists, mostly middle-class women, educated, privileged and mainstream. Despite the four waves of feminism since the 1960s, the discourse of white feminism is mostly unidimensional in that its ideology focuses solely on the equality of the sexes, and the betterment of women but still in the capitalist system devised by men for the benefit of men. Men against women and women against men was precisely the fuel that kept society, as it is currently constituted, running. By contrast, the African American feminist bell hooks resisted the notion that the primary conflict in society was one of 'men against women', which seemed inherent in radical definitions of 'patriarchy'. Patriarchy is not gendered. For her, it could be simply defined as 'institutionalised sexism'. In order to end it, everyone, male and female alike, must 'let go of sexist thoughts and action' (hooks, 2000: 9).

Of course, some men are oppressed more than some women; and not all women are oppressed in the same way. Writers such as hooks pointed out that for African American women, the family was not necessarily the site of oppression as it was for white people, representing a place of possible refuge from the traumas of white supremacy. The kind of workplaces available to many black women, too, were not of the liberating kind accessible to educated white women. As patriarchy is not a fixed ideology, so too has feminism evolved to challenge its shifting margins of operation. What has not changed, however, is the power of white women who are privileged to exact this change as they see it, in contrast to their sisters of colour across the globe. Despite its colossal complexity, patriarchy remains a useful tool to recognise the subtle depth of the forces that keep multiple oppressions in place, from the expectations about the behaviour of women in the home and the workplace to the way they are portrayed in the media, in the law and in general public discourse. White supremacy, as a type of patriarchy, works alongside white feminism, and vice versa, in mutually enabling the systems of oppression to exist for many across the globe. Intersectional feminism, as envisaged by Truth (1851), and later Crenshaw (1991) and others like hooks (2015), exposes the matrix of domination (Collins, 1994) that suppresses the lives of women of colour. Intersectional feminism is multidimensional, and it is very essence, to its very core, requires collaborative global feminist solidarity for the 21st century.

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For me, Zakaria's book is a landmark contribution to women's struggles, in decolonising and redefining feminism for the age in which we live. This book is 'not about feminist theory, but rather about feminist practice' (p. 9). It problematises the history of women's struggles for emancipation and equity in its collusion with colonialism, empire, racism, and the capitalist agenda. Zakaria declares that the theoretical foundation of her thesis stems from Spivak's critical essays on the silencing, marginalisation, and misrepresentation of the subaltern (1988); a potent philosophical and political stance that underpins this work.

Zakaria begins the book with the all too familiar story of casual sexism and racism spouted by her middle class 'woke' white friends as they enjoy drinks at a Manhattan wine bar. She lists the litany of inappropriate comments, questions, assumptions and the 'dysconscious' (King, 2004) othering that stems from white privilege, juxtaposed against the reality of her own backstory. She 'can feel the rising anger at having to "keep it light" and accommodate expectations of people unfamiliar with all the things that can and do go wrong for women like [her]' (p. 9). Zakaria sets the scene with unflinching precision, and the reader knows the rest of what follows will be an uncomfortable read, no matter where on the feminist spectrum one sits. With a kind of graceful anger, she critiques the feminist ideologies, movements and systems deeply enmeshed in white supremacy, that do not represent and exclude the majority of the world's women to this day.

The book is divided into eight chapters, Chapter 1 charts the difference in the struggle for the vote between white women and brown women, entangled with the scourge of imperialism, and the fight for independence in India. Chapter 2 offers the reader a critique of several key white feminists – de Beauvoir, Friedan, Millet, juxtaposing their work alongside the work of Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass, Martha Jones. She reminds the reader of the work of these white feminist stalwarts, set within the context of historical events, and uses these to demonstrate the Euro-centric, exclusive and essentialist nature of their thinking. Solidarity she concludes is a lie. Chapter 3 examines the work of various NGOs and development agencies and issues a searing attack on what *can* be their white savior complex, including the unfinished work of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, as having failed in its path forward for the world's women. Chapter 4 offers insights into the role of white women in media, police, and military, battling men for equal opportunities, instead of fighting their neo-liberal, neo-imperialist practices, 'carrying forward the racial hierarchies and self-interested exploitation of the colonial era' (p. 86). Chapter 5 highlights several tensions and contradictions – the disconnect between sexual pleasure and sexual politics, and the yawning gap between white interpretations of sex, sexuality, and gender identities between white and brown/Black/Muslim feminists. 'There is no Black protagonist in *Sex and the City*' (p. 115). Global media industries define and showcase a brand of feminism as acceptable. Conversely, we are reminded of the hyper-sexualisation of subaltern women since colonial times, and their threat to white standards of feminine decency.

