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Acts of Recovery: Autoethnography, Performance, and Trauma in Ethnographic Work

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Theater Studies

by

Ming Lauren Holden

Committee in charge:

Professor Stephanie Batiste, Chair

Professor Paul Spickard

Professor Jennifer Tyburczy

September 2019

The dissertation of Ming Lauren Holden is approved.

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by

Ming Lauren Holden

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ABSTRACT

Acts of Recovery: Autoethnography, Performance, and Trauma in Ethnographic Work

by

Ming Lauren Holden

This dissertation aims to add the cultural weight of advanced scholarship to a description and understanding of the relationship between trauma, performance, and recovery. It does so using case studies and methodologies whose operative modes and execution both stray consciously from the confines of some of the historically traditional ivory tower's most egregious disciplinary blind spots. Chapter One, as an introduction, lays out a definition and history of trauma; and a justification for examining it the way I do in the name of progressive scholarship. Chapter Two recounts and analyzes my experience co-founding the Survival Girls, a theater collective for Congolese refugee women in a Nairobi slum, in a meditation on the role of performance studies in a modern and responsible conception of subjective and ethnographic scholarship. Chapter Three approaches the sort of gender-based violence that the members of the Survival Girls suffered by way of literary scholarship by analyzing two plays that address the experience of such violence without re-enacting that violence upon the women I worked with, thereby positioning stage directions in a playscript as an acceptable alternative

subject onto which to responsibly employ an “anthropological spyglass” in 2019 as a privileged interloper. Chapter Four uses a performance studies perspective to document over a decade of oral history interviews with an American Indigenous man who is also a Vietnam War veteran and a cancer survivor, dancing with the performance of those interviews as constitutive of an ethnography which illustrates what might be called the reverse effect of the historical anthropological spyglass.

Each of these explorations use performance studies as an entry point for the effort toward decolonial methodology, epistemology, and tradition to examine intersubjective possibilities for understanding trauma and recovery as affective phenomena.

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Chapter I.

An Introduction

> ..Nearly every time I've been pulled over, I've prayed there were no drugs in my car, despite the fact that I don't use drugs; I don't even smoke pot. That's to say, the story I have all my life heard about black people — criminal, criminal, criminal — I have started to suspect of myself.[1]
>
> Ross Gay

The project of this dissertation is to look at trauma and its relationship to performance and embodiment. There are now not only trauma theory texts to which to turn for this exploration.[2] Psychologists Judith Herman and Bessel van der Kolk, working with traumatized patients of all ages in the Boston area over the last fifty years, have had ample opportunity not only to arrive at conclusions about trauma's effects, but at a structured and implemented way of examining what might be done to recover from it.[3] Their research shows its outcomes to be physiological, with measurable effects on the brain, body, and behavior of the subject, and to simultaneously produce a range of disruptions in the identity formation of

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1 Gay, Ross. "Some Thoughts on Mercy." *The Sun*, July 2013. Web: <http://thesunmagazine.org/issues/451/some_thoughts_on_mercy>

2 Most notably Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (1996).

3 Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Political Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Perseus Books (1992).

Van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Random House (2014).

the subject.[4] Substantiated by Van der Kolk's work on trauma and the brain, this exploration is indebted to conceptions of trauma and its aftermath, such as those that Jenny Edkins points out "we now describe as 'post traumatic stress disorder' [but that] are not a disease or an illness: they reflect our inability to allocate meaning to an event, that's all."[5] Since meaning is a product of the social order in which we find ourselves suspended, and language is the way meaning is encoded in culture and personal narratives, Edkins' description gestures toward a way to understand the socially mediated process of dehumanization: those mechanisms of the private and public sphere that are destructive to the self-worth (and the mortal body) of the subject through toxic hailings that are designed to impose a less-than, or a less-human-than, identity on the subject. "A white middle-class Westerner," Edward Said writes, "believes it his human prerogative not only to manage the nonwhite world but also to own it, just because by definition 'it' is not quite as human as 'we' are. There is no purer example than this of dehumanized thought."[6]

This dissertation aims to use a performance studies lens to explore the relationship between Edkins' description of the post-traumatic condition as a question of allocating meaning instead of pathologizing that condition as an illness; and to put that viewpoint into conversation with Said's notion of orientalism and dehumanizing the other, using the recent

[4] Herman and Van der Kolk's research was largely conducted at the Trauma Center connected to Harvard and the Massachusetts General Hospital.

[5] Edkins, Jenny. *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2003).

[6] Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Knopf (2014): 108.

clinical research of trauma specialists Bessel Van der Kolk and Judith Herman to do it. Both the intersubjective ethnographic approach I use in this work, and the interest in social justice that drives it, aim toward decolonizing academic research. The recent work of Macarena Gómez-Barris[7] inspires my definition of decoloniality, which, Gómez-Barris writes, "moves away from singularity and the reduction imposed by the European gaze toward the proliferation of epistemological possibility."[8] The work in this dissertation aims to make that move, too.

But first, some history informing the definition of trauma employed in this work, and a justification for such an intervention:

A founding figure of Western psychology through his pioneering work in psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud fundamentally altered Western conceptions of representation by tracing the source of psychological maladies to the unconscious – to those memories and desires repressed behind the curtain of conscious experience. Freud posited what may be thought of of as "the intervention (that took a century to be) heard round the world" in Vienna in 1896 with a tract called *The Aetiology of Hysteria*, which he presented at the Psychiatric Society. In the paper, Freud wrote that "at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience."[9] One Richard von

7 Gómez-Barris, Macarena. *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives.* Durham: Duke University Press (2017).

8 Gómez-Barris, 3.

9 "Sigmund Freud Chronology." Accessed July 18th, 2018. Web article: <https://www.freud-museum.at/online/freud/chronolg/1896-e.htm

Krafft-Ebing responded that it sounded like a "scientific fairy tale."[10]

While the reception to his efforts was less than warm, Freud clearly grappled with the stories of incest abuse nearly all of the 'hysterical' female patients in his study shared during his attempt to perform 'the talking cure' of psychoanalysis with them. Freud proved well ahead of his time when he theorized that the women whose 'hysteria' had left them unable to function normally or cope maturely had its roots in these women's experience as victims of incest and other sexual abuse, often chronic abuse beginning when they were very young. Recent trauma research corroborates this century-old claim so closely that Freud deserves some credit for the prescient compassion inherent in his argument.

However, in short order, Freud discredited his own thesis; Herman interprets the nominal public pivot Freud made in the late 1890s, from a focus on psychoanalysis with abused women to a focus on repression (looking at dreams as representations of the unconscious), to be a turn he took out of fear.[11] Herman claims that this fear was one of the possible social ramifications of connecting the sickness of his female patients with a public story of incest that implicated the men in their families, who were the men in Freud's own social circle. This lack of a "social reality"[12] that would "reflect" accurately the truth these women were speaking about their experience, one that would support Freud in his assertions, is precisely why, Herman argues, the eerily spot-on idea he had foundered for the next decade

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10 Hergenhahn, B.R. *An Introduction to the History of Psychology*. Cengage Learning (2008): 525.

11 Herman, 13-18.

12 Ibid., 24.

or two.

Herman's suspicion lends itself to an understanding of abusive power structures and the way they function to produce and reproduce powerful social organizing forces such as stigma and shame. Nothing short of a powerful social movement, one that can change the subject and nature of the dominant cultural messages from abusive to affirming, has ever, or will ever, reverse what Herman calls "the ordinary social processes of silencing and denial."[13] This dehumanizing voice of the dominant narrative is that language which exerts the social order, what Jenny Edkins calls the "language of the powerful, the words of the status quo, the words that delimit and define acceptable ways of being human within the community."[14]

Echoing Herman, Edkins traces the oppressive societal reaction that occurred instead of the community support and validation that Herman argues is necessary for a full recovery; namely, seeing First World War veterans as cowardly, distressed traumatized children as exaggerated and unbelievable, and 'hysterical' female victims of childhood trauma as having either 'asked for it' or to have imagined what happened.[15] Whether the traumatized condition was known as 'hysteria' in abused women at the end of the nineteenth century, or as 'shellshock' in veterans of the First World War, the work of trauma to dehumanize its subjects through damaging identity formation manifested as these character attacks, as accusations of moral failure on the part of the subject; in short, these 'hysterical,' 'cowardly'

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[13] Herman, 9.

[14] Edkins, 1-10.

[15] Ibid., 3.

subjects were thereby designated as pariahs, and as such, deserving of the treatment such stigmatization engenders. Herman points to those material effects when she points out that stigmatizing a 'hysterical' patient – abandoning and discrediting a trauma survivor when you're the one who was trying to help her recover – is a surefire way to keep her unwell, but archived history does not reflect this for another several decades. The probable outcome of Freud's betrayal of his patients was the kind of revictimization by caregivers that Herman posits invariably takes place when the figure of authority in whom a patient has placed trust does not care for her the way he should.[16] That such patients were forced to live under such authority didn't help matters, and created the conditions of possibility for such mistreatment in the first place.

It took the stigma attached to soldiers returning to America from the First World War to start again the process of addressing the connection between wartime trauma and 'dysfunction' in the eyes of a society whose notion of 'functional' was rooted in heteronormative and capitalist regimes of truth and temporality. There is a change in the brain functions of people who have suffered extremity, and a dehumanizing approach brands lessened ability to manage or cope according to social norms as a moral failing and not, as it is largely now known by contemporary Western therapists to be, an eminently understandable and even unavoidable reaction to that extremity. Herman writes that Abraham Kardiner, a mentee of Freud's, abandoned psychotherapy for anthropology when he saw that the troubled men returned home from war were being treated as pariahs and moral failures by the society

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[16] Herman, 123.

he believed was supposed to take care of them. This move was one of compassion, rooted in the observation that a socially constructed culture of stigmatization was having a direct effect on individual wellbeing. The diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (or PTSD) was not formalized in the American Diagnostic Manual until 1980, when the Vietnam veterans returning home organized into 'rap groups' of social support and insisted on a public process of acknowledgement and support giving what Herman calls "dignity [to] their distress."[17] The same year, the first rape crisis center in America opened in Boston, and Herman's work, which was rooted in the second-wave feminist movement, aimed to create spaces where traumatized women could gather in similar groups for a similar purpose. Herman notes, however, that while the Vietnam veterans had memorials through which to process *their* pain, raped women had no such public monument to function as a legitimizing testament to their own.[18] While the monuments that helped Vietnam veterans feel seen and heard by society undoubtedly served other functions that deserve to be critiqued as problematic – such as glorifying neoliberal narratives as well as those of traditional, Western notions of masculinity – the comparative silence around what raped women suffered contributed to the environment of silence that Herman argues helped keep them traumatized.

Western conceptions of the traumatized condition generally designate it as a reaction to an overwhelming event "outside the range of ordinary experience" characterized by intrusive memories that destabilize a linear experience of time and a coherent sense of

[17] Herman, 27.

[18] Ibid., 73.

agency.[19] The memory of the traumatic event will not recede into the past, where it belongs in the inner life of an empowered person, but rather it lies in wait as a present danger to the psyche, robbing the subject of a sense of self-ownership and internal control. A subject of dehumanizing treatment will remember, either consciously or bodily, what happened. The subject will react to reminders of such abuse as though the event is happening once more, right here and right now, in intrusive memories. This doubling-back effect on temporality produced by experiences of distress and extremity is a primary feature of the traumatized condition, whose effect Laura Lipsky Van der Noot, in her work on trauma stewardship, compares to being trapped in amber.[20]

Trauma research is necessarily curious about two related loci of interest in the scholarly conversations around affect and trauma: potential and lack. Potential is largely the province of those newer academic disciplines in which this dissertation finds its home, that constellation of performance studies, affect studies, and decolonial scholarship and the queer studies, feminist studies, and ethnic studies that fed into what's more of a network, rather than one contiguous trunk, of contemporary humanities theory. Lack, however, has a long and storied tradition within the academy, fascinating the earliest literary theorists and scholars as well as the broken-hearted poets of the world. Freud made his famous distinction between mourning and melancholia as a way to describe physiological and mental processing

[19] Herman, Chapter 2: "Terror."

[20] Van der noot, Laura Lipsky. *Trauma Stewardship: and Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others*. (2009).

in response to a perceived lack. Chalfin writes that structure of traumatized being could be characterized as "living-without…living-without-needs, living-without-understanding, living-without-bodily-sense, living without-words, and living-without-relatedess."[21] Citing Hamlet, Simon Critchley opines that "the modern issue…is that we…experience the world with a sense of something missing, with a sense of lack."[22] Critchley does not restrict this claim to traumatized people or to a character in Shakespeare's play. Chalfin's "living-without," through Critchley's view, is a feature, not a bug, of post-Kantian life. Decolonial scholarship, and philosophical and literary traditions that gave rise to it, is preoccupied with potential, and as such, it's the intellectual corner for those interested in doing other things with that lack than simply bemoaning it. This begins with a rethinking of that human state most chock-full of potential *and* lack; namely, vulnerability.

Enter affect theory, stage right. Patricia Ticineto Clough cites Fred Moten and Stefano Harney in an enjoinder that neatly ties such a potentially productive position to the rise in the academy since the turn of the century of affect studies, specifically their celebration of "stepping out of the skeptical of the known into an inadequate confrontation with what exceeds it and oneself."[23] [24] That's as unshakeable a definition of vulnerability as

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[21] Chalfin, Robin R. "Being Broken and Unbroken: Trauma, Heidegger, and Befindlichkeit." *In the Wake of Trauma: Psychology and Philosophy for the Suffering Other*, edited by Eric R. Severson, Brian W. Becker, and David M. Goodman. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press (2016) 99-118:105.

[22] Skerrett, Kathleen. "Trauma, Tragedy, and Theater: A Conversation with Simon Critchley." *In the Wake of Trauma: Psychology and Philosophy for the Suffering Other*, edited by Eric R. Severson, Brian W. Becker, and David M. Goodman. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press (2016) 99-118: 20.

[23] Clough, Patricia Ticineto. "Introduction." *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Edited by Patricia Ticineto. Durham: Duke University Press (2007). 1-33: 28.

any I've seen; moreover, Clough uses it to summarize the business of affect studies as just such an inadequate confrontation with the academy, "because the disciplines, having gone professional, can only judge what is not already marked for their easy assimilation as inadequate, unprofessional, even unethical or criminal."[25] Now we're talking decolonial scholarship. I'd go so far as to state that if scholarship is not, as Clough restates it for the purposes of affect theory, "go[ing] right ahead and step[ping] out into an inadequate confrontation with the social, changed and changing, which exceeds all efforts to contain it," it's not decolonial enough. To use the theatrical phrase for improvisation, if we're not 'both-and-ing,' we're simultaneously recolonizing and missing the point.

Decoloniality, at its heart, seems to thrive in the chaos and complexity that exists under the surface of whatever has been glossed over enough to have a signifier. Chalfin writes that "traumatic affects or moods remain unintegrated, making attunement to self and other difficult, while meaning-making and expression are thwarted."[26] Affect studies is fertile terrain for those decolonial scholars who wish to reclaim, examine, celebrate, or mull over (Gómez-Barris, for one, appears to do all of these things, sometimes at the same time) what happens during that thwarting, or what is produced in the space of it, instead of the arguably covertly oppressive process of things going smoothly or as planned.

Gómez-Barris describes institutional knowledge as itself an "extractive zone," one in

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[24] Harney and Moten quoted in Clough, 28.

[25] Clough, 28.

[26] Chalfin, 105.

which "normative methodologies reproduce an episteme and representation of marginality" through an "epistemology of measure" that "refuses to address the partiality of knowledge."[27] Performance studies joins affect studies, translation studies, and trauma studies in a constellation of decolonially concerned disciplines picking up steam since the turn of the century, studies whose lines of inquiry are decidedly context-dependent and whose concerns are accordingly decolonial in nature. Allowing for context is allowing for partiality, for an implicit qualification to a claim. Recognizing the implicitly decolonial nature of theories friendly to, or at least interested in or willing to play ball with, the twin flames of lack and potential is an implicit move in the direction of scholarship whose primary aim is not semiotic accuracy. This opens up a world of possibilities and attendant risks for the scholar of trauma: what might be the aims of scholarship otherwise?

One such aim might be theory that finally contends with trauma in a way that is not only of interest to literary theorists, but to social workers and other "applied" practices, of which the Survival Girls' performance is one. Chalfin puts the traumatic preoccupation with fissures and cracks poetically:

> When surviving has meaning and one's life matters to the other, a person knows that his or her existence is rooted in the world; the individual feels a sense of belonging. This ameliorates the personal and interpersonal alienation that is so fundamental in traumatization. Thus, the recovery—or coming back from trauma—is about the acknowledgement of this mattering, not about fixing the brokenness.[28]

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[27] Gómez-Barris, 11.

[28] Chalfin, 113.

Insofar as the colonial and neoliberal projects are ones of oppression and dehumanization, and could be said to constitute diffuse traumas exerting themselves on bodies as heavily as chains or as lightly as a lingering suspicion, scholarship is one of the ways a culture might be said to 'recover' in the way Chalfin describes. Affect studies is central to emergent theories of trauma because the practice of theory itself must change in order not to attempt to fix brokenness; that's what Clough's inadequate encounter is about.

In addition to potential and lack, the theoretical frameworks for trauma and recovery also dance discursively according to the mysterious choreography of contingency. "If we read *Hamlet* as a modern tragedy," Kathleen Skerrett comments, "the therapeutic moments...are contingent moments. These are not internal, not external, contingencies. Those contingencies may be mapped aesthetically which would allow one to face the choice to cherish what has been so painfully lost."[29] The event of violence and the aftermath of trauma may not be possible without this contingency, which may in fact be the force that animates the dialectic between lack and possession, or even lack and potential.

That force is inarguably ghostly. Skerrett says of Hamlet's famed encounter with Yorick's skull that "there is a kind of contingency in that scene, a dark plenitude."[30] The dark plenitude populating the contingency of what Skerrett calls the "failed mourning" of

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[29] Skerrett, Kathleen. "Trauma, Tragedy, and Theater: A Conversation with Simon Critchley." *In the Wake of Trauma: Psychology and Philosophy for the Suffering Other*, edited by Eric R. Severson, Brian W. Becker, and David M. Goodman. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press (2016) 99-118: 19.

[30] Skerrett, 21.

sentimentality foregrounds her question: “What is the genre that furthers the work of mourning?”[31] Scholarship like kind I aim for here sees the energetic exchange of affect, and critical thought about it, to be part of answering the question of furthering the work of mourning, because it links to the project of locating an ethical focus for this time as scholars. Clough writes that “the increasing significance of affect as a focus of analysis across the number of disciplinary and interdisciplinary discourses is occurring at a time when critical theory is facing the analytic challenges of ongoing war, trauma, torture, massacre, and counter/terrorism.”[32] That laundry list of unspeakable experiences encompasses more or less every systemic ill that might *prevent* the work of mourning. Tina Chanter argues that the shift from castration trauma to collective trauma is related to the shift from universality to contingency and specificity, which grants access to “a conception of affect that refuses to take for granted the borders distinguishing subjects and objects, individuals and communities”[33] in the tradition of Ahmed’s notion of the ‘skin of the community.’ Clough, for her part, notes that “for Freud, as for Butler and for theorists of trauma generally, the body is the body of organism, a closed system, seeking homeostasis and equilibrium.”[34]

Chalfin makes a connection between agency and modes of power when she specifies

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31 Ibid., 27.

32 Chanter, Tina. “Seeing Things That Were Not There Before: Revisioning Freud’s Oedipus, with a Little Help from Rancière.” *In the Wake of Trauma: Psychology and Philosophy for the Suffering Other*, edited by Eric R. Severson, Brian W. Becker, and David M. Goodman. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press (2016) 57-76: 75.

33 Chanter, 69.

34 Clough, 11.

that "trauma is arguably most injurious when inflicted by another human being and when a person's capacity to act—to respond on his or her own behalf—is thwarted on an ongoing basis," conditions which occur in captivity, but also "covertly in any hierarchical structure—whether it is familial, educational, military, or faith based—where one's dependency and some measure of secrecy and coercion can function to maintain psychological control."[35] Here the affect theorists (and posthumanists) help to pose an interesting point: if bodies do not, in fact, "end at the skin," then they cannot be subjugated by social forces or trained by the state; as long as bodies have borders, they can be made to do things and cultivate skills in service of regimes. Decolonial and affective frameworks trade in the notion that if bodies do not end at the skin of the boy but of the community, then they are less easy to subjugate.

It follows that the destabilizing sense of agency involved in subjugation and in trauma also destabilizes, necessarily, a sense of linear time, raising the question of whether it's possible to have one without the other. The experience of trauma is one that departs from a linear experience of time and a normative experience of subjecthood through the sheer agony it causes someone to be so loosened. In general, people enter into those spaces in times of unbearable pain. Time is not experienced in a linear fashion during these moments of unbearable distress. These moments reduce the subject to witness, either to their own crisis or someone else's. In the overpowered victim of violence, the victim dissociates, and so the 'her' one stands next to need not be another person but one's own person. Herman, Van der

[35] Chalfin, 100.

Kolk, and Lipsky, therapists who have spent decades working with traumatized people, have all written about this effect on a trauma victim's relationship to history and to their unity of self, or cohesion of agency. But what queer theorists like David Eng suggest is that some people *do* want their anguish and their pain, because of the richness and sense of purpose it gives their lives.[36] Queer frameworks trouble assumptions that trauma, therefore, is altogether "bad." The defiance of such categorization is also what Van der Kolk described on a 2015 podcast, citing an exchange with a Vietnam veteran as what inspired his life's work:

> I gave him some medicines to make the nightmares go away…he said, "I did not take your medicines, because I realize I need to have my nightmares, because I realize I need to be a living memorial to my friends who died in Vietnam"…my fascination [is] how people become living testimonials for things that no longer exist.[37]

To a trauma victim as I use the term, therefore, is a fundamentally performative act: it is to be a living testimonial for something that no longer exists. For that something to be abuse as I use *that* term means that it robbed the subject of agency in the moment to preserve oneself or others in a moment of extremity. Further, I use the phrase 'toxic interpellation' to describe the effects of trauma on the victim as one that deals in disempowering identity formation. Moving with that framework into an investigation of 'living testimonials for things that no longer exist,' affect theory brings a vital element to such tensions in the way it enlivens the relationship of trauma to ontology, which I believe is critical to the decolonial

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[36] *Loss*, edited by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press (2003).

[37] Van der Kolk, Bessel and Tippett, Krista. "On Being: How Trauma Lodges in the Body." Audio blog comment. March 9, 2017. Web. https://onbeing.org/programs/bessel-van-der-kolk-how-trauma-lodges-in-the-body-mar2017/

project. Clough cites the influence of Ruth Leys had on affect theory with the proposition that "trauma is forgetting without memory," in a turn of events wherein "the ego is overrun by the object or event, fixating the ego" and "the body becomes a memorial, a ghosted bodily matter."[38] Such linkages between psychoanalysis and affect are illuminated by the questions Clough draws from Leys' substantial legacy, the most resonant of which to my work is: "what is the ontological status of a ghosted body of a haunted materiality?"[39]

Once affect theory started working heavily on dusty ideas from previous centuries' deep dives into psychoanalysis and philosophy, ontology paved the way for contemporary stabs at decolonial methodology; I borrow John L. Roberts' phrase of "radical openness"[40] in the subject to describe the notion that then began to productively trouble long-held disciplinary mythologies disguised as universal givens in earnest. While he gives Caruth credit where it's due for delineating an ontology of trauma, Roberts calls for a "deeply *historical* ontology of trauma,"[41] is the sort of historical situating that might be of use to the decolonial project Gómez-Barris promulgates (emphasis mine). in that it challenges those very clinical technologies holding Caruth back from a more radical sense of temporality—one less beholden to what Gómez-Barris might call a "colonized" or

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38 Clough, 6-7.

39 Ibid., 7.

40 Roberts, John L. "Temporality, Alterity, and Traumatic Ethics." *In the Wake of Trauma: Psychology and Philosophy for the Suffering Other*, edited by Eric R. Severson, Brian W. Becker, and David M. Goodman. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press (2016) 155-174: 171.

41 Roberts, 171..

"extractive" temporality.

One example of how trauma destabilizes linear time in it subject is Freud's theory of melancholia, which closely resembles Van der Kolk's description of becoming a living testimonial for something that no longer exists – a voluntary, or at least not altogether purposeless, suspension in the amber of traumatic memory. "Mourning…[is] a sifting through of what was most cherished, was beloved in the lost object," Skerrett remarks, musing about Hamlet. "The alternative is melancholia, which many of us get stuck in."[42] Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz writes that melancholia "spills into the realm of the pathological because it resembles a mourning that does not know when to stop."[43] As such, melancholia encompasses the aspect of disproportionality in dehumanizing subject formation.

Freud was perhaps describing such mourning, a form of distress seemingly stuck at high volume and on repeat, when he described 'hysterical' patients as "suffering from reminiscences." Performance theory, as well as affect theory, stage such questions comfortably. Performance theorist Ann Pellegrini casually notes that "hysteria has a kind of pathological—because hypertheatricalized? —identification with others."[44] Pellegrini here

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[42] Skerrett, 22.

[43] Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics.* Minneapolis: University of Minnestoa Press (1999): 64.

[44] Pellegrini, Ann. "Trauma, Tragedy, and Theater: A Conversation with Simon Critchley." *In the Wake of Trauma: Psychology and Philosophy for the Suffering Other*, edited by Eric R. Severson, Brian W. Becker, and David M. Goodman. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press (2016) 99-118: 30.

refigures the Freudian definition of hysteria and its attendant oppressions as an affective, intersubjective exchange, and grounds it in the language of performance performatively, as an embedded question. Such pithy turns of phrase are not only that: they rethink, refigure, reorient, and recode notions at the heart of trauma, such as overfill. Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo writes of an Ilongot man who had lost four children that "with the advent of martial law, headhunting was out of the question as a means of venting his wrath and thereby lessening his grief. Were he to remain in his Ilongot way of life, the pain of his sorrow would be simply too much to bear."[45] Rosaldo here provides for the possibility that melancholia is the progenitor of a cultural shift within the individual. The headhunter experiences an overfill of grief so great that the worldview provided for him by his own culture could not contain it.

In order to recover from trauma, perhaps, this man inserted himself into a different web: into a network of significations whose meaning were other than the ones in which he had previously been suspended. He was still a father who had lost children, but as the meaning given his life by his culture changed along with that culture, he was, perhaps, able to make "a happy story in [his] mind," one in which the focus on his children as innocent angels sent home to heaven perhaps provided another narrative that addressed the need to kill someone as a sin, or a form of anger it was possible to reduce by turning that anger over to a benevolent god. Or, perhaps, more generally, the father was given reprieve from his pain by the un-bounding made possible by the code-switch to another culture, and therefore another reprieve from construction of time, and therefore of narrative, and therefore of identity, and

[45] Rosaldo, Renato. *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis.* Boston: Beacon Press (1993): 5.

therefore of self. In this way, extremity's effect on the brain of cutting off access to the parts that can reason and contextualize is perhaps a liberating one. After all, Edkins writes, "for language to work at a particular time and in a particular context it is necessary for there to be a linguistic community that shares or is subject to something that will temporarily fix meanings… [t]here has to be some provisional agreement, accepted ideology or central authority structure that will halt the fluidity of terms and make language meaningful."[46] The fixedness of those meanings is what vexes progressive scholars like Rosaldo with its assumptions and requirements and restrictive influence on marginalized identity. For there to be a moment of only bodily sensations and timelessness, away from the fixed nature of language and the social bonds it inherently reinscribes, away from the web of social expressions so eager to bind up a subject: perhaps then the overfilling of melancholic affect offers the traumatized some strange reprieve.

Rosaldo writes of his own unbearable grief, and its attendant anger, which he experienced when he lost his own wife in the field while conducting anthropological research on the Ilongot people in the Philippines. Rosaldo had initially not grasped the cultural practice of headhunting to assuage personal grief. "My own inability to conceive the force of anger in grief," he writes, "led me to seek out another level of analysis that could provide a deeper explanation."[47] However, once he found his wife's lifeless body at the bottom of a ravine, he heaved with tearless sobs that he realized, remembering the death years before of

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[46] Edkins, 7.

[47] Rosaldo, 3.

his brother, were an expression of rage. He recounts what he wrote in journal in the days that followed: “I felt like in a nightmare, the whole world around me expanding and contracting, visually and viscerally heaving.”[48] Rosaldo wrote fifty years ago of grieving his wife’s death: “I experienced…the trembling beginning in my abdomen and spreading through my body, the mournful keening that started without my willing, and frequent tearful sobbing.” While Rosaldo acknowledges that “by invoking personal experience as an analytical category one risks easy dismissal,” (especially within anthropology some fifty years ago), he does the epistemological work bell hooks did at roughly the same time, though she was doing it at Oberlin: opening an awareness of the body within the academy in ways that enrich notions of knowledge and understanding.[49] The body-centered awareness evidenced in Rosaldo’s description of trembling and sobbing is also precisely the awareness Van der Kolk would go on to claim is missing in traumatized people. In both senses of the word, then, Rosaldo recovers knowledge.

Rosaldo’s description of the disordered state of terrible grief additionally recalls Phelan’s description of a similarly unloosened experience. Phelan recounts visiting the hospital bedside of her beloved Julie, whose brain tumor left her comatose, and whose fevered skin turning gray sends Phelan into “a space without geometry or physics, a space without subject or perceiver.”[50] It is arguably a step in the right direction with respect both to

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[48] Ibid., 9.

[49] hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress.* New York: Routledge (1994).

[50] Phelan, Peggy. “Trisha Brown's *Orfeo*: Two Takes on Double Endings.” 13-28, Lepecki, ed. *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory.* USA: Wesleyan University Press (2004): 23.

those who have been socially or anthropologically othered *and* to those who have been subject to unbearable extremity to honor how thorough of a jostle dehumanizing experiences can be. Edkins points out that "trauma and traumatic memory alter the linearity of historical, narrativized time, time which has beginnings and ends."[51] Not only that; Rosaldo, in his critique of Clifford Geertz's interpretive approach to culture, notes that "most ethnographers prefer to study events that have definite locations in space with marked centers and outer edges. Temporally, they have middles and endings. Their qualities of fixed definition liberate such events from the untidiness of everyday life." The fixedness is what vexes Rosaldo, to whom culture is not a circumscribed, "tidy" system to be read like a text, and so that vexation serves the progressive purpose of guarding him against presumptions of fully understanding extremity in others.

Rosaldo goes on to claim that these procedural ethnographies "ignore the perspective of the most bereaved survivors" to the detriment of an actual understanding of the culture at hand. In so claiming, Rosaldo begins to 'disidentify,' perhaps, from the subject-object alterity that has bound up some of his anthropologist fellows in the practice of negating the subjective experiences of the other. This negation, which Hartman reminds us functions to destabilize agency, is what Rosaldo argues keeps his fellows from fully perceiving the perspectives of people from other cultures. And not only do they ignore the perspective of the bereaved, but they impose an inexorably Western "grid" onto its subject. "We don't like not knowing," Edkins writes, "so we pretend that we do…we forget the uncertainties involved

[51] Edkins, 40.

and adopt a view that what we call social reality — which Slavoj Zizek calls social fantasy — is basically knowable."[52] Because trauma traverses the realm of bereavement, of melancholia, of the unspeakable (and, Van der Kolk might add, it trades in remembering, bodily, the *un*knowable and *un*feelable), trauma may be the only loosening from the normative strictures oiling the machine of social relations, and it may also be the most 'true' to the subjective experience of a human before the prescriptive business of language gets in the way. That experience, the one of experiential extremity without subject or perceiver, is not one that can ever be adequately described. Edkins states that "communication takes place in language and language itself is social and political, not individual."[53] The space of the most intense grief, or anger, is the only liberation from discourse and toward a truly individual existence, however agonizing or blank it may be, without subject or perceiver, with referent or reference.

Lipsky Van der Noot quotes Van der Kolk and MacFarlane's assertion that "society's reactions seem to be primarily conservative impulses in the service of maintaining the beliefs that…bad things only happen to those who deserve them."[54] Close studies of how trauma operates illuminate the relational truth that society's reactions are coercive social forces and that the beliefs animating them send a clear message, one meant to maintain an oppressive framework victimizing some people but not others and asserting that the victimized ones

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[52] Edkins, 13.

[53] Ibid., 7.

[54] Farmer quoted in Lipsky Van der Noot, 30.

deserve it. Van der Kolk notes that “trauma almost invariably involves not being seen, not being mirrored, not being taken into account,”[55] and that social relationships that nourish people are the single most important factor in mental health. Such a project illuminates the interpellative nature of various modes of oppression and the structural commonalities between them, be they legislated or verbalized. They are destructive to the self-worth (and the mortal body) of the subject through messaging that is disproportionate, negative, and false enough to be dehumanizing — if not through overt use of insult, through the oppressive function of the social meaning behind the word. Judith Butler’s thoughts on subject formation are especially pertinent here, specifically that “oppression…works not merely through acts of overt prohibition, but covertly, through the constitution of viable subjects.”[56] In other words, talking about trauma in terms of toxic interpellation highlights how the *messages* one receives about oneself through traumatic experience are then subconsciously re-inscribed by the subject in concrete, bodily ways. Elizabeth Grosz, in her feminist theorizing about the body, explores the notion of inscription of the body from the outside-in, a corporal subject produced through networks of signification.[57] Chalfin notes plainly that “interpersonal violence functions to render the other as object, something other than human.”

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[55] Van der Kolk, 59.

[56] Butler, Judith. “Imitation and Gender Insubordination.” *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, edited by Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin. Routledge: New York (1993): 312.

[57] Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. USA: Allen & Unwin (1994), 18.

[58] Taking into account recent work by clinicians who specialize in trauma, I see trauma as the experience rendered by *dehumanizing* outside-in inscription that wreaks havoc on the subjectivity of the survivor. I define dehumanization the way Said explains it in the quote featured earlier in this introduction; namely, the attitude and treatment that presumes its subject to be own-able, and manage-able, by someone who thinks of themselves as 'more human' than the subject.

The reason trauma can wreak such havoc is put most succinctly by Rosaldo, who posits that "one must consider the subject's position within a field of social relations in order to grasp one's emotional experience."[59] A useful understanding of the traumatic effect is one that takes into account the extent to which 'emotional experience' is one of identity formation *by* those social relations, which, as they are between people, are always mediated. The Lacanian notion of a mirroring stage in the process of subject formation finds that pained voice here, in the psychic distress that results from its absence. Rosaldo prefaces his work with an epigraph from lesbian feminist thinker Adrienne Rich: "When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing."[60] Kristine Stiles writes that "the struggle between the multiplicity of internal voices and the monolithic voice of external authority breeds trauma."[61] It is here, in the negation of their experience, the

[58] Chaflin, 105.

[59] Rosaldo, 2.

[60] Adrienne Rich quoted in Rosaldo, xxi.

[61] Stiles, Kristine. "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies: Representations of Cultures of

invalidation of their layered and complex internal lives, and the denial of their story by the dehumanizing "monolithic voice of external authority," do the subjects of oppression experience the assault on their ontology that constitutes trauma's breeding ground. Judith Butler asserts that "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes" and that as such, "the invocation of identity is always a risk."[62] One contemporary example of the embodied result of such subconscious belief, the physiological havoc wreaked by abusive messaging, is Van der Kolk's description of rape victims being physiologically unable to relax at the end of a yoga class, demonstrating what he believes is a trauma-induced inability to believe, with brain or with body, that they are safe. It appears that the human nervous system wires in similarly 'hypervigilant' ways regardless of the mode in which the dehumanizing messages at the heart of trauma are delivered, whether the trauma comes from being called "worthless" by a family member, or from being treated as a possession by American society writ large.