Chapter 6 continues in this vein, shedding light on the searing hypocrisy and double standards applied to the use and misuse of black and brown bodies, *vis-à-vis* their white female counterparts. The rise of inappropriate labelling and cultural prejudices, enshrined in law, to seemingly protect and save 'brown women from their brown men' (Spivak, 1988), is disturbing discourse that yet again uplifts the status of white feminist supremacy, whilst discounting the perspectives and voices of women in other parts of the world. Furthermore, the violence of white men is seen as acceptable in ways that the violence of men of colour are not. There is a tendency, for example, for us to excuse the violence of white gunmen as a product of mental health issues, whilst men of colour wielding violence are terrorists with grossly skewed mental perspectives. As Zakaria provides a coruscating critique of the rhetoric used, she tackles this sensitive topic in a way that lays testament to her legal mindset. In Chapter 7, Zakaria discusses the ways in which feminists of colour are compelled, cajoled, and enticed into enabling white feminist supremacy, and renounce their own cultural practices, in order to have a seat at the table of the white feminist temple. They become acceptable, are rewarded and it is the only path some women of colour feel they have to take in order to be successful in a white man's world.

Finally, in Chapter 8, after having methodically deconstructed the systems and practices of white feminist supremacy, she re-builds for the future and forges ideas that will transcend the four waves of white feminism, the feminism of women of colour around the world, to a global vision of solidarity in our collective fight against centuries of racialised, gendered and classed patriarchy.

Overall, this powerful, elegant, transformative book gives not only the academic community, but women of all hues, a thought provoking and riveting read. Zakaria's work is rightly both personal and political. As a postcolonial feminist and woman of colour, I laughed, nodded, and cried with anger and sadness. The book stands proudly with the works of other intersectional feminists – Lorde, Crenshaw, hooks, Davis, Mirza, and Ahmed – as an incisive critique of white feminism(s) for its brutal exclusiveness and myopia. One of the key strengths of this book is that Zakaria, armed with undeniable evidence and captivating narratives, argues eloquently for a better world. She speaks truth to power and underscores the urgent need for collaborative solidarity across all divides. She calls for a 'reconstructed feminism' (p. 172), and a re-framing of traditional power politics, such that women give each other the privilege and brave spaces to debate, agree and, most importantly, to disagree. This choice she contends is 'essential for the constitution of a movement' (p. 173) because as hooks (2015) also argues, 'the absence

of [political and social] choices' is what excludes and oppresses women and denies them the freedom to think and act. Zakaria maintains, as others have done before her, that it is only when we embrace feminism's messy complexities and tensions that it becomes 'a force for real change' (p .173). The book will appeal to academics and students working in a range of disciplines—sociology, philosophy, politics, law—and is accessible to anyone interested in feminist movements.

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Intimacy and Injury: In the Wake of #MeToo in India and South Africa

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This fresh-off-the-press volume, *Intimacy and Injury,* is not only an attempt to think with and through #MeToo in the geopolitical contexts of India and South Africa; it also serves as a vital and energetic exchange of ideas between feminist activisms in these two global Southern spaces. It is also of course a dialogue between feminist activism and feminist scholarship. Perhaps even further it may be seen as part of a larger conversation about what scholarship is or should be, and questions about where activism begins and scholarship ends. The argument for activism as feminist knowledge is part of a larger critique of the neoliberal capitalist, colonial and patriarchal logic that still dominates in the university. The call for collaborative work across disciplines, modalities and other spaces of knowledge unrecognised by the academy is clearly a priority for decolonial, feminist and queer scholarship. The book models this admirably, it is threaded through with art, images and poetry, both in the chapters and in the reflective pieces that so poignantly draw the sections together. This is indeed a strength of this book which also presents us with a rich account of #MeToo and other feminist activisms within these two global Southern contexts, offering an important contribution to the larger scholarship around #MeToo and extending the lens of the recent international handbook (Chandra and Erlingsdóttir, 2021) which, while providing a valuable and wide scan of geopolitical contexts, included a minority of global Southern voices.