Recent trauma research suggests that such treatment has physiological effects. Van der Kolk asserts, simply, that "the brain is a cultural organ."[63] For such a simple sentence, the implications of it are wide-ranging. The implications most important to this investigation are the ones concerning the relationship between ontology and embodiment. To paraphrase

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Trauma." *On Violence: A Reader*, edited by Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim. Durham: Duke University Press (2007): 522-538.

[62] Butler, 308.

[63] Butler, 84.

prominent literary theorist Terry Eagleton, without others, there would not be a need for language, which is what creates reality.[64] Without others, there is not a social reality to reflect back to me, for good or for ill, what I am, or even *that* I am. Those who work in the humanities and social sciences will likely agree that culture is important, and that it determines an awful lot about how and why people do what they do. Van der Kolk gives those of us with such a vested interest in the business of cultural theory a way to think through culture's effects as bodily ones, and as a result, a way to think through its enactment, and reproduction, as a bodily effect of being a subject formed by a culture that either reflects its subjects' humanity accurately or doesn't. If one is dehumanized, subject to abusive fictions diminishing their own worth, certain ways of processing and responding to the world will emerge in the subject that might appear out of the context of the moment because it is in step with another moment. While the reasons people are mistreated are socially constructed, the effect of mistreatment and prolonged alarm on the human brain appears to be quite similar across difference in culture and location. While what constitutes a threat is socially determined, the feeling of being threatened affects the brain in much the same way. Van der Kolk plainly states that the way a person is treated has a direct effect on the brain as it develops, determining "not only how we think and what we think about, but our very capacity *to* think."[65]

Recent research in cognition throws into sharp relief the physiological effect that

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64 Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory, An Introduction*, second edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing (1996).

65 Van der Kolk, 21.

dehumanizing treatment, whether rhetorical or physically brutal, has on its subject. Van der Kolk writes that the nervous system begins forming before we're born, but does most of its wiring by the time we're four or five years old. The brain stem, or 'reptilian brain,' governs the emotions and stress response, including the endocrine system.[66] The amygdala, situated right above it, functions as a "smoke alarm" — it senses what might be a threat, and acts on it without parsing whether the perceived threat is an actual threat. In front of the amygdala, the thalamus, which Van der Kolk refers to as the "watch tower," does that work of parsing and interpreting information. Van der Kolk asserts that traumatized people experience a reduction in the corresponding regions of brain activity: they live with a decreased ability to interpret sensory input.

One aspect of those negative effects is temporal. Van der Kolk writes that traumatized people who suffer somatic distress symptoms with no clear source—muscle spasms, migraines, back pain—are receiving distress signals from the body beyond such time as when those signals were pertinent to the situation. A distressed person 'blowing things out of proportion,' for instance, might be doing so because in moments of extremity, the more evolved frontal part of the brain shuts down and the brain stem secretes hormones instructing the body to "fight," "flight," or "freeze." Herman and Van der Kolk both write that if a person spends enough formative time distressed by things she cannot control, she is likely to develop anxiety or some other kind of autonomic hyperarousal.[67] This hyperarousal is an involuntary survival mechanism that helped her to cope in her youth, but outside of the

[66] Ibid., 56.
[67] Herman, 35; Van der Kolk, 225.

family home, or beyond her childhood, she is derided as 'crazy' or 'hysterical': she responds to the world with an unconscious hermeneutic wired in her past, one that interprets even benign signs in the present as threats according to a rubric rooted in a past context. The interpretive function is simply absent, and as such, Edkins argues,[68] we don't know what happened because we don't have thoughts about what happened: we can't name what happened, which means we can't make sense of what happened.

What's important about the recent work on cognition as it relates to trauma theory is that the more 'primitive' parts of the brain overwhelm the frontal parts – the parts that determine if the smoke is coming from a barbeque or a fire that are responsible for an ability to reason and to contextualize sensory input. The conscious mind can reason, and therefore direct a person's behavior to be reasonable according to the moment. While humanists held up reason as positive proof of human intellect, reasoning can also be described as a social practice meant to enforce culturally contextual norms. Foucault is useful here, specifically in his study of modern penality, when he points out that "mechanisms of normalizing judgement" are not brought about by "the superimposition of the human sciences on criminal justice and in the requirements proper to this new rationality or to the humanism that it appeared to bring with it," but rather are operated by "disciplinary technique."[69] The norms engendered by such technique are subjugative ones, formulated and enforced by the ones at the top, are thereby also most able to access the conscious mind and its grasp on reason: an

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[68] Edkins, 39.

[69] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon Books (1977): 196.

interpretive process that is, among other things, a social force isolating the least powerful by reducing their ability to 'crack the code' of the present moment.

While this inability has historically been employed as a means of attacking the character of the traumatized person as a social failure, recent clinical studies show that the traumatized person's brain works differently than those of people who have not been through catastrophic and unbearable events. It turns out that certain parts of the brain 'light' up — the neurons interpret and send signals to the rest of the body — much less often in the brains of traumatized patients. For instance, their proprioceptive abilities, self-sensory networks that Van der Kolk calls sensory self-awareness, are often lacking. Van der Kolk would ask a severely traumatized patient to hold an object such as a key, and often, that patient would not know what the object was.[70] Other patients felt alarmed at not knowing where their masseuse was in the room even though the masseuse was holding the patient's feet. The lost sense of self we usually think of as metaphor is, in fact, embodied: severe trauma victims' central midline brain areas do not light up normally. Their sense of self, their sense of their own body, is offline. Caruth writes that "trauma is confrontation within an event that, in its unexpectedness and horror, cannot be placed within schemes of prior knowledge."[71] Perhaps the state of trauma is one in which prior knowledge doesn't remain 'prior' enough for the traumatized person to place the traumatic event in that scheme of prior knowledge, an integration which requires self-awareness and a grasp of narrative and meaning. If the

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[70] Van der Kolk, 89.

[71] Caruth, 153.

traumatized person can't fully be 'now,' it seems to follow that they can't be altogether 'here' either, in that contextually reasonable interpretations are not altogether available to the subject in the present moment.

As noted previously, John L. Roberts intervenes in the mammoth influence Cathy Caruth has had over the nascent field of trauma studies to point out that she and her peers "have mostly neglected the historical dimension of their respective enterprises,"[72] in Caruth's case by using both de Man and Van Der Kolk to "integrat[e] deconstructive practice…in order to establish a performative theory of language" that "conceal[s] through clinical technologies"[73] the "radical openness in temporality residing at the heart of the subject's being."[74] Here, Roberts makes the sort of intervention that dovetails with the broader project of decolonial scholarship, intersubjectivity, and the methodology of autoethnography. Complementing this refrain, Stacey Novack summarizes Robert Stolorow's conception of agency as a force that, "insofar as it is damaged by trauma, is an orientation to the world that will be inevitably lost and mourned, with consolation resting on the fact that helplessness, anxiety, and grief can be borne and shared jointly." Decolonial scholarship, in the tradition of the disciplines that produced a number of its adherents—affect studies, gender studies, feminist studies, queer studies, women of color feminism, Chicanx Studies—attends to the notion that 'radical openness,' as Roberts puts it, might be found in research that is itself

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[72] Roberts, 171.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

‘borne and shared jointly’; in this case, intersubjective autoethnography. Clough points out that “just as experimentation and auto ethnographic writing was being elaborated and critical theory and cultural criticism, trauma was being discussed in terms of its affect on memory, it’s producing in the subject the incapacity to retrieve the past, or to speak truth about it.”[75]

Such incapacities disrupt a linear experience of time with intrusive memories, also known as flashbacks. While memories are by their very nature a temporally nonlinear event, the experience of a flashback triggers a physiological change in the subject that the subject has not consciously sanctioned. Useful examples might be a war veteran body-slamming to the ground at a barbecue because a firework sounds like a gunshot, or a certain curtain fabric triggering a panic attack in a woman who is reminded of the bedroom where she was molested. In the moment of flashback, the brain of a traumatized person does not filter information as relevant according to the present context, but according to the past context of the traumatic event. Sensory input is a kind of text, and one effect of trauma is to scramble the traumatized subject’s ability to sort through that input. And insofar as behavior is a series of gestures, a performance, through the disruption of intrusive memories trauma triggers a gesture out of step, out of sequence, with the cultural norm of the present moment. It might be said that the traumatized person is unable to read the text of the culture in which they operate,which is not only a culture of space but of time. An unfettered relationship to the present moment is the precursor to the very safety in the present moment that Van der Kolk

[75] Clough, 6.

asserts is unavailable to traumatized people. Trauma disrupts the subject's temporal experience, which in turn manifests as a gesture that doesn't fit the moment. It seems unreasonable, when it is better understood as a contextual snag. It is a reasonable response, but not to the present moment.

In yet another use of "web" as metaphor, Foucault describes the socially controlling force of discipline as a "web that constrains or restrains" gestures.[76] The performatively reiterative gesture of trauma, whether a heightened startle reaction or hyperventilation, is a piece of cultural text inserted into a moment other than the one in which the action to which it is a response occurred. Said describes orientalism[77] as a "web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, [and] *dehumanizing ideology*"[78] that uses narratives of exoticism as a cultural force to exert Western imperialism over the Orient. Geertz[79] uses the same metaphor of a "web" to define culture as "webs of significance" suspending man and spun by man himself, and for Geertz, they render an understanding of culture to be essentially semiotic, and the business of understanding it to be interpretive.[80] The definitive turn he takes is also one that conceives of culture as a web of infinite messaging. Said's mission is to point out how belief systems animating cultural forces such as stigma and

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[76] Foucault, 152.

[77] Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Knopf (2014): 35.

[78] Ibid., 27.

[79] Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, Inc (1973): 3-33.

[80] Geertz, 5.

stereotype operate through deliberately false narratives to maintain a fundamentally racist power structure. Geertz reminds us that both are webs of culturally mediated messages otherwise known as "social expressions." So too, perhaps, are Rosaldo's "field of social relations"[81] and Grosz's description of the human body as "interwoven with and constitutive of systems of meaning, significance, and representation"[82] and "bound up in the order of desire, signification, and power."[83] Foucault's influential examination of punishment as a form of social control[84] trades in the same metaphor, calling "everyday existence" a "web."[85] Such a large theme across these impactful works and the authors who wrote them suggests a theoretically near-universal relevance of body and subjectivity as bound up with and suspended in webs of meaning: a fly interpellated through its relation to the spiderweb in which it is caught, a spiderweb made of both language and the social expressions it encodes.

The denial of a subjects' humanity through their treatment as objects, as outlets to be used, is therefore enacted through both rhetoric and gesture: messaging I'd further describe as a process of misreading that enforces uneven power structures by denying its subjects fundamental humanity. The purposeful inequality of social order enforced by such denial is

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81 Rosaldo, 2.

82 Grosz, 18.

83 Ibid., 19.

84 Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon Books (1977).

85 Ibid., 183.

one of deep betrayal. Such inequality, whether in a familial or legal system, maintains and reinforces oppressive power relations by negatively affecting the subject's sense of self-worth, incorporating dehumanizing stories into the deeply personal process of identity formation. Edkins writes persuasively on the damage that can result:

> Who we are, or who we think we may be, depends very closely on the social context in which we place and find ourselves. Our existence relies not only on our personal survival as individual beings but also, in a very profound sense, on the continuance of the social order that gives our existence meaning and dignity: family, friends, political community, beliefs. If that order betrays us in some way, we may survive in the sense of continuing to live as physical beings, but the meaning of our existence has changed.[86]

Van der Kolk and Caruth join Edkins in the general premise that trauma is about interpretation: the traumatized state, as one that debilitates the interpretive faculties of the brain, is one of not being able to make meaning out of one's experience. Herman claims that without being able to integrate a traumatic memory into a narrative, a return to a sense of agency and self-worth in the traumatized subject is impossible.[87]

In describing her term "cultures of trauma" as the "traumatic circumstance that is manifest in culture, discernible at the inersection of aesthetic, political, and social experience,"[88] Kristine Stiles implies that aesthetic, political, and social experience all converge to create culture; as such, each mode of experience has its own messaging contributing to that intersection, which is perhaps the middle of the web of "social

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[86] Edkins, 4.

[87] Herman, 224.

[88] Stiles, 522.

expressions" that together constitute the human subject. An examination of trauma raises the notion that the web of culture — what James Baldwin called a "labyrinth…of historical and public attitudes" molding identity both through belief systems and through the norms and laws that those belief systems produce — is a web of messages. Those messages, if they succeed in shaping subjects' beliefs about who they are and what they are, traumatize the subject. Said describes his concept as a "grid" for "filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness."[89] It's almost certain that oppression, leaning as it does on abusive fictions that create pariahs out of people, is a grid: one that takes its form of in culture. Said implies that the forces in control of the dominant narrative can convince a subject, or at least those around the subject, of the narrative no matter how false the narrative is. The oppressor chooses a simplified story, one that denies its subject full humanity. The traumatized subject, over time, has less and less control over that simplified story.

Judith Herman echoes Van der Kolk's characterization of trauma in terms that might also apply to such oppression when she asserts that "conventional social attitudes not only fail to recognize most rapes as violations but also construe them as consensual sexual relations for which the victim is responsible. Thus women discover an appalling disjunction between their actual experience and the social construction of reality." If you remember something in your "actual experience" that the "social construction of reality" denies having happened, the disjunction between the two is your liminal home: you're stranded in a web of abusive fictions. In terms of both cultural oppression and interpersonal abuse, the damage

[89] Said, 6.

rendered by this distortion is both intentional and systematic. It is the result of the debilitating nature of social control exerting itself over a subject's sense of agency and therefore her ownership of her identity — her story about herself. Insofar as it is deliberate political and cultural obfuscation of the other defined by the fact that it is, in Said's words, "*not even trying to be accurate*,"[90] orientalism is absolutely at work here. The "deterioration" of the brain that Caruth notes is a symptom of trauma[91] is mirrored in society entire, and it includes the elusive shape of what did not come to pass. Such is the slow process of destruction created by the abusive web of an oppressive culture, those social expressions working in concert to ensnare their prey.

Subjugation inherently fashions its targets that way. Said has been pointing that out for half a century. Herman's point about the great damage done to a public that does not honor the truth of the most marginalized people in it is echoed across various discourses. Said's work illuminates how deeply such effects thereby corrode the subject's conceivable relationship to truth. Alexander makes a forceful case for American legislation as a main method of maintaining a "new undercaste"[92] of black man, a method both borne out of and reinforcing racist ideology that creates a "closed circuit of perpetual marginality"[93] In naming the orientalist discourses that produce the otherizing of people and their cultures—the

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90 Said, 71.

91 Caruth, 65.

92 Alexander, 17.

93 Ibid., 95.

discursive construction of a "closed field" hemming the other in with exoticizing and fetishizing assumptions, Said foregrounds Alexander's claims about systemic violence as a closed circuit.

The results of this institutionalized mistreatment are a trauma that is as evident in what it produces as in what it does not. It is easier to trace deterioration through a survey of what was there. It's harder to delineate the crystal ships of what, as a result of systemic oppression, never was: whatever trauma victims may have grown up to accomplish or create if they had not been silenced, trapped in the amber trauma, suspended in the web of a dehumanizing dominant narrative. Van der Kolk writes that "humans are meaning-making creatures,"[94] and meaning is not only a question of interpretation of events, but one of the narrative it is then possible to create about them. For traumatized people, memory will intrude unbidden and the physiological autonomic response will be unmanageable in scope. When that's the case, it's easy to believe the worst stories. The resultant damaged ability to trust oneself is widely acknowledged by contemporary researchers to be at the heart of the loss suffered by traumatized people. It corrodes a sense of confidence and well-being to wonder whether one's memory is true, or one's interpretation valid, or one's reaction reasonable. It's difficult to "make happy stories in our minds,"[95] as Van der Kolk puts it, if the social and domestic order rests on seeing us, and our seeing ourselves, as inherently bad, abnormal, or less-than – if the familial and cultural holders of power are trading in

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[94] Van der Kolk, 16.

[95] Van der Kolk, Bessel. "On Being." Podcast with Krista Tippett. Posted June 6, 2017.

dehumanizing narratives.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that "research no longer be conducted with indigenous communities as if their views did not count or their lives did not matter,"[96] a description that closely resembles language for trauma used by Van der Kolk when he writes that "trauma almost invariably involves not being seen, not being mirrored, not being taken into account." [97] Hartman's aforementioned focus on negation as a force in subjection is pertinent here, as a form of "not being seen" that is arguably as powerful as orientalism's othering grid of "not even trying to be accurate." Here, Herman's "social construction of reality" is the record, the researcher's notes, the limited Western conception of knowledge that disqualifies embodied knowing, the archive that does not take into account the oppressed person's viewpoint or experience, "for," as Stiles writes, "its concealed conditions, its silences, are the spaces in which the destructions of trauma multiply."[98] Here, the act of creating a web of culture—of "social construction[s] of realty" from laws to norms—that denies the oppressed the validity of their experience is also one of trauma, either through calling them subhuman in so many words, or failing to call them at all.

Trauma theory and recent studies of cognition assert that this disturbance in identity formation is also one in temporal experience, suggesting an inextricable link between the two. Such a link has profound implications for gesture as a form of speech, and for the

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[96] Smith, 9.

[97] Van der Kolk, 59.

[98] Stiles, Kristine. "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies: Representations of Cultures of Trauma." *On Violence: A Reader*, edited by Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim. Durham: Duke University Press (2007): 522-538.

relationship between knowledge and embodiment. Coercive social forces of disgust, shame, and segregation don't simply produce a feeling of anger and shame in their targets, but their physiological counterparts: a demonstrable rise in stress hormones. This rise in stress hormones leads to a host of symptoms, from somatic complaints such as migraines or muscle spasms, to an inability to sleep or digest food peacefully, as well as aforementioned difficulties interpreting sensory input. Lipsky Van der Noot specifies that the 'fight, flight, or freeze' reaction, the kind of response occasioning a release of stress hormones, requires that one "literally shake it off" the way animals do to "move the energy through."[99] Herman emphasizes community, and within that, laughter as healing antidotes she relies in the groups she facilitates with survivors of incest. Van der Kolk recommends yoga, theater, and any mirroring or connective social game as a way to finish the recovery that talk therapy started but can rarely complete. Citing an example of a Native social worker describing impromptu group hugs, Lipsky Van der Noot calls these healing convergences of space and time "microcultures": pockets of time and space "emphasizing a different set of values than the culture at large" supporting its members by "showering [them] with encouragement and holding [them] accountable."[100] Those two social practices are what Herman asserts constitute a successful support group, whether for veterans or incest survivors, and both are powerful forms of resistance to the socially isolating and physiologically wearisome effects of trauma.

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[99] Lipsky Van der Noot, 213.

[100] Lipsky Van der Noot, 215-6.

Kristine Stiles explores split identities as a response to an unbearable situation in her exposition of "cultures of trauma," using case studies of Romanian performance artists and nazi skinheads living under a repressive political regime. She cites the work of Alexandra Cornilescu, who "noted that survival in Romania depends upon 'hedging,'" a cultural practice in which "one cultivates the ability to live multiple lives."[101] Stiles explains that "Romanians learned to say one thing and mean something else, to speak in layered codes impenetrable to informers, often even confusing to friends, to use their eyes and gestures as if they were words."[102] In addition to buttressing earlier notions of the porous boundary between gesture and words, Stiles shows how the very porousness of that boundary is utilized as a way to deal with the trauma of political repression. Every form of interpellation but the obvious ones are used by those oppressed by the dominant discourse, distributing agency and its enforcement throughout the various modes of interpellations available to the individual within culture: an inside-out inscription of self that is articulated through a world-directed intentionality. Furthermore, traumatic intrusive memories have the effect in common with what Gallagher writes is the effect in schizophrenic people of "unintended thinking": that the "common temporal structure of embodied movement, action, and cognition" is "a structure that breaks down."[103]

A fairly recent spate of humanities theory has made some troubling attempts,

[101] Cornilescu quoted in Stiles, 534.

[102] Ibid., 534.

[103] Gallagher, 205.

whether nominal or suggestive, to retheorize the trauma resulting from systematic oppression. These attempts have occasionally strayed into the realm of the ethically questionable in an effort to perhaps shed limiting aspects of the discourse. Mimi Nguyen makes this misstep in *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages*, by using the trappings of progressive diction to further the mistreatment of the refugees and immigrants who are her subjects.[104] The most useful part of Nguyen's critique is a Foucauldian analysis pointing out that post-traumatic stress disorder as a diagnosis is geared toward rehabilitation, which is itself, she notes, "a system of disciplinary intents and powers." Edkins makes a similar claim, when she describes recovery from trauma as "the reinsertion of survivors into structures of power."[105] But Nguyen slides into an accusatory stance from which it is difficult not to commit some of the same theoretical errors she means to critique.

While it is useful to point out that such "classificatory schema" serve to elide the power imbalance at work between, for example, a soldier who murders someone at My Lai and a villager who saw it happen, Nguyen does not present a convincing alternative, but merely makes a convenient accusation of all rehabilitation discourse as an agent of liberal empire functioning discursively to open the path toward "commit[ing] more war."[106] Looking specifically at survivors and veterans of the Vietnam War, Nguyen also charges the American

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[104] Nguyen, Mimi. *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt and Other Refugee Passages*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.

[105] Edkins, 9.

[106] Nguyen, 122.

Psychiatric Association with a "forfeiture of moral judgement" in its 1980 inclusion of post-traumatic stress disorder in its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* because it asserts equivalence in psychiatric symptoms between survivors of trauma.[107] Nguyen's interesting claim that such a move "flattens the articulation" of their symptoms garners no tangible proof; distasteful as neoliberal critics may find it, the symptoms of intrusive flashback do plague both soldiers and citizens.[108] Kristine Stiles demonstrates a better handling of material like this when she writes plainly of "the shared symptoms that result from the interrelated causes of trauma in war and sexual violence," but makes clear that she nurtures "no lingering desire for holistic humanism, nor the need to attempt the constitution of false homogeneous communities."

But Nguyen shows no such subtle nuance; her tone toward her subjects, including Kim Phuc, subject of the infamous 'napalm photo," can be troublesomely condescending. Nguyen dismisses Phuc's appearance on Oprah, in which she discusses her relationship with God, as "rehearsed" without record of what Phuc did in the green room before going on television. Nguyen characterizes ethnographers, refugee camp workers, and refugees' own testimonies as "fanciful" and the writing of a psychologist about forgiveness as "musings."[109] Nguyen's aim to productively trouble the notion that testimonies and the concept of trauma aren't themselves rhetorical moves with agendas, serving a purpose in more nefarious

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[107] Ibid., 13.

[108] Ibid., 78.

[109] Nguyen, 55.

ideological economies, is hampered by the shallow antagonism evident in her diction. Wherever a more progressive scholarship lies, it is probably not in the direction of rejecting the primacy of a marginalized subject's account of their own experience in favor of a facile critique of that testimony. It is probably also not in Nguyen's facile dismissal of "the perpetrator" or the concomitant disregard of horrors suffered by veterans, which neatly "others" them in a kind of quasi-reverse orientalism insofar as it results in "a flattened articulation," if you will, of their humanity. Edkins accounts in a more responsible way for what Nguyen rushes to critique — that often, traumatized veterans had themselves been victims of trauma — but instead of writing off the experiences of perpetrators, Edkins reflects that "it seems that to be called traumatic — to produce what are seen as symptoms of trauma — an event has to be more than a situation of utter powerlessness…it has to involve a betrayal of trust as well."[110] Here Edkins performs a kind of theoretical opening-out into a considerate question, rather than a closing-in to the familiar circuit or field to which a subject is relegated by hasty and unexamined critique like Nguyen's; Edkins' move denotes the kind of wisdom Stiles claims can "increase insight into, and compassion for, suffering, empathy which is the first and necessary stage for reform."

Augmenting the humanity of the oppressed in a discursively sustainable way is unlikely to be achieved by dehumanizing the oppressor, or by reducing the terms of positionally within a traumatic event to a shallow distinction of the perpetrator, who Nguyen seems to suggest does not deserve compassion, and the victim, who does. A Native American

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[110] Edkins, 4.

service member, deprived of options for making a living or achieving recognition beyond joining up and haunted by memories of his wartime victims, might disagree. It's a curious 'social progress' that refuses complexity of agency and experience to any group of people, 'evildoers' included. Interpellation is not just one-way, and neither is trauma. Nguyen neither convincingly takes down neoliberalism, nor convincingly suggests another theory to replace the 'trauma' label she rejects. While it is important to interrogate the way narratives of survival might be co-opted by a state eager to resolve its own wrongdoings, condescending to the testimony of a survivor about where she found power in her life moving forward risks a different kind of oppression the survivor: the discursive oppression of invalidation, and the affective oppression of contempt.

In another curiously uninterrogated stance on trauma in the diaspora, Laura U. Marks explores the "haptic visuality" of embodied spectatorship in her 2000 book *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*.[111] Marks's book touches individually upon a rather exhaustive list of cinematic works made in the 1980s and 1990s by experimental filmmakers that she identifies as members of the diaspora. Marks conceptualizes these films' viewer as a kind of archive of haptic triggers engaged in embodied spectatorship. Marks argues that these experimental films, which she calls "intercultural cinema," utilize such methods as repetition, grainy film, black spaces, disjointed imagery, and the dis-integration of image and sound to honor the gaps left by the experience of im/emigration by evoking a certain physical ("haptic") response in viewers that

[111] Marks, Laura U. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. USA: Duke University Press (2000).

stimulates, emulates, and/or releases sometimes-buried memories of intercultural and personal trauma, and politically charged wounds caused by historical censorship enacted through the “regimes of knowledge” that Marks posits comprise “first-world” culture. As Marks deepens her inquiry, Foucault’s “regimes of knowledge” become “regimes of sense knowledge,” which sets the stage for a discussion on the role of synesthesia in sense-knowledge and also suggests that a “multi-sense-regime” might, like a “multisensory” process, “know” more.[112] If “respect[ing] our bodies capacity for knowledge” is what haptic visuality and embodied spectatorship teach us through their multi-sensory processes, “translating” the dominant culture's Western, ocular-centric capacity for knowledge into a more multisensory “regime” may perhaps make room for members of the diaspora and their experience.[113] Evident here is the clear influence of Cathy Caruth and her theoretical descendants. “Memory as it attaches itself to unresolved trauma,” writes Kubiak, “is intolerable not because it has been "repressed," but rather because it *will not be translated*” (emphasis mine).[114] He quotes Caruth: “What returns in flashback is not simply an overwhelming experience that has been obstructed by a later repression or amnesia, but an event that is itself constituted, in part, by its lack of integration into consciousness.”[115] The intrusion of memory itself, a memory that precludes smooth “translation” of self from past to

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[112] Marks, 116-118.

[113] Ibid., 119.

[114] Kubiak, Anthony. “Splitting the Difference: Performance and its Double in American Culture.” *TDR* 42, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 91-114: 108.

[115] Caruth quoted in Kubiak, 108.

present, is often buried for the sake of that continuation-of-self except in moments of uncontrolled flashback.

In light of these notions, there may a troubling force at work in Marks' seeming unwillingness to interrogate further her own description of haptic response that members of the diaspora may have to the films she examines: an unloosened "affective memory" "stored in safekeeping until a means of translation can be found."[116] Here, Marks clearly describes a traumatic flashback but is unwilling to call it one. Marks' definition of haptic perception of "combination of tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive functions" seems attractive enough, especially given Marks' discussion of Western ocular-centric culture as one that enforces a limited subjective experience, one that constrains other sense-knowledges. However, in spite of Marks' theoretical research on trauma and the apparently progressive, positive effect she seems to believe haptic visuality has on people from marginalized cultures, one wonders if Marks has spent quality time with traumatized people in the diaspora or out of it. For a traumatized person to "lose her sense of proportion" in a dark and crowded movie theater as a result of a "stored memory" rising to the surface and triggering sense-knowledge can be exceedingly distressing to the person experiencing it. It can be especially so in the absence of thorough and consistent community support in its wake. Caruth notes that "as modern neurobiologists point out, the repetition in the traumatic experience in the flashback itself can be retraumatizing, if not life-threatening; it is at least threatening to the chemical structure of the brain and can ultimately lead to deterioration."[117]

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[116] Marks, 13.

[117] Caruth, 65.

Acknowledging that “first world” lenses overlook different kinds of knowledges does not prove that triggering traumatic flashbacks in immigrants and refugees is ultimately the most progressive way to go about proselytizing those other knowledges. Responsible scholarship asks whether such an experience ultimately is welcome in the subject whatever her terms, whether the reliving of it is helpful whatever the memory, and the person who carries it with her is willing to go through the painful process of integrating the memory.

Responsible theory about trauma does not lose sight of the well-being of the subject. Refusing to call a traumatic flashback a traumatic flashback does not by itself make research progressive. Triggering one in a marginalized subject does not necessarily honor the subject’s sense-knowledge, whatever form that knowledge takes and whichever of the senses is its currency.

Macarena Gómez-Barris takes a similarly worrisome step with her recent work on the neoliberal/colonial forces at work in what she calls “extractive zones,”[118] which exert Western capitalist systemic harm on local and indigenous cultures in what is problematically called the ‘Global South.’ In her recent takedown of the Anthropocene as a term that obscures ecologies and diversities of life and perspectives through a “universalizing idiom and viewpoint,” Gómez-Barris firmly roots her definition of work that decolonizes as that which “catalogues life otherwise” from that idiom in pursuit of “the creation of emergent

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[118] Gómez-Barris, 5.

alternatives."[119] Citing Anibal Quijano's stirring call for "liberation from all power organized as inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and domination," Gómez-Barris writes that she finds the potential for such liberation "within wide-ranging, critical, and interlinked social ecologies."[120] Gómez-Barris uses the term "decolonial queer femme' method' do describe her situatedness in an an epistemic and methodological "de-linking from the colonial"[121] with a theory and praxis that "valorizes non normative embodied femininity as sources of knowing and perceiving"[122] through "attending to the resonances of lived embodiment as world-shaping activities."[123] Gómez-Barris points out the indebtedness of such positionally to women of color feminisms, Chicana feminisms, and queer scholarship as well as scholarship that moves betwixt those discourses.

In an entertaining, if not entirely earned, romp of scholarship, Gómez-Barris uses what she calls a "fish-eye episteme" to "displace..the ocular centricity of human development" in a visual critique that is inspiring if not always convincing. While it's easy to agree that settler colonialism "systematically destroy[s] through dispossession, enslavement, and then producing the planet as a corporate bio-territory,"[124] it seems Gómez-Barris writes from a place of belief that rivers have only been viewed as a way to harness electricity, and

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[119] Gómez-Barris, 5

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid., 9.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Gómez-Barris, 9.

[124] Gómez-Barris, 9

that seeing rivers as sites of social and ecological sustenance is novel – or, perhaps, that conducting research to that end is, and furthermore that doing so requires coining unnecessary new terms and making sweeping generalities about neoliberalism and empire. With a proliferation of similarly sweeping definitions of decoloniality, what it is, and what it does, occasionally Gómez-Barris risks 'decoloniality' as a catch-all term for anything that isn't clearly neoliberal empire, and as a result the specificity that populates what she calls the "lushness of social life" that can't be seen "through any single frame" risks being swept under the rug by facile dismissal.

There's a discursive pitfall here; namely, twenty-first century trends in decolonial humanities theory risk renouncing specificity along with a situation in history. There are, in fact, numerous scholars who have privileged the social and ecological sustenance of rivers to Andean indigenous communities (Erasmus, Spigelski, Vogt, Suntana…), and contemporary queer cultural theorists who have invoked a hermeneutics of phenomenology (Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* comes to mind, but not because I think that book is a particularly successful text in this way either); the only novel thing about Gómez-Barris' analysis here is calling it a 'fish-eye episteme.' A new name, here, does not necessarily denote a new function, and it is these turns of phrase that are, unlike Pellegrini's aside about hysteria previously noted, possibly unearned. I worry that enthusiastic scholars pursuing decoloniality as a project risk obscuring specificity the way Gómez-Barris intends to avoid by (forgive me) muddying the waters of the decolonial discourse. I've also had the pleasure and honor of riding in a narrow riverboat in Amazonian waters with indigenous community members to write about what they do. Though I didn't do so as an academic researcher, I also wasn't

trading in facile dismissals of my own complicity in an attempt to somehow be other than that and then get credit for it in an academic text. Relying entirely on my senses to experience those boat rides without describing the encounter in academic terms and/or in the English language, while a useful and perhaps even necessary exercise for progressive humanities scholars in that position; and endeavoring not to enact quite so neoliberal a transaction in the encounter; doesn't decolonize the encounter as much as it makes me a reasonably thoughtful tourist in addition to my role as a humanitarian worker and nonfiction writer. As someone who also put in seven years of time in undergraduate and masters programs' in creative writing and who generally enjoys fun new names for things, it pains me to say that such poetic terms as "fish-eye episteme," "inverted view," and/or "submerged perspectives" might not perform the radical departure from the colonial project Gómez-Barris' seems to be aiming for. Would that a turn through phenomenology while riding in a boat in the jungle sloughed the neoliberalism right off; sadly, I fear it's not quite as straightforward as Gómez-Barris' writing suggests. In fact, if I've taken clearly at least one of her point about decolonial epistemologies, nothing is as straightforward as may be symbolized, including the dismissive claims she makes.

In that vein, Gómez-Barris additionally pursues a facile dismissal of spiritual tourism in terms her own scholarship trades in. She writes:

> As Byrd states, settler societies "exist relationally and in collusion with the processes of racial, gendered, and sexual otherings that seek to make contesting histories and experiences resonate authochthonously through the lingering touch of the real." The "lingering touch of the real" is an apt descriptive phrase for how spiritual tourists as non-indigenous subjects desire personal transformation through contact with "authentic native spirituality." The spiritual tourist industry operates by transferring the cacophony of

the US racial order to the site of empire. [125]

The neocolonial trappings of the spiritual tourism industry exploiting indigenous communities is certainly deserving of critique; however, Gómez-Barris herself comes awfully close to "desiring the lingering touch of the real" "through contact with 'authentic native spirituality'" when she describes her use of the phenomenological lens as one in which "the future on the other side of catastrophe was presented and perceived as unmediated relationally with the natural world, a sensual spirituality organized by Juana and Francisco that created the possibility for the unnamable to emerge."[126] A 'sensual spirituality creating the possibility for the unnameable to emerge' sounds, frankly, like the 'lingering touch of the real' that the spiritual tourists come looking for, and aside from perhaps a closer study of the language and culture at hand, it's not clear what distinguishes Gómez-Barris from those tourists—from the 'cacophony of empire' imposing itself on subjects like Juana and Francisco. *The Extractive Zone* is exemplary of both the exuberance of spirit and forthright scholarship that makes projects like mine possible through such large leaps; it also offers clear instances of the risks that 'radical openness' poses to research. Is it possible to work toward a more self-aware decoloniality in humanities theory than one that the current trend of facile critiques of neoliberal empire allows for? A decolonial approach that faces more directly the function scholarly claims serve to those who hold doctorates and would like garner a professorship and advance to tenure by roundly critiquing neoliberal power relations

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[125] Gómez-Barris, 56-57.