This book starts off, appropriately, in a place of discomfort, acknowledging the widespread critiques of #MeToo as a global feminist movement. The introductory chapter reiterates the multi-layered contestations and debates as well as the divisions between feminists and polarisation of genders that have been ignited by the taking up or not taking up off #MeToo, particularly from the vantage point of global southern feminists. For example, the editors succinctly point out the ways in which the movement has been globally northern, white dominated and caution that

> Simplistic over-emphasis on #MeToo as a transformational moment of global feminist solidarity threatens to violently obscure the work and histories of feminist organising in our parts of the world; this is a trend we want to redress, by considering the manifestations of #MeToo in these contexts as well as its silences, weaknesses and incapacity to encompass the scale of longstanding local feminist work. (Roy, Falkoff and Phadke, p. 3)

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As Shefer and Hussen (2021: 402) have noted in the South African context: 'One key question has been about who gets to speak and whose voice matters. Locally articulated critiques about the way in which the movement is classed, raced, and reproduces a neoliberal individualism lacking intersectionality have mirrored some of the international arguments.' Similarly, Desiree Lewis (2019, n. p.), in her presentation at the academic forum from which the book emerges, draws attention to the neoliberal capitalist and individualist underpinnings of the movement, noting that stories have mostly been told about middle class, professional, and high-profile women, with emphasis on 'their absolute victimisation, powerlessness and vulnerability'. She argues that 'rarely in recent years has the South African media highlighted the horrific violence affecting women who continue to be coded as "dispensable bodies" – farm workers, domestics or migrant women'.

Jyotsna Siddharth (p. 102) in this volume echoes this point:

> The discourse on ##MeToo in India changed a few things. It gave upper-caste, upper-class, cis women in India a moment to express their agency to bring public attention to their sexual offender. It created, for them, a space to publicly express their anger offering a moment of celebration for the contemporary feminist movement. This moment may be seen to have brought some respite to this subset of women who experienced sexual harassment and violation. One might argue that this moment was useful but partial.

The author also goes on to ask 'how did we forget to #MeToo the Indian state?' (Siddharth, p. 103). The same question may be directed at any state and speaks also to the limitations of testimonial resistances with respect to institutionalised and material change.

These critiques and others are also the focus of the second section of the book, which together with other chapters in the book, call out the silences and erasures that are embodied in or consequent of the #MeToo movement. These include: silences around sexual violence against men raised by Louise du Toit; the silencing of rural and other subaltern women and Disha Mullick further points to the material dangers, even loss of life, many women face when speaking out in particular contexts; and the lack of representation of the diversities of Dalit and Bahujan groups and Rupali Bansode also highlights the way the movement may have led to the particular victimisation of already subjugated and marginal men in these communities.

On the more positive side, throughout the book a wide range of activisms are show-cased and elaborated as are the politics and contestations around these. We hear about a multiplicity of localised activisms, with 'online spaces as a particularly active location for feminist organising and resistance', the deployment of diverse symbolic and material narratives and strategies, across times and places, including the 'pre-histories' and '"new" feminist interventions' as the editors call them or new kinds of feminist 'noise' as Chakravarti and Roy articulate this. We also encounter artistic and creative activist installations, as for example the poignant art and performances in both India and SA that Swati Arora shares to illustrate how a politics of refusal may work to challenge gender binaries, sexual violence as well as dominant stereotyped tropes of gender and violence. Together with Peace Kiguwa's chapter and others in the book, the emphasis on the power of affect, women's rage together with care, relationality, response-ability emerge as powerful thematics in the activisms and artistic responses documented here. Many of the chapters also illustrate the way in which the campaigns and movements reflected on speak back not only to sexual violence and its silencing, blaming and shaming of victims, but also in some cases correct the erasures of #MeToo as Ntokozo Yingwana and Nosipho Vidima argue:

> The SWEAT #SayHerName campaign not only promotes the recognition of sex workers' human rights (specifically the right to life and freedom from violence), but also serves as an important curative in the global feminist discourse on SGBV (in particular the #MeToo discussion), as it brings to the fore the all-too-often marginalised voices of female African sex workers. (p. 96)

In sum what this book shows so clearly and pays tribute to are the powerful and multiple agentic and activist voices and bodies of women, across intersecting injustices. Not that they have ever been absent, but often marginalised and misrepresented and easily written off in the public imaginary. Relatedly, what stands out also for me in the book is the emphasis on continuities rather than ruptures and how many of the chapters speak to pre-histories, post-histories and while notions of generation are explored, they are also destabilised. But I also found myself then wondering, why is #MeToo the marker? The editors conclude with the line: 'It is to these new possibilities of feminist world-making that this volume, in the wake of #MeToo in India and South Africa, gestures' (p. 18). Indeed, I think the book does more than gesture, it unravels and interrogates, it engages deeply with the complexities related to these new possibilities, particularly as they emerge in these two postcolonial contexts which share many things yet are different and can learn a lot from each other in scholarship as well as strategies of mobilisation and resistance. Yet it still begs the question – are these rich examples of movements to be studied in

the wake of #MeToo; why not #MeToo studied in the wake of these movements that were there before, during and after #MeToo?