[126] Ibid., 62.

through examining facile generalizations for traces of oneself, that boldly examines one's own propensity for hypocrisy as itself a colonizing power? It's not that these scholars *hide* their professional objective or their own participation in neoliberal empire as much as they both fail to address it directly, and fail to do so while making critical claims that are so general as to be hypocritical and ultimately flimsy. There is an implicit tension here between the stretching decolonial scholars mean to do with language to account for what cannot be symbolized, which is a worthy and vital concern of the decolonial endeavor, and what can.

This concern, which I've illustrated using the three books above but which applies to a spate of post-9/11 humanities theory, stems from my desire to attend to how sneaky colonizing powers can be on my own research and writing, as well as my peers'. Decolonial scholarship is not immune to the colonizing powers working, as they do, upon the ideas we have and the books we make, and fighting neoliberalism on every front includes a dogged commitment to a scholarship that does not pretend to fall outside of it or to avoid its pitfalls. Claims that it does are possibly not in service of *de*colonizing the academy but in *re*-colonizing it with a laziness that 'opens up' less than it willfully ignores. Not every scholar needs to take down neoliberalism anew, and neoliberal empire is undoubtedly a nefarious network of power relations oppressing the subaltern; there remains a risk in ceasing to be ever-vigilant of ourselves as scholars. That I am troubled by neoliberalism just like everyone else in my field is precisely why I believe this trend deserves to be questioned with the care researchers are trained to have. I worry that the adoption of creative but possibly less-original-than-meets-the-eye terms in a book of cultural theory, in other words, may ultimately be a less decolonial act than an overt and unflinching example at contemporary

constraints on the capacity, willingness, and demand for the kind of critical self-awareness called for by social justice efforts.

To conclude, the abusive nature of imperialism is revealed in the deliberate "misreading" of othered cultures and bodies that constitute dehumanization; the abusive nature of rape culture is revealed in the deliberate misleading of the victim about how worthy she is and whether anyone will believe her; and the abusive nature of racism is revealed in the deliberate destabilization of the racially marked other's sense of safety, sometimes to the point of murder. In all cases, the traumatized subject's own ability to read the immediate culture of the present moment is impeded by a compromised ability to detect threats and filter relevant sensory input. They are suspended in the web of a culture that tells intentional lies about them, and they can do little to alter their positionality within a field of social relations such that their humanity shines through the dominant ideology.

While childhood trauma experienced at the hands of caregivers is not always entirely distinct from trauma experienced at the hands of a racist police state, nor are the two equivalent. To say so would risk invoking what Fred Moten, in his essay about looking at the photo of lynched black American man Emmet Till, calls the "epistemological danger" of the semiotic pull toward universality.[127] However, the language used by Herman and Michelle Alexander, a psychologist and a legal scholar ostensibly talking about two respectively different things, is so strikingly similar as to be revelatory. Both authors hammer home the

[127] Moten, Fred. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition.* University of Minnesota Press (2003): 198.

point that the damaging phenomenon of mistreatment lies in rendering certain groups as pariahs in the imagination of those who have power over them, both individually and in public discourse. Lack of what Alexander calls an "ethic of genuine care"[128] is what she argues keeps black people in America oppressed due to social constructions of racial bias. That lack is also what keeps abused women derided as hysterical pariahs. Trauma, then, is a double-barreled oppressor. It is not only dominant discourse, but the thickness of culture that begins where discourse ends. It is not only the abusive words and gestures that perform culture, but the wounding ideology that animates those bodies into victims and perpetrators. To borrow the words of Edkins and Herman, to access the meaning of our existence depends on a dignity that it's awfully hard to give ourselves when others don't give it to us, too. Said's work on orientalism was undeniably influential across disciplines and decades, because he identified the mechanism of mistreatment at the level of empire in terms of culture and story. He exposed that mistreatment as a diffuse cultural practice working to obfuscate the other by employing dehumanizing narratives. Whether it is to help battered women recover or to change public conceptions about race, whether the pain suffered by a traumatized person is inscribed by an abusive home environment in the family, or an abusive police state, social transformation will not occur if that doesn't change: if the social imaginary does not shift its conceptions in order to help marginalized groups and/or traumatized people to be seen and heard. Herman and Alexander both persuasively argue that central to that ethic is acknowledging the suffering and the humanity of those who have been hurt, which requires seeing them first as human at all.

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[128] Alexander, 18.

Chapter II.

The Survival Girls:
A Meditation on Gender-Based Violence and Performance

> This puts me in mind of a much repeated, indeed, probably the most repeated, passage from Jane Bowles's 1943 novel Two Serious Ladies. One little girl offers to introduce another to a new game called "I forgive you for all your sins." "Is it fun?" the prospective playmate asks. The answer: "It's not for fun that we play it, but because it's necessary to play it." And so, they do.
>
> Ann Pellegrini[129]

Jacqueline was twenty-nine years old when I met her in 2013. She was the newest member of the Survival Girls, a women's theater group for Congolese refugees that I facilitated in a Nairobi slum in 2011. The group began as an arts workshop and within two weeks it had become a theater group whose first project was creating a piece to perform in public on World Refugee Day 2011. As their first piece of drama took shape, the women chose the theme of survival for how they would be known: The Survival Girls. Over the years to follow, the Survival Girls has sustained itself as a self-governed theater group of and for these Congolese women who created original theater based on social justice issues. The group grew as the women took on the roles of chairlady and treasurer, deepened their friendships, and received occasional contracts from humanitarian agencies in the refugee community in Nairobi to create original theater pieces about AIDS, gender-based violence, and the importance of education for girls.

When I returned to Nairobi in the summer of 2013, I met Jacqueline. Jacqueline's

[129] Pellegrini, 31.

voice was deep, her body stout, and she wore her hair back in a simple ponytail. It was her story the Survival Girls drew from most heavily that summer for their newest piece of original theater, which traced a refugee's journey from Congo (which the Survival Girls members called “Congo” and not “The Democratic Republic of Congo”) to Kenya. The play begins in Congo, where a young woman and her mother are cooking at home. A rebel soldier, played by Jacqueline, raps on the door and barges in, ties up the daughter while he rapes her mother, then rapes the daughter. The soldier then leaves and the daughter cradles her mother, who dies in her arms. The daughter gathers her possessions and flees on foot. She boards a bus whose conductor kicks her off because she doesn't have the fare. A good Samaritan helps her to another bus station, and the driver of the next bus rapes her, telling her that sex is her payment for the fare. When she arrives in Kenya, a refugee agency sends her to a camp, where she is reunited with a family member. The Survival Girls join each other onstage for the finale, which is a song they sing in a mix of French and English: *Dire non à la violence/ We don't want to suffer anymore/ Dire non à la violence/ Non à la guerre…*

When the Survival Girls came up with the plot of this piece in our workshop, Jacqueline spoke a Congolese dialect of Swahili in her low voice while another Survival Girl translated for her. Jacqueline sat on the floor, leaning against the wall, wiping her eyes. She told her own story, translating it from memory-image to language; it was translated for me by a member of the Survival Girls; and then the Survival Girls set to work adapting the story for the stage. When it came time to cast the characters, Jacqueline agreed (and perhaps even volunteered; I'm not sure, because I know little Swahili) to play the men who did this to her, the men who raped her. The refugee women and Kenyan counselors who eventually saw the

production would comment on how perfectly Jacqueline embodied a rebel soldier's walk and talk and mannerisms.

This was not depicted in the play: Jacqueline saw her brother chopped up and the men who did it ordered her to make a stew with him. When she refused, they raped her, and she had a baby boy. She does not know if the baby boy survives.

In a profound way, there is no "telling" of this or any other part of Jacqueline's history — any kind of telling. There is no speaking for her. There is also no "telling" if it is true. By "true" I mean "confirmed according to the rigors of journalistic standards," and "documented according to the rigors of academic standards." For Jaqueline, her story, and those of the lives of others in these pages who have undergone the unspeakable, the business of "confirming" the facts of history for the purpose of research can be anything from futile to damaging and unethical. Augusto Boal, in an interview about the participants in his Theater of the Oppressed practice, put it well: "Ummm. If they don't feel oppressed can they talk about that oppression? Sometimes an oppression is so violent that you can't even talk about it."[130] And sometimes, you *can* talk about it, but choose not to, or not to talk about it any more than you have. Jacqueline chose not to remain in touch with the other members of the group or with me after 2013. Beyond a YouTube video made by a social service charity in which Jacqueline's face is blurred out for anonymity and her words are subtitled in English, there is no more direct record of Jacqueline telling it. And there is no Jacqueline here represented; she is there, either continuing to await asylum and living in poverty, or she is resettled to a

[130] Boal, Chatterjee, Schechner. "Augusto Boal, City Councillor: Legislative Theatre and the Chamber in the Streets: An Interview" from *TDR* (1998) V 42, No 4: 75-90.

third country (in which she may still live in poverty). Her story is deeply sourced in that it is hers, and that she told it, and that she is a wellspring.

The United States Government and UCSB's Office of Research define research as follows:

> Research means a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Activities which meet this definition constitute research for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported under a program which is considered research for other purposes. For example, some demonstration and service programs may include research activities.[131]

In keeping with the delineations given above, I approach this case study as a form of memoir and not traditional academic research. There is no physical or ethical way to perform the sort of research as defined above about Jacqueline and the Survival Girls. Jacqueline related her story to me and to others in the room, and I directed the show she and the other women in the group created from her story, before I began a PhD Program and identified as a scholar. Her status as a refugee and as a trauma victim would designate her a member of a vulnerable population. Asking her to reflect on the process in a formalized interview risks re-traumatization. For that reason alone, a more traditional "ethnography" is out of the question.

But there are other reasons. One is that more traditional ethnographies run the risk of

[131] "Office for Human Research Protections," HHS.gov: 45 CRF 46.102 (d). Website. Retrieved 2/5/18. <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/regulations/45-cfr-46/index.html>

promulgating devastating amounts of the cultural forces – misogyny and Eurocentrism, for example – whose immediate manifestations have already hurt these women. Joann Kealiinohomoku points out that while 'ethnic dance' is a phrase meant to convey the anthropological view that "all forms of dance reflect the cultural traditions within which they developed," the canon of scholarship attempting to look at ethnic dance is "rife with unsubstantiated deductive reasoning, poorly documented 'proofs,' a plethora of half-truths, many out-and-out errors, and a pervasive ethnocentric bias."[132]

That ethnocentric bias hides in plain sight and it takes the form of language and culture. In her keynote speech at UCSB's American Indian and Indigenous Collective Symposium,[133] Dr. Cutcha Risling Baldy laid out the convincing argument that the most prominent anthropologists of indigenous tribes in California are five white men who (mis)interpreted and (erroneously) discarded the information they gathered through a heteropatriarchal lens; specifically, that Alfred Kroeber's squeamishness with menstrual cycles influenced his dismissal of "The Flower Dance" and other indigenous female coming-of-age ceremonies as "primitive." Dr. Baldy credited Linda Tuhiwai-Smith's concept of "re(writing) and re(righting)," pointing out that entire epistemological contexts are lost when Kroeber and his peers "were the only ones writing our stories." Dr. Baldy pointed out

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[132] Kealiinohomoku, Joann. "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance." *Moving History/Dancing Cultures*: A Dance History Reader. Edited by Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press (2001): 33-43.

[133] Risling Baldy, Cutcha. "Wung-xowidilik / Concerning It—What Has Been Told : (Re)writing, (Re)righting and (Re)riteing Native Feminisms." Cross-currents: Navigating Translation, American Indian and Indegenous Collective Conference, 4 March 2018, UCSB, Isla Vista, CA. Keynote Address.

numerous examples of Hupa-to-English translations by white male linguists and ethnographers that positively dripped with heteropatriarchal bias, erasing, obscuring, and tainting language for women's bodies and their functions with taboo that simply was not there in the original culture. This 'otherizing' misreading is at the heart of the dehumanizing effect described by Edward Said as orientalism; ethnocentric bias is the system of belief than animates such subtle invalidations as putting words like "female illness" where "sacred moon time" might be.

This movement of personal belief finding shape in in policy as an oppressive force is exemplified by Brenda Foley's discussion of the Supreme Court case known as "The Kandyland Case," wherein, Foley points out, that:

> By agreeing to consider the case under the O' Brien framework of content neutrality, while simultaneously declaring 'nude public dancing itself is immoral' (Justice Scalia), the Court, to borrow from Judith Butler, 'stated what it did not want stated,' namely, its own cultural bias.[134]

So too, perhaps, did anthropologists such as Kloeber, laboring under the assumption that their biases did not corrupt their anthropological spyglass when in fact they constituted the majority *of* it. Subjective ethnographies attempt to address such pitfalls by making their limitations explicit. In her exploration of theater rehearsal ethnographies, Gay MacAuley makes the helpful claim that "it must be acknowledged that analysis, whether it takes the form of a written document or an edited film, involves a much more intrusive kind of

[134] Foley, Brenda. "Naked Politics: Erie, PA v the Kandyland Club." *NWSA Journal*, vol 14 no 2: 2002, (and Butler quoted in Foley): 15.

interpretation, a far more obvious ordering and shaping of the material."[135] Analysis has been "intrusive" in its compulsion to "order" and "shape" the material it interprets long before there was any such thing as a performance ethnography or a video camera. The indigenous scholarly move to (re)write ethnographic history makes plain the suppressive, damaging nature of those intrusive attempts to shape and order made by ethnographers who thought they knew the meaning of what they were seeing, but didn't. Citing Solveig Freudenthal, McCauley reminds us that "we need to 'both see and understand an event,' thus making it clear that seeing is not synonymous with understanding."[136] A traditional ethnography of a performance like that of Jaqueline and her peers is further challenged by the fact that while the dominant discourse of those international, Westernized organizations controlling their movement classified the women in the Survival Girls as refugees, there may be little aside from trauma to unite them in their experience. Two of the women told me they were from tribes so culturally different within Congo that if they were not united by the experience of fleeing Congo, their families would not have permitted them to intermingle and may even have done each other lethal harm.

Just as there is no way to do an ethnography confirming these statements, there is no way to do an ethnography of a counterfactual narrative. For a contemporary white American scholar to do an ethnography of any culture not her own was easier back when the anthropological spyglass produces putative objects, as Said would put it, without question,

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[135] McAuley, Gay. "Towards an Ethnography of Rehearsal," *New Theatre Quarterly* 14.5.3 (1998) 75-85: 77.

[136] McAuley, 78.

and my own biases could obscure the cultural truths within which these women live. It would have been easier. It would also have been ethically wrong. And unlike Drs. Baldy and Tuhiwai-Smith, I am not of any of the cultures – plural – in question. “I will not add another origin story for dance,” writes Kealiinohomoku, “because I don’t know anyone who was there.”[137] In the case of the Survival Girls, neither do I: that I worked with them, believed their statements, and did my best to honor and support their efforts does not mean that I know their origin story, and part of what led to the common identity suffered by those subject to the moniker “refugee,” – which they did not grow up with – is the loss of precisely those locating physical and cultural markers that do much create their worlds of origin.

Kimberlé Benston writes that his concept of “methexis” is a mode of research growing out of the need to lower the wall between himself and those he is in community with even as he theorizes about the cultural and political meaning of their art.[138] He quotes Hurston’s use of the term “anthropological spyglass” in order to ground his argument for such theoretical tools in the history of anthropology as functions of what Said warned of: a gaze that construct “putative objects” of their subject. Because such constructions are injurious to the experience, intentions, and interactions to be found in the black arts community, he argues that entirely new heuristics and practices are called for, ones that truly reduce injurious binaries by fostering nourishing connections. As a methodology, methexis is a limited option for an ethnographer with my positionality: while I was in community with

[137] Kealiinohomoku, 33.

[138] Benston, Kimberlé W. *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism.* New York: Routledge (2000).

these women, they were more profoundly in community with each other, and the communities they hailed from were not the ones from which I hail.

However, the hopeful notion under which this I do this work is the possibility that theorizing can do something other than construct putative objects, and that can instead be itself a nourishing connection. The ways in which I might theorize from a place of connection with the members of the Survival Girls suggest the possibility of what Dwight Conquergood calls “sturdy, fecund totalities created by the people themselves, whole statements, whole songs or houses or events, away from which life expands.”[139] I consulted my own experience of trauma, and my observations of the creative process of those who had suffered it, and the resultant effects of both on my memory as a creative-critical researcher in the hopes that instead of subsuming important difference through a Eurocentric, possessive identification, such a process might instead gesture toward a ‘fecund totality’ in which the Survival Girls and I might do work together and I might write about it – differences intact and included. Baldy and Benston both raise the notion that commonalities with the ‘other’ being studied might lend to understandings that are less oppressive, less condescending, and more in communion with the experience and epistemology of the subject. MacAuley cites James Cliffords’ point that “‘insiders studying their own cultures offer new angles of vision and depths of understanding', but adds an important rider: 'their accounts are empowered and restricted in unique ways.'”[140] The same is true of the external attempt to impose a “pan-”

[139] Conquergood, Dwight. “Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance” *Literature In Performance* Vol 5 (April 1985): 1-13

[140] Cliffords quoted in McAuley, 80.

prefix on any group of people whose differences go unheeded in the linked processes of colonization, assimilation, and genocide suffered by both indigenous people of America and the tribes in Congo within which the women of the Survival Girls began their lives. While I believe the Survival Girls and I did form a helping-out circle, to use Benston's phrase, as part of the playmaking and especially the ensemble-building process, theorizing trauma based on an ethnography of *them* would necessarily be created from a place of gross assumptions about their experiences from a cultural distance – one that would, in turn, construct them as "putative objects," and I strongly believe that they don't need any more of *that*.

Dwight Conquergood's work on "an ethnography of the mind and heart" is much more what I am getting at in these pages, and it presumes advocacy to be the natural outcome of such an ethnography. While there is much I am left not knowing, and perhaps, I'll argue, *meant* not to know, Conquergood's investment in the "epistemological potential of performance as a way of deeply sensing the other" is borne out by the theoretical reflection after the fact.[141] To approach recollections as an ethnographer is to presume the possibility that theoretical ruminations about a memory can be a way of "deeply sensing" the other. Writes Conquergood:

> When working with minority peoples and disenfranchised subcultures, such as refugees, one is frequently propelled into the role of advocate. The ethnographer, an uninvited stranger who depends upon the patient courtesies and openhearted hospitality of the community, is compelled by the laws of reciprocity and human decency to intervene, if he can, in a crisis.[142]

141 Conquergood, 3.

142 Ibid..

Adding to the record and treating as worthy of study the work of Jacqueline and her peers in the Survival Girls is a form of advocacy, one riddled with the substantial and valid problems and risks that attend representation. Representation by someone distant in terms of time, physical distance, language, and culture presents especially strong obstacles. D. Soyini Madison, a scholarly recipient of Conquergood's influence, refers to representation as both a "pleasure and a burden" that is "already so much about ethics."[143] The pleasure is in knowing these incredible women and supporting their work in the moment with as much awareness of trauma as I could muster, and the burden lies in how imperfect that attempt was – and how imperfect now the attempt *is,* to examine a memory the way an ethnographer might: to examine a social practice in a culturally different context than one's own in order to make meaning out of observations.

Though I don't imagine this work to be without its pitfalls and foibles, it wouldn't be the first time the members of the Survival Girls have been made into putative objects. To make a subject into a putative object is the project of dehumanization, to which these women were subjected by the act of gender-based violence itself, and further by the pervasive classist attitude toward refugees in Kenyan society, and toward brown female bodies the Eurocentric world over. Dr. Baldy had a quick, incisive follow-up to Kroeber's quote that "poor and rude tribes make much more of the adolescence ceremony than those possessed of considerable substance": "All right, Kroeber," Baldy said to laughter throughout the room, "this is really about *you*." Hers was a pithy way of pointing out the central problem in the traditional

[143] Madison, D. Soyini. *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. USA: Sage Publications (2005): 11.

anthropological canon, which is that it serves more as a documentation of how the anthropologist makes meaning than his ostensible subjects.

Dr. Baldy's work here may serve to support a counter-argument to dismissals of auto-ethnography and auto-critography as "me-search"; simply, that in 2018, responsible scholarship might tend that way in scholars who are interested in theorizing what they see, but not in the fundamentally heteropatriarchal Eurocentric assumptions of neutral objectivity that underpin the theorizing that came before, which scholars of intersectionality now understand to be neither neutral nor objective. The contemporary indigenous scholarly critique of the anthropological spyglass was foregrounded by scholars such as Johannes Fabian, who clearly links "the oppressive uses of time" to anthropology's failure to "come to a rest vis a vis a clearly defined other."[144] Fabian links modernity writ large to a succession of steps that secularize Judeo-Christian time — which Fabian describes "a sequence of events that befall a chosen people" "as opposed to pagan, cyclical views of time as an *eternal retour*" — "by generalizing and universalizing" that Judeo-Christian time.[145] Fabian's intervention to trace the roots of anthropology to the Enlightment's "devices of discourse," an academic warning of sorts around the risk of a "history that is universal because it expresses the omnipresent signs of divine providence," illuminates the overlap between universalized Judeo-Christian modes of thought and the heteropatriarchal Eurocentric gaze – namely, the dangers in presumptions of divine universality and its underlying presumption of neutrality.

[144] Fabian, Johannes. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. New York: Columbia (2002): 2.

[145] Fabian, 2.

[146] I'd argue that this presumption and the way it helped to make putative objects out of its subjects is roundly critiqued by Conquergood (among others) when he states that "there is no null hypothesis in the moral universe" and that "refusal to take a moral stand is itself a powerful statement of one's moral position."[147] A universe in which objective reality is presumed, and is therefore a part of the anthropological spyglass, is one in which it is possible to "refuse to take a moral stand." Inaction in the face of injustice is wed to the presumption of neutrality in the Eurocentric gaze enabled by seemingly providential universalism.

Instead of putting more of *that* troublesome stuff into the theoretical ether, I hope to turn instead to Conquergood's notion of dialogic practice, one that seeks to position the ethnographer in such a stance as to listen with the ears and heart, and to deeply sense and deeply know the other without demanding, as Clifford Geertz[148] puts it, that the other be "any less different." Elisa Facio also engages with the practical limits that seem not to have been clear to early anthropologists when she describes ethnography as personal experience, and herself as a participant-observer.[149] Facio builds on Punch's 1986 claim that "acute moral and ethical dilemmas may be encountered while a semi-conscious political process of negotiation

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[146] Ibid.

[147] Conquergood, 8.

[148] Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, Inc (1973): 3-33.

[149] Facio, Elisa. "Ethnography as Personal Experience." *Race and Ethnicity in Research Methods.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage (1993).

pervades fieldwork. And both elements, political and ethical, often have to be resolved situationally, and even spontaneously, without the chance of 'armchair' reflection."[150]

What to do, once it is acknowledged that no universal truths, or truths that will ultimately withstand examinations by the spyglass-in-reverse, will be uncovered with the ethnographic attempt to make meaning out of observation? Can anything salvage the loss of the certainty that used to accompany the anthropological spyglass and its presumption of critical distance? What can recoup the incursions made into the presumptions of objectivity that once undergirded ethnography, that once constituted much of the anthropological spyglass, and the certainty those presumptions enabled and enshrined? Once the indelible limitations of situationality are acknowledged, and the impossibility of critical distance to create a mythological space of theoretical neutrality critiqued for the Eurocentric, ethnocentric, misogynist, and misguided bunk that it is, perhaps different processes emerge – new epistemologies that create other knowledge by honoring the limitations that expose all that bunk. Emerson, Franz, and Shaw write:

> A female ethnographer studying local women in Africa, for example, may find herself helping to prepare greens and care for children, leaving no time to produce many written notes. Yet in the process of that involvement she may most clearly learn how women simultaneously work together, socialize, and care for children. Only in subsequent reflection might she fully notice the subtle changes in herself as she learned to do and see these activities as the women do…figuring out — holistically and intuitively—what these people are up to.[151]

[150] Punch quoted in Facio, 75.
[151] Emerson, Franz, and Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1995): 17.

Over twenty years have passed since the publication of the book from which the above passage is extracted, and it shows the relatively nascent acknowledgement in the ethnographic field that truly ethical cultural research *by* humans *of* other humans might be research that pretends no objectivity, but instead leans into the positionality and subjectivity that once *hindered* the ethnographer in dogged quest of neutral objective vision. Now, that very positionality and subjectivity might be accepted and even celebrated. The restrictions they create and the process of their acknowledgement might be a process of interpretation and construction inclusive of more and different epistemologies. It might be a less categorizable form of knowledge (specifically from the standpoint of institutions seeking to define knowledge as 'generalizable' through 'systematic investigation,' or 'generalizable' at all). Yet scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai-Smith to Cutcha Baldy are here to tell us that if generalizable knowledge was the goal, the outsider (i.e., the researcher, the anthropologist, the ethnographer) was never going to reach it anyway – and historically, often that outsider often assumed he or she *had* reached it, when their accounts of what went on were anywhere from shallow and ill-informed to laughably, or even genocidally, wrong. Dr. Baldy remarked more than once during her keynote that she was instructed by her elders to "go to the language, because our language is feminine," for as culture is shaped by epistemological tradition, and those cultural traditions are shaped and passed along in verbal language in addition to the gestural language of example, so is the worldview it carries.

Critiques like these make manifest those conclusions that historically, in the Judeo-Christian worldview, were presumed to be a given and self-evident; "thus both, the external, spatial boundaries of history and its inner continuity," writes Fabian, "are of

religion."[152] Productively troubling the line between science and religion this way throws into relief the contingency of all epistemologies. In that vein, part of the project of contemporary indigenous scholarship is to throw into relief the knowledge intentionally hidden from (while sometimes in plain sight of) the Western interloper. While anthropology's main currency has historically been the Eurocentric 'male gaze' of the anthropological spyglass presuming objective knowledge of othered cultures, indigenous scholars descended *from* those othered cultures often make explicit throughout their written and orally delivered scholarship that certain knowledges are simply not for everyone to know, and will *never* be shared with someone who intends to insert it into the archive as "research." While most contemporary ethnographers are trained in ethical considerations of what to leave in or take out of their reports, those norms of cultural sensitivity are only relatively strict and never static, and certain understandings and approaches will stay hidden from the view of the anthropological spyglass, and therefore out of the archive that often erroneously presumes objective neutrality, until someone of the culture in question is holding it.

In the place of that problematic spyglass is a relatively new but already trenchant critique; precedent for the approach of drawing inferences from personal anecdote and memory abounds. It can be found not only in contemporary performance theory texts, such as Peggy Phelan's "Trisha Brown's Orfeo,"[153] but from such social science heavyweights as

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[152] Fabian, 4.

[153] Phelan, Peggy. "Trisha Brown's *Orfeo*: Two Takes on Double Endings." Lepecki, ed. *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory.* USA: Wesleyan University Press (2004): 13-28.

Clifford Geertz writing about Indonesia in the 1950s. In his influential essay "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," Geertz recounts the experience he and his wife had of being treated as though they didn't exist when they first arrived to the village in Bali where he was to conduct anthropological research:

> We were intruders, professional ones, and the villagers dealt with us as Balinese seem always to deal with people not part of their life who yet press themselves upon them: as though we were not there. For them, and to a degree for ourselves, we were nonpersons, specters, invisible men.

Geertz goes on to tell an undeniably entertaining story of how he and his wife come to be accepted by the villagers. He and his wife join the locals in spectating a cockfight, which, though technically an illegal activity, has been arranged by the village community to raise money for a local school. However, Javanese law enforcement shows up to raid the cockfight, and the villagers head for the hills. Geertz writes that "on the established anthropological principle, 'When in Rome,' my wife and I decided, only slightly less instantaneously than everyone else, that the thing to do was run too."[154] Given the social distance implied by the behavior of the villagers toward the Geertzes prior to that moment, they are astonished when the Balinese villager who let them into his house to hide from the police defends them, and defends them passionately, to those very police when they showed up demanding to know what the American interlopers were doing at this man's house. The Geertzes' impromptu host told the police in great detail precisely who the Geertzes were, why they were in the village, and so on. Geertz was stunned that the village full of people

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[154] Geertz, 415.

who hadn't looked directly at him and his wife, let alone spoken to them, had actually been keeping very careful and informed track of them. Geertz is careful to frame these events as a way "in" to the culture he wished to study, a way to build the rapport needed for an anthropologist to grow relationships with his informants. He does not furnish the readers of his essay with the numbers of Balinese people with whom he interacted to arrive at the notion, for example, that "acting as if we simply did not exist" was "general in Bali."[155] But generalize he does, and the anecdote in question serves to animate yet another, consequent generalization: that in Bali, "to be teased is to be accepted." Because its subsequent events led the Balinese villagers to feel they could tease him, the cockfight raid evasion ultimately "led to a sudden and unusually complete acceptance into a society extremely difficult for outsiders to penetrate."

Is there a way to analyze a social practice without committing what Tracie Morris calls the "dehumanizing" act of assuming a singular meaning? Is there a way to create an ethnography that doesn't "penetrate" or "intrude" when doing so is in pursuit of "generalizable knowledge" that itself reeks of the othering effects of orientalism? It's unclear whether the reenactment or impersonation I witnessed is because Jacqueline is Congolese; because she is a refugee; because she was in Nairobi; or because she had been through terrible trauma. If I wrote about it as though it *were* clear, that attempt to use the othering, dehumanizing spyglass in pursuit of "generalizable knowledge" would, to borrow Dr. Baldy's words, probably say more about me than about Jacqueline.

It follows that this chapter aims to trouble the notion that it's at all possible to conduct

[155] Ibid., 413.

systematic investigations of trauma and its effect when such investigations require the brand of an identity in order to designate a target population – "Congolese," "woman," "refugee," –when trauma is what shatters, divides, and complicates identity, and designating a target population obscures such complexities. Katherine Stiles advances the notion of cultures of trauma. One wonders how to conduct an ethnography of one of *those*. One wonders how to be a researcher, sailing to the uncharted nation of "Trauma," university and federal guidelines in hand, next to the spyglass that has so long created putative objects of its human subjects: a nation whose denizens are dispersed across continents, across radical linguistic, topographical, and cultural difference. One wonders how to ethically conduct the systematic investigation required by research when the identifying moniker is not "Balinese villager" but "trauma survivor" or "rape victim."

The subjective memory approach to this subject matter is based on my provisional answer: one doesn't. Not in the Geertzian sense, anyway. Would staging twenty performances wherein the victims of gender-based violence reenact that violence present any more concrete a finding than the one? How many rape victims would need to share their story with me before the standards of ethnographic rigor would allow that my theories about other people's misery have value from the perspective of contributions to generalizable knowledge? Violence and its aftermath disrupt the very systems of the mind and body that structure and order experience; they erode those mechanisms by which a person does things that can be described as "conduct research." Clifford and Marcus assert that "there is no whole picture that can be 'filled in,' since the perception and filling of a gap lead to the

awareness of other gaps."[156] In these pages I can only cobble together the mosaic that might best honor such a conundrum under the murky title of "creative research" or "community-based collaborative research," and ask questions that gesture towards the liminal — because ethical engagement with the suffering of others requires me, I believe, to honor those gaps. In this case, one of the gaps is between what constitutes "research" as "categorizable knowledge" and the ethically driven sense that what Jacqueline did that day was important as it stands alone. It is not part of a systematic investigation of the effects of gang rape and graphic violence on Congolese women who are refugees. Another gap is between the notion of objective neutrality and the inescapable personal reality that while I was, as director and facilitator and advocate, "in relation" to these women and had participated as those things throughout their playmaking process, my role as the re-collector emphasizes that of witness, not researcher.

However, there may not be the differences I think there are between the two. MacAuley notes that "there is no such person as a neutral or transparent observer..any analysis and even any description will bear the imprint of its own cultural moment [but that fact] does not, however, invalidate the record." Perhaps the future MacAuley makes possible with that admission, which she credits to intellectual theory, is one more and more cognizant of Kristin's Hastrup's assertion that "anthropologists in the field are dealing 'not with the unmediated world of the "others" but the world between ourselves and the others.'"[157] As

[156] Clifford and Marcus, eds. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography.* Berkeley: University of California Press (1986): 18.

[157] Hastrup quoted in McAuley, 79.

people who are insistently othered by ocular-centric Western interpellations, indigenous scholars also often emphasize the sacredness of what is secret. Centuries-old embedded practices of resistance to genocide encoded that sacred knowledge in ways that are purposefully hidden from the outside researcher's eyes.[158] In other words, no matter how far Geertz and his wife ran from the police alongside Balinese villagers after a cockfight was raided, possibly they'd never get to the place of cultural literacy, or "generalizable knowledge," that Geertz may have presumed was reachable. That is to say, Geertz's claims about Balinese culture are not necessarily wrong, but *partial* – more partial than the heteropatriarchal norms shaping the 'spyglass' of whatever he noticed and however he interpreted it. Many contemporary indigenous scholars' intervention on research about their own cultures has been to (re)write and (re)right the record so as to make that inherent partiality, those blind spots, explicit. Such an effort deals a sound and vital blow to Lawrence Levine's description of cultural hierarchy, which Brenda Foley summarizes as:

> ..a construct governed by..the sense that culture is something created by the few for the few, threatened by the many, and imperiled by democracy; the conviction that culture cannot come from the young, the inexperienced, the untutored, the marginal; the belief that culture is finite and fixed, defined and measured, complex and difficult of access, recognizable only by those trained to recognize it, comprehensible only to those qualified to comprehend it.[159]

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[158] Many indigenous researchers' works and talks could stand as an example – in fact all that I've read or heard – but foremost in my mind currently is that of Cornell's Abraham Francis, arguably the youngest of the bunch, and his presence at the 2018 AIIC Symposium at UCSB.

[159] Levine, Lawrence (1988, 253, author's emphasis) quoted in Foley, 7.

Observation implies seeing, and seeing is a subjectively selective act. Research that aims not to further dehumanize the cultural others observed in its pages works from *that* acknowledgement of fallacy, rather than a presumption of objective neutrality. I am more ready than Emerson, Franz, and Shaw are to abandon the notion that any additions I make to "knowledge" in this instance come from an understanding of "what these women [the Survival Girls] are up to." I'd instead rather declare on the front end that a modern critical reading of this ethnography would make me, the "I" in the narrative, the putative object, rather than the women whose theater performance I describe here. I am relying on my memory of an extraordinary act of courage by someone with whom I am no longer in contact; whose language I did not know; with whom I did not conduct a formal interview; and whose oral history I could neither verify nor consistently record with a technological device. I proceed uncertainly and under the perhaps vain hope that some glimmer of understanding, if not generalizable knowledge, might be gleaned from thinking theoretically about the significance of what I *did* see and what I *did* understand of that remarkable event. I do so under the auspices of a dissertation because meaning might be made, in spite of the vast field of difference between me and a systematic investigation of generalizable knowledge: the vast field of difference between me and Jacqueline.

Furthermore, Jacqueline's location is at this point unknown. The only interviews I conducted with the women in the Survival Girls group were in 2011, before Jacqueline's joined the group. On that day we were elbowed out of our rehearsal space at a Catholic church compound in the slum of Kangemi by a large and well-established co-ed performance group called the Red Lions. It was raining so hard that the Survival Girls and I could barely

hear one another, let alone rehearse outdoors. I used a hand-held digital photo camera to spend a minute or two recording poor-quality video of each member of the group. I asked each woman what being part of the Survival Girls meant to her, and if she had a message for the world. The interviews were an on-the-spot effort to rescue our time together – we met only three times a week – by providing the empowerment and sense of attention I believed it was my job as the group facilitator to give them. I did not put the videos up online or use them in any presentation or academic paper. None of those little filmed interviews pass muster from the standpoint of traditional academic research on human research subjects.