While #MeToo is certainly deployed as a catalyst to open up conversation, for the most part it does not emerge as the major focus in most chapters. Rather what emerges far more are the local contexts of India and SA over different spaces and temporalities, the many and multi-layered activisms, often led by subaltern women and non-binary people, at the interface of class, raced, ethnic, caste inequalities, who refuse and resist epistemic and material violences against them.

Amanda Gouws in her chapter concludes incisively that 'Both #MeToo and the local SA #EndRapeCulture) caused a *crisis* of the present, where what has gone before could not be continued afterwards as "business as usual"' (p. 217, my emphasis). And her chapter indeed does a wonderful job of exploring the limitations of #MeToo and elaborating how these two movements contribute differently. I do however remain troubled by the centring of the #MeToo movement in thinking local activisms in the book (see Hussen, 2022; Hussen and Shefer, in press; Shefer and Hussen, 2020). In my own situatedness in South Africa as a feminist scholar, women's activism on the streets and online against sexual violence, decolonial feminist and queer voices, feminist killjoy protests and agencies, arguably appear far more powerfully in the South African imaginary, perhaps the global imaginary too, within this and other global Southern contexts of challenging the entangled histories and presents of Eurowestern colonial patriarchy.

On the other hand, notwithstanding continued concerns about the way in which #MeToo has been focused on or foregrounded, whether as accolade or critique, and what this intense optics might say about continued dominance of particular voices and probably something about which bodies matter too, it has shaken things up. It has brought debates and testimonials into homes and schools and marketplaces and opened up vibrant transnational dialogue, such as the dialogue across two global southern contexts that this book animates.

And in this respect, one of the further strengths of this book is articulated through a key locating sentence in the editorial which speaks to its efforts to *open up dialogue* rather than operate in the normative framework of the #MeToo movement itself. As the editors put it:

> The kinds of questions being explored in this book can lead to a new set of interrogations, acting as an opening rather than offering straight forward answers and clear endings.

#MeToo has indeed stimulated fierce debates between feminists too and, not for the first time, illuminated 'precarious solidarities' as Shilpa Phadke puts it and also argues as a 'reassuring sign of a dynamic movement' (p. 175). And as Jaya Sharma points out 'the invitation is for us as feminists to focus our energies on transformation and justice, where messiness, changefulness and contradictions are not bad words but descriptions of life as it pulsates within and around us' (p. 305).

Shefer and Hussen (2020: 404-405) in turn argue that

> Perhaps one of the most valuable opportunities that considering #MeToo … opens up is the space to reflect on contemporary transnational feminisms, successes, failures and possibilities. We need to continue asking questions about the extent to which global efforts at solidarity remain troubled by geopolitical inequalities, material and discursive, and relationalities of patronage through privileging particular knowledges and particular bodies. We suggest that the challenge for a global movement would be to find ways of strategically mobilizing global, regional and local resistances to sexual violences and their intersecting possibilities, while resisting an erasure of differences in power and privilege at multiple levels.

There is a lot to be vigilant about as a feminist scholar-activist. As Louise du Toit (p. 152) in the volume cautions

> Feminist activists have to weigh in on this war of interpretations, in particular by drawing attention back to all of the actual victims' lived experiences themselves. This is especially important in colonial and postcolonial contexts, where 'rape talk', thus the public ways in which rape is from time to time taken up as a matter of shared social concern, has mostly tended to serve racist colonial agendas.

In conclusion, reading this book, notwithstanding the many disturbing events documented here that highlight the continued excess of sexual violence, particularly subaltern, marginal and transgressive women and men, in the two geopolitical contexts focused on here, one still comes away surprisingly inspired and hopeful (critically hopeful). There are so many activisms, so many creative and affective and affecting engagements, movements, campaigns, installations documented or gestured to here – that resist, that say no, that call out, that disrupt, that transgress, and that make a difference towards everyday experiences and imaginaries of a world where violence against anyone, including other species, is unimaginable, surely, an impossibility.

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