Rather, this case study is, in every sense of the word, a subjective one. It uses as primary material my own memories of working with Jacqueline and the Survival Girls group. It does so in an attempt to think through the theoretical implications of a severe trauma victim impersonating one's own rapist, as Jacqueline had the extraordinary bravery to do and as I had the honor to witness. The "systematic investigation" is a theoretical one, and so is any "evaluation" and "testing" it may undergo. Bearing witness is not an objective process.

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When I was in college, majoring not in international relations, development, or theater, but in literary arts, six years before I traveled to Kenya and met the women who would become the Survival Girls, I wrote this in my journal:

> *And were a man in rags or a man in a nice suit to turn aggressively towards me, to grab me, then and only then perhaps he would no longer be an image. Today a lecturer on Latin American torture testimony demonstrated this problem of discourse on pain: he took a piece of paper, meant to stand for discourse on torture, and ripped it. He said this is violence. This is what violence does. It is not discursive it is violence, it is pain. No one will ever be there to see the swan. Even I am not there anymore. I read that little*

Congolese girls are being impregnated by U.N. soldiers. You would tell me that becoming incapacitated by depression over it does nothing to help. You and your face and sweater, the talking with, the remembering of...came through the door, crowing about nuggets of wisdom and central philosophies and how he was right to say that a capacity for joy in one's own life can be a gift to other people, and he looked down at the buttons on his shirt. I walked out, and twice on my Crying Walk, a blue-eyed custodial worker stopped to smile at me and make sure I was smiling, and I felt guilty to be one of those pea-coated ear-phoned tortured youngsters. But he smiled and meant it, once on the street and once actually slowing the car, pointedly touching his cheeks, until I smiled.

(Other people with awful lives)[160]

Honoring the gaps in the case of seeing and hearing the women of the Survival Girls at rehearsal, at the performance, and the women in the audience thereafter, is perhaps a question of admitting that mine is not the work of an Africanist or an anthropologist. It grows out of the possibility that there are inferences to be drawn simply from the fact that Jacqueline and the Survival Girls did this, and that it had the effect that it did on their audience. The discerning will note that, while I explore a few theoretical claims about the effect of severe trauma on the psyche, the attempt to do so remains an attempt. It lacks a central thesis. Such absence is meant to honor the unknowable in the violence spoken of here, the unknowability of the painful memories Jacqueline drew from to do what she did on that stage. It is meant as a gesture towards the problematic possibility of conducting scholarship as an ally, scholarship that touches on the misfortune of those less privileged than the researcher. At the nexus of scholarship and spectacle, I do this work and this writing. None of it escapes the valid arguments of critique, but none of it would I undo. However,

[160] All italicized passages in this chapter are from my personal journal entries in Spring 2005.

fundamentally, there is no telling of Jacqueline’s story by one other than herself. That's why I tell it slant.

The first member of the Survival Girls to request a private meeting with me in 2011 did so because she wanted to tell me the true story of her experience as a gang rape victim. She said any things that day, among them the following: *"I can't control my thoughts. I can't stop replaying what happened. I'm afraid I'll never be like the other girls. I’m not a normal person. I can't stay where I am; I keep going back."* Trauma theory and recent studies of cognition, as well as this brave woman’s words to me, assert that this disturbance in identity formation is also one in temporal experience, suggesting an inextricable link between the two. Such a link has profound implications for gesture as a form of speech, and for the relationship between knowledge and embodiment. Coercive social forces of disgust, shame, and segregation don’t simply produce a feeling of anger and shame in their targets, but their physiological counterparts: a demonstrable rise in stress hormones. This rise in stress hormones leads to a host of symptoms, from somatic complaints such as migraines or muscle spasms, to an inability to sleep or digest food peacefully, as well as difficulties interpreting sensory input. Those people, whose ‘social status’ denied them humanity within the world fashioned by dominant ideology, often come from cultures whose subjugation precludes literacy in the dominant languages not just of speech, but of behavior, norms, and movement through socially privileged (policed) space. To be oppressed is to be denied those buffered zones of unfettered access to reason that we call “privilege,” and to be subject instead to a steady stream of dehumanizing narratives. In her work on trauma stewardship, Laura Lipsky

Van der Noot quotes Paul Farmer's definition of structural violence as that visited "upon all those whose social status denies them access to the fruits of scientific and social progress."[161] Assuming that social progress includes increasing public recognition of the humanity of historically oppressed people, structural violence is a form of intentionally induced trauma that stands historically constituted in contradistinction to that social progress.

The knowledge and wisdom that might spring forth, were those who have been historically marginalized to take the spyglass into their own hands, might in part be new and different knowledge than the tired canon and its Eurocentric authors adherents. Linda Tuhiwai-Smith[162] also does heavy lifting in that vein, as an indigenous academic calling out the profession of anthropology as a whole on its own ethnocentric form of cultural orientalism. In their work to revise the academic notion of epistemology, these scholars champion the body as a source of wisdom in the same way psychiatrists like Herman and Van der Kolk do. What Conquergood might describe as "scriptocentric" oppression – the ocular and reductive kind of othering that Said describes as constitutive of orientalism – have required that resistance take indirect, nonverbal forms for its subjects to survive. Van der Noot specifies that the "fight, flight, or freeze" reaction, the kind of physiological response occasioning a release of stress hormones, requires that one "literally shake it off," the way animals do, to "move the energy through."[163] Judith Herman emphasizes community, and

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[161] Farmer quoted in Van der Noot, 37.

[162] Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: Zed Books (1999).

[163] Van der Noot Lipsky, 213.

within that, laughter as healing antidotes that she relies on in the groups she facilitates with survivors of incest. Baldy also specifies that Hupa women's coming-of-age ceremonies must include laughter, "because at three in the morning, when you're fasting, everything is funny." Based on the testimony of the Survival Girls members as well as my memories of working with them, laughter and community could be found in the small pockets of time and space wherein they built a culture together. Citing an example of a Native American social worker describing impromptu group hugs, Van der Noot calls these communal healing convergences of space and time "microcultures": temporal and special pockets that "emphasiz[e] a different set of values than the culture at large" and support their members by "showering [them] with encouragement and holding [them] accountable."[164]

Those two social practices, showering participants with encouragement and holding them accountable, are what Baldy asserts make Hupa dances for young women such effective community support structures, and what Herman asserts constitute a successful support group, whether for veterans or incest survivors. Those two social practices were also foundational to my process of facilitating the Survival Girls' workshops and, I believe, to the success and productivity of their work in them. Laughter and accountability within groups founded on premises of interpersonal support are powerful forms of resistance to the socially isolating and physiologically wearisome effects of trauma. With deep histories of oral storytelling tradition, spiritual practices, music, and dance, non-scriptocentric cultures, such as many black and indigenous communities, create spaces for common interpersonal

[164] Ibid., 215-6.

practices than that align with well-being; namely, with resistance: with wellness in the face of those oppressive forces that seek to dehumanize and traumatize the other. These microcultures of communion, celebration, mourning, and release are usually temporary, and they tend to resist and/or remedy the problems with the anthropological spyglass observed and predicted by Boas, Hurston, Said, and Benston, that, when unchecked, produces "putative objects."[165] To be encouraged and held accountable are both forms of being *seen* clearly, and as the historical effect of the othering spyglass is to deliberately obfuscate the subject through dehumanizing narratives, these temporary spaces function as cultural pods of trauma recovery, oases in the societal desert of oppression and its damaging, wearisome effects. Traumatized has come to mean sick and in need of recovery. This is, perhaps, a limiting worldview, one with oppressive blind spots similar to those hooks recalls were employed by her newly desegregated school, one in which, she remembers, "knowledge was suddenly about information only."[166] What if the traumatized state, as it is called, were reconceptualized as a mode of knowing certain things, and a healthy state a mode of knowing others? Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés, in her forward to William Cleveland's book *Art and Upheaval,* describes trauma as a sort of turning inward, a winter of the inner self in which difficulty, pain, longing, and sorrow run the show for a while.[167] Reflecting an approach to suffering seen before in Buddhist and indigenous worldviews, Estés affirms the conceptual

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[165] Said, 22.

[166] hooks, 3.

[167] Estés, iii.

framework of seeing obstacles in life, and the winters they create, as gifts and teachers that allow us to cultivate compassion and contact our "courage bones." If knowledge can be embodied, so too can courage. When audience members lauded Jaqueline's walk and talk and mannerisms as she impersonated the kind of man who raped her and killed her family, perhaps one aspect of what they were praising was Jaqueline's courage bones: her pain, also known as information she had, pain she chose to translate to word and gesture: a memory's imprint that her knowledge and her courage not only helped her to embody but were embodied themselves.

The kind of holistic wisdom in the concept of courage bones is echoed by a multitude of voices entrenched in varying discourses, including David Eng, whose attention to queer frameworks promulgate loss as a "productive" rather than a "pathological" condition.[168] This is one of the ontological ground for autoethnography and affect theory as decolonial endeavors. One of the tools of oppression, what Audre Lorde might call a tool of the "master's house," is erasure. Those subjected to it might then value their pain as evidence that the person they loved and lost did indeed exist. Such a shift in how to receive the anguish trauma leaves in the body and mind suggests an empowerment in the identity of the subject even if, or perhaps especially if, the subject is traumatized: I am in pain, which means what happened did indeed happen. I am in anguish because my lover died, and died from AIDS; my anguish is the only testament to my beloved's existence and importance, because the dominant narrative would at least exclude that person and at most erase them. This was

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[168] *Loss*, edited by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press (2003).

not the case in what I heard from Jaqueline and her peers, at least not explicitly: none of them indicated to me that they wanted to sink into their memories for the sake of their identity or to confirm the reality of their losses. It is because the women in the Survival Girls group who shared with me didn't want the pain to govern their experience any more than it already did that I have not asked to interview them after the performance, or otherwise condescended to them about what their pain might teach them. Rather, I sat and watched them in a tiny apartment in Nairobi, encouraging Nana's good-Samaritan-character to stroke Palome's fleeing-refugee character's face in such a way that the audience could see the gesture and understand the moment of care there embodied. It's possible that the piece was both painful and relieving, and that for the players, the process of reliving or drawing from memories was both cathartic and empowering, *and* retraumatizing. Conquergood writes of a "heuristically rich paradox of fieldwork (and performance) is both/and, yes/but, instead of either/or." This worldview is one of the most potent forms of resistance to trauma, in no small part for that very heuristic richness. In a March 2018 conference panel for writers on music and poetry, Tracie Morris contended that "no social practice means only one thing. Ever. And it's *dehumanizing* to assume that it does."[169] Presuming a singular meaning in the Survival Girls' 2013 performance in Nairobi that day thus does the work of orientalism in that it dehumanizes those who practice it.

Furthermore, presuming a singular meaning is a form of abuse whether it intends to be or not. Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that "research can no longer be conducted with

[169] Morris, Tracie. "Beyond Measure: Experiments in the Music of Poetry." Associated Writing Programs Conference, 9 March 2018, Tampa, FL. Panel Presentation Comment.

indigenous communities as if their views did not count or their lives did not matter,"[170] a description that closely resembles the very language for trauma used by Van der Kolk when he writes that "trauma almost invariably involves not being seen, not being mirrored, not being taken into account."[171] Saidiya Hartman's focus on negation as a force in subjection is pertinent here, as a form of "not being seen" that is arguably as powerful as orientalism's othering conceptual grid, one comprised of narratives that are "not even trying to be accurate."[172] Geertz related the negating social experience of silence when he wrote the following of the Balinese villagers initial refusal to "see" him and his wife:

> ..Everyone ignored us in a way only a Balinese can do. As we wandered around, uncertain, wistful, eager to please, people seemed to look right through us with a gaze focused several yards behind us on some more actual stone or tree...they acted as if we simply did not exist, which, in fact, as this behavior was designed to inform us, we did not, or anyway not yet.[173]

One wonders what Geertz would have written of being deliberately not-seen from a less powerful vantage point. What Herman calls the social construction of reality is the record, the researcher's notes, the limited Western conception of knowledge that disqualifies embodied knowing, the archive that does not take into account the oppressed person's viewpoint or experience; "for," as Stiles writes, "its concealed conditions, its silences, are the

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170 Smith, 9.

171 Van der Kolk, 59.

172 Said, 71.

173 Geertz, 10.

spaces in which the destructions of trauma multiply."[174] Here, the act of creating a web of culture—of a "social construction of reality" that runs the gamut from social norms to institutionalized laws—denies the oppressed the validity of their existence, one achieved either through calling them subhuman in so many words, or failing to call them at all.

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I begin in the lexicon of criticism, wading through its boggy fields. Or I start where the poetry does, breathing in the mud around me. Either way, quicksand awaits. Bending forward without changing body: the converging streets do in the black pelt of midnight. By "midnight" the streets become prosaic. Anything worth reading is worth reading twice, including the text of another body, another person's history. If for every door in a fictional world there are nonfictional, discursive implications as to what is behind it, then it could be said that for every novel there should be a book of essays somewhere. The puppeteer who chooses the wallpaper of our internal bedrooms, the rooms we imagine (determine?) separate fact from fiction, is a trickster, a coyote howling at a full moon – a full moon that prompts many a love sonnet only because it triggers certain biological reactions in certain warm-blooded vertebrates. (This is the way it is now: parameters soggy, weak.) Below the rung that determines (as a fact) that fact and fiction are false constructs, there is one that states that an equal mound of truth exists for every mound of untruth: we open doors into fictive pastimes for ourselves if we stop, while reading an essay, to do any kind of imagining. It is comforting, somehow: anytime something is fancied, there is something to be known; any time a reality feels too cold and hard there is a steaming mug of myth somewhere in the cosmos. Tricking our own brains into thinking we remember doing something we dreamed instead. So in a way I am from here, in that nothing but my own memory, the set of snapshots my brain calls fact, contests that I have not always been in a city on the East Coast at this deserted intersection near a convenience store, wondering at the sparkling bits in the sidewalk, waiting for another platonic shift.

The Survival Girls rehearsed in the slum of Kangemi, Nairobi, in the studio-sized apartment of the most senior Survival Girl, Sofia, moving her plastic chairs to the far side of

[174] Stiles, 524.

the room and using her kitchen as backstage. Jacqueline would “enter stage right,” coming in from outside the tiny apartment, where laundry hung over puddles of sewage and wandering feral dogs, clomping her big boots and carrying a “gun” (a large piece of wood she carried over her shoulder). The Survival Girls group had kept some red sashes from costumes they had made for another piece of theirs. The red sashes had symbolized the blood of war, and one of those red strips of cloth was now repurposed as Jacqueline's gun strap. The group determined that for the performance of this piece, which would be at a local NGO for refugee ladies called Heshima Kenya, Jacqueline’s soldier character would drag the women playing innocent Congolese women accosted in their home offstage for the rape scene, and the victims would scream to illustrate what was happening to them.

In a February 2005 TED Talk, Anna Deveare Smith, acclaimed performer of one-woman shows compiled faithfully from interview transcripts, performs four monologues. One of the monologues is based on the story she heard from a female prison inmate about how that inmate had allowed her boyfriend to abuse and kill her daughter. Smith prefaces the piece by saying that some people had asked her to take it out, because the character was not likable. She demurred, she tells her audience, because she values risk and “the negative imagination.”[175]

What is the negative imagination? What is the process by which one “plays the bad guy,” the way Jacqueline and Deveare Smith both did? What does that process do and make possible for a performer who, like Jacqueline, suffered at the hands of the bad guy

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[175] Smith, Anna Deveare. *Four American Characters*, 2005 TED Talk video, minutes 6:00-7:30.

she’s playing? Ann Anlin Cheng writes of Smith's work:

> Anyone who has partaken of Smith’s performances understands the discomfort of being made to watch the fine line between speaking for, speaking as, and speaking against...With Smith's peculiar brand of impersonation, it is as if only in imitation, in the bodily occupation of the other, that we come to see paradoxically an alternative to the traps of representation. That is, representation has frequently and rightly been criticized for its colonizing potentials. But Smith's art suggests that representation, mimicry even, may be employed as a form of performative counteroccupation, whereby the act of placing oneself in the other's place exposes one's vulnerability to that performed other.[176]

A language barrier, and also a desire not to further invade or trouble what I hoped was Jacqueline's process of recovery and ownership, prevented me from asking her what it meant for her to portray her rapist; what she gained from the process; and whether she believed it had been beneficial. I wondered where her “self” went in the moments when she used her body to perform a “counteroccupation,” to reenact her memory as the rapist who so assaulted her selfhood and denied her humanity. Did that counteroccupation “expose [her] vulnerability to that performed other,” or did it *reduce* that vulnerability by producing a space of assertion, a node of agency in the body of Jacqueline herself, in order for her to perform that counteroccupation? Rare is the space wherein admission of her status as a rape victim will not garner a woman derision; perhaps nonexistent is the person whose identity did not, as Halberstam and Livingstone put it, “originate from the outside” as a cultural creation. Rachel Adams contends that “the extraordinary body becomes a signifier for the..‘secret

[176] Cheng, Ann Anlin. *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanlysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Greif*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2000): 58.

self.'"[177] It might unearth another aspect of subjugation to assume that the "extraordinary experience" which Van der Kolk and Caruth assert is constitutive of trauma performs a similar function. Foucault's regimes of truth operate in invisible but substantial ways when the body does not visually display the outside-in inscriptions of shame and self-hatred that could be argued to constitute the traumatized subject's "secret self." Mechanisms of marginalizing and/or subjugating power, originating from without and exerting the social order from outside in, may not be visible, but they depend on and therefore create a subject who is traumatized and struggling with agency and self-trust. "His vertical mastery of the visible world is purchased through her collapse back into the underworld," writes Phelan, but in my mind it's not Orfeo and Eurydice: it is Jacqueline's rapist who "purchas[es his] mastery of the visual world" through Jacqueline's collapse back into the underworld, to a place where trauma sometimes leaves no visible – "visual" – mark.[178]

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> *Somewhere my face assumes its less affordable set of features under a shapeless grey hood. It is what I do in gas stations in strange towns. It is what I do at night. The damage is not something I ask for, but I do imagine it, and I am superstitious. I am trying to enter it, but it is a wall, and shifts like tiles.*
>
> *One: there is a scar on my ear where damage has been done. In an intimate moment you kiss it and I weep. My first laugh, after months, tears at the air with the silver strength of departure.*
>
> *The latch is missing.*
>
> *Two: there is a white fog surrounding us on a beach and I tell you that you can feel and look at the pink and ridged place where they have lopped my thumb off. You break into tears and my own sob sounds like a bark and I say, this is what it is. If it's here, it is. The stones around us are flat and*

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[177] Adams, Rachel. *Sideshow USA: Freaks and the American Cultural Imagination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (2001): 85.

[178] Phelan, 28.

autumn-colored.

From their very first improvisation of the first rape scene, the Survival Girls had it ?so well that I could barely breathe watching it. I am affected by every rehearsal of every piece the Survival Girls create, but with this one I could barely hold the camera to record them. Jacqueline was awe-inspiring, and so was Palome, re-enacting her own rape at the hands of rebel soldiers with high, keening screams. They tied some of their red sashes together to make a large red "rope" that the group members who played truck drivers carried around themselves, making engine noises as they held it out at elbow level on either side to denote a vehicle. The red rope behind the "driver" would drag on the ground until Patience's refugee character "boarded" by slipping within its circle and holding up the slack behind the "driver," not unlike how a maid of honor would hold a wedding dress train. Two more sashes were used by Jacqueline in that very first scene, when she tied up Palome's soon-to-be-refugee character and dragged Sofia's mother character backstage as Sofia wailed and Palome screamed.

Performance ethnographers often treat the rehearsal process as a process ripe for theorizing. McAuley asks, "Does the presence of an observer during the rehearsal process necessarily, by his or her very presence, transform the event? If so, does this then render invalid the observations made by such a person?"[179] The answer is no – not as long as I bear the responsibility for pointing out that this is an ethnography of what I remember, no more and no less; that furthermore, this makes it no different than relating a memory as an

[179] McAuley, 79.

anecdote and making sense of it from there; that moreover, the questions it raises do not presume interpretive authority over the experience of the women in the Survival Girls group. Furthermore, the process of translation is arguably at work in every human consciousness and in every social process. There is the translation of direct experience into the words one uses to describe it to oneself, and then the words one uses to describe it to others. Shawn Gallagher might add that intention needs translation in order to manifest as action[180]. The Survival Girls' performance, concerning bodies that have been raped and that re-enact that rape as the perpetrator, raises the questions of the kind of translation at work. When it is physically *represented* instead of altogether physically undergone, "translated" from choiceless victimization to voluntary representation, does it become metaphor?

The theatrical space, for Jacqueline, could be a metaphorical one: a representation of the horrors of lived violence. In addition to a space of metaphor for her own memories and the narratives they produced, the theatrical space could also be one where Jacqueline "pushed back" against the identity her violator would give her through forcing himself on her and murdering her loved ones. Herman's work supports the notion that what Adams might call the "secret" nature of the traumatized self might find relief and recovery, and even what Herman describes as "integration" in performance, which is, by its very definition, not being secret anymore. Perhaps theatrical space is a way to perform a counter-interpellation, a non-toxic one, by virtue of showing the world what happened. It is an interpellation of something much different than that intended by the perpetrator whose words and mannerisms

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[180] Gallagher, Shaun. *How The Body Shapes The Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2005): 178.

are impersonated onstage. In the simple act of mimicry, this interpellation is an act of critique of that which is being mimicked, and it's inside-out this time. A person walking around, feeling an anguished sense of detachment from daily functioning and normalcy, recalling unspeakable horrors, may experience even worse pain because those emotions and memories are not in the field of Geertz's "social expressions" and Renato Rosaldo's "social relations." Perhaps shifting the specificity of traumatic memory into knowledge and expertise through embodied mimicry is a form of storytelling as empowerment, and performance a mode of 'being seen.'

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> *Apparently the first thing to do to avoid an attack is not to look like a victim. Be alert. Look around. Be aware. On the grass we startle passersby with our loud, throat-tearing shouts of "no!" as would-be attackers simulate threatening postures and words. We throw out our hands, our feet. We back up, turn and run.*
>
> *No, if we touch it is through space. Boundless space, you call it, but you are lying. The space you are in must have bounds, because it isn't here. If that space were truly boundless, this space would be too. It would all be one space, and we would be in it together.*
>
> *When I was young I saw everyone else's bodies but since I was inside my own I more existed. I didn't think I transcended what I saw moving about, I just...was. I wonder now if this is the closest I will get to remembering the brain state of my infancy: my body wasn't set yet, its perimeters as the same as those binding up everyone else weren't apparent to me. I didn't relate what went on in my head with the fact that somewhere my foot ended and something else began.*

Trauma victims trying to navigate their daily reality with impoverished hermeneutics. Their trust in their own ability to interpret information, and to sort out what input constitutes a threat and what doesn't, have been scrambled. This is no accident. It's a feature, not a bug, of systematic disempowerment. McGowan's comparison of the experience of such

systematic disenfranchisement to a “mirrored fun house” makes clear the connection between oppression and the distortion in reality it is designed to fashion in its subjects. This intentional distortion, this purposeful isolation of the subject in order to confuse and demoralize her, is a function of the web of an oppressive culture: a maze of messages and cultural reflections designed to destabilize the subject’s hold on her own narrative and exploit the fungibility of her truth. One is reminded of the chilling exchange between Angelo and Isabella in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*, whose terms of power can be rendered explicitly and faithfully by these two lines alone:

> ANGELO: Say what you can, my false o’erweighs your true.
> *[ANGELO exits.]*
> ISABELLA: To whom shall I complain? Did I tell this, who would believe me?[181]

Oppression finds structure in the power dynamics the above exchange throws into sharp relief. That oppression functions through what Muñoz and Said might call “the dominant ideology” or what Judith Herman calls “the social construction of reality.”[182] In a series of exposés in the *New Yorker* published in the autumn of 2017, Ronan Farrow documented revelations of Hollywood juggernaut movie producer Harvey Weinstein as a serial sex abuser.[183] Farrow’s articles quote numerous actresses accusing Weinstein of sexual

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[181] Shakespeare, William. *Measure for Measure.* Act II, Scene IV.

[182] Herman, 67.

[183] Farrow, Ronan. "From Aggressive Overtures to Sexual Assault: Harvey Weinstein’s Accusers Tell Their Stories." *TheNewYorker.com*, October 20th, 2017 issue, accessed November 10th, 2017. Web: < https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/from-aggressive-overtures-to-sexual-assault-harvey-weinsteins-accusers-tell-their-stories>

coercion tactics, including rape. Specifically, Farrow profiles Rose McGowan, who went public with her allegations against Weinstein first and was subsequently subject to intimidation and elaborate terror tactics.[184] Of this experience, wherein McGowan was blacklisted, stalked, and her inner circle infiltrated by someone who claimed to be an ally to her cause, but who was actually an ex-Israeli-intelligence officer hired by Weinstein through a private firm, Farrow writes:

> McGowan said that the agencies and law firms enabled Weinstein's behavior. As she was targeted, she felt a growing sense of paranoia. "It was like the movie *Gaslight*," she told me. "Everyone lied to me all the time." For the past year, she said, "I've lived inside a mirrored fun house."[185]

Edward Said's work on orientalism lends itself to an understanding of the intentional forces of distortion at work both in the fictional character Isabella's obvious isolation and in McGowan's actual account. Isabella's predicament is arguably that of every mistreated woman, including those Sigmund Freud abandoned after realizing the social implications of his thesis about the incestuous origins of his anguished female clients' somatic complaints, otherwise known as 'hysteria.' McGowan is the subject of a contemporary form of orientalism insofar as it is mistreatment inflicted on a less powerful subject by an imperial consciousness that has no intention of seeing that subject clearly, and whose subjugation depends on that willful othering.

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[184] Farrow, Ronan. "Harvey Weinstein's Army of Spies." *TheNewYorker.com*, November 6th, 2017. Web article. Accessed November 10th, 2017. < https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/harvey-weinsteins-army-of-spies>

[185] Ibid.

Said describes orientalism as a "grid" that "filter[s]…the Orient into Western consciousness."[186] A "grid" for "filtering" input into "consciousness" aptly describes interpellation and its role in interpretation, both on the part of the oppressor and the oppressed. The oppressive interpellation that traumatizes its subject through dehumanization is one such grid. It interferes with the subject's brain's ways of making sense of things, and therefore with the subject's ability to protect herself from threats, by telling stories about that subject that do not allow for the veracity of her claims. It's almost certain that oppression, leaning as it does on abusive fictions that create pariahs out of people, is a grid: one that takes the form of culture – in this case, what is now called "rape culture." Said's concept of orientalism is one way to describe the effect Weinstein and his minions had on their subject: a form of impoverished hermeneutic adopted by the oppressor, unwillingly suffered by a subject who has little no choice in how she is portrayed and defined in the dominant cultural narrative. Said's assertions imply that the forces in control of the dominant narrative can convince a subject, or at least those around the subject, of the narrative no matter how false that narrative is.

The results in the identity formation of the subjects of such mistreatment cannot be overstated. This is in part because others may believe the dehumanizaing narrative that isolates and destabilizes the subject, and in part because enough of this pervasive cultural web of social expressions operating in tandem create that funhouse mirror, that fog, deluding the subject at worst that she is, in fact, less than human, and at least that while she is human, she is such a bad one that she deserved what happened. The powers that be control whether

[186] Said, 6.

they choose to tell a lie; the subject is arguably not in as much control of whether she believes it. The oppressor chooses a simplified story, one that denies its subject full humanity, one that, as Tracie Morris put it, assumes a singular meaning for any social practice. The traumatized subject, over time, has less and less control over that simplified story. She may not be in total control, either, of whether she relents and accepts the idea that the harm of trying to tell the truth outweighs the harm of living with stories about her she knows to be false: the idea that "[his] false o'erweighs [her] true."

Judith Herman echoes Van der Kolk's characterization of trauma in terms that might also apply to such oppression when she asserts that "conventional social attitudes not only fail to recognize most rapes as violations but also construe them as consensual sexual relations for which the victim is responsible. Thus women discover an appalling disjunction between their actual experience and the social construction of reality."[187] In a culture of abuse, whether familial or national, the web of traumatizing messages underpinning that culture is what forms a social construction of reality, one in which the stories and the humanity of the disempowered subjects are, per Smith, not taken into account. If you remember something in your actual experience that the "social construct[ion] of reality" denies having happened, the disjunction between the two is your liminal home: you're stranded in the stultifying web of an abusive culture, a world made of funhouse mirrors. In terms of both cultural oppression and interpersonal abuse, the damage rendered by this distortion is both intentional and systematic. It is the result of the debilitating nature of social control exerting itself over a subject's sense of agency and therefore her ownership of her

[187] Herman, 67.

identity — her story about herself.

As the Survival Girls developed their piece, I arranged for them to perform at Heshima Kenya, a Nairobi organization assisting refugee girls with holistic approaches to trauma recovery and integration into society. Earlier the week of the performance, I traveled there to make clear to the counselors the risk of triggering traumatic memories in the audience members. I knew it helped the Survival Girls themselves to express what had happened onstage, and also, that if we took proper care of audience members who reacted to the piece, the Survival Girls could help them as well.

"The ones who react, we will know to give them counseling," said Alice, the Heshima counselor I spoke with. "It's why Heshima is here."

The day came, and suffice it to say the Survival Girls more than did their piece justice. After their performance, they bowed and went "backstage" (which meant "into the kitchen"), and Alice had all fifty young women in the audience (Burundian, Somali, Rwandan, Congolese, Ethiopian) close their eyes and take five deep breaths. Many of them had begun spectating the play noisily giggling at Jacqueline's spot-on impression of a man, but by the end of the play, you could have heard a pin drop. In the silence that followed those five breaths, the howling began. Full-on hysterics in two cases; girls running outside and lying prostrate on the grass, pounding with their fists, while counselors rubbed their backs. I slipped backstage, where the girls, who could hear the cries, were all tearing up also. Jacqueline burst into loud sobs and wept against the back wall for a while. I put a hand on her shoulder, and told her I was proud of her. (Once again, I come back to Phelan, writing of

her beloved, who is dying: “Her suffering, or what I took to be her suffering, was sometimes too much for me to watch...There was little I could do...mainly I stood next to her.”[188])I walked with Jacqueline back to huddle with the other girls, sniffling, and I told them to listen to the cries emanating from the other room. “Each of those girls will get help now,” I said, “because you were brave enough to do this today.”

Facio gives credit to the self-awareness to those anthropologists who first contested their own conditioned sense of omniscience on the record; namely William Whyte, who, in the early 1940s contributed to the progressive journey of anthropology as a discipline by referencing his own “foolish errors and serious mistakes.”[189] Was I making one now? Was I saying the right thing, noticing the right things? Should I have asked to hug Jaqueline? What would a trained anthropologist have noticed? What would a trained social worker have done? How can I make sense of it now, nearly five years on? “The ethnographic model,” writes McAuley, “suggests..that until I try to say 'this is what I saw' I have not understood what I saw.”[190]

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Poetry is what is done in the quietness of study, in response to the loudest sounds, what happens when a disempowered, gaunt little ghost of an ugly stepchild cannot stop thinking of the row of cottonwoods lining the dirt driveway to her family's barn; specifically, the grey of their bark, specifically, the artichoke plant between each of them, which leads to the mother in the garden and the strange smell of the little garden shed and so on. The noise made by phenomena that remain silent until allowed by the (loose-fitting, and

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[188] Phelan, 18.

[189] Facio, 79.

[190] McAuley, 78.

> *cursed with the affective/effective nature of the observer's affect/effect on the observed) media of memory, then language, then pen, to bloom out or pool, or do what it is that wounds do in their language in order to have a language. It is a response to the gaping pink, stretching sort of noise wounds make. First the noise (tear?), then the quiet in which words are worked with. It's merely a reproduction of the only script there is: all matter, once localized, bursting forth with a fury beyond fury — think of a rose, its petals piercing you — the soft womb of silence in which the planets have since bloomed out and glided into their velvet orbits, sweeping through the vacuum of space like owls.*

One of the Heshima Kenya counselors came back to ask if I'd do group therapy with the audience. "They're *all* crying," she said, concerned and perplexed. "Would you do group therapy?"

So the Survival Girls and I did our customary end-prayer huddle, we came outside and sat in a big circle. Fifty girls, some hiding behind their headscarves. I thought we should be in smaller groups, and after a few awkward silences in the face of questions put forth by the counselors, we branched off and every Survival Girl and I sat with a group of about eight audience members. The Survival Girls took on the role of counselor unexpectedly, but they did very well. Truth be told, most of the audience members didn't know why anyone would want to relive or think about those memories. They wanted tangible ("embodied," perhaps) help, they wanted to move forward, the way Jacqueline just wants to see some practical benefit of her work in the Survival Girls. "If people support us," she reasoned once in Swahili as Sofia translated for me, "then why aren't we seeing the profit?" None of the Survival Girls or their audience members seemed all that eager to relive their memories for the sake of marinating in them. As far as I heard, all of them wanted to go to school, and most of them are college-age. The sounds of the Survival Girls' screams in rehearsal and onstage replay in my mind when I read the words of, for instance, Paula

Rabinowitz (as she quotes Chick Strand about American porn): "'..It's not that they take responsibility for the experience happening but for 'having had' it.' The claim of 'responsibility' challenges women's victimization in/by narrative by asserting that their stories are conscious reenactments."[191] While I do not believe the circumstances referenced in Rabinowitz's piece translate perfectly to the experience of the Survival Girls, I do wonder if the Survival Girls' work "challenges women's victimization in/by narrative by asserting that their stories are conscious reenactments." As Jacqueline bellowed and wrestled her costars onto the stage floor, brandishing a piece of wood meant to symbolize a gun, did she feel fully present as herself, or was there a division of self, one produced by a collision of her personal memory of being a rape victim with the embodiment of her rapist? That Jacqueline wanted to write the play and perform in the production as the soldier was clear. What, exactly, it asked of her was not. Yet her tears when the play was over, and she stood against a wall, sobbing, echo Phelan's observation that "this place of play insists that play is not easy."[192]

The heartbreaking truth of pathology, especially that of systemic racial or sexual trauma, is that its perpetrators see an opportunity to empower someone who is helpless in their orbit, and through the "outside-in" social process of dehumanization, choose to disempower them instead. Dehumanizing narratives, in other words, are not only what the Western empire tells about people from the Orient, but they are also what abusive parents tell their children. Van der Kolk writes that "humans are meaning-making creatures,"[193] and

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[191] Strand quoted by Rabinowitz, *Posthuman Bodies*,105.

[192] Phelan, 28.

[193] Van der Kolk, 16.

meaning is not only a question of interpretation of events, but one of the narrative it is then possible to create about them. McGowan ultimately have reason to believe her darkest fears; after Farrow's first article, there followed a flood of revelations about Weinstein's entrenched and systematic habit of sexual abuse – abuse so enabled by many in his personal orbit within the film industry that it ended up the subject of a class-action racketeering lawsuit.[194] When Freud realized that the 'hysterical women' he was treating in Vienna were nearly all raped in their childhood by family members, he stumbled upon a veritable epidemic of sexual trauma in the same affluent families that made up his social sphere, an epidemic that fed off of the practices of silencing for the next hundred and twenty years. Perhaps this is the moment that in some small way acknowledges the countless women and their countless stories, all of which festered in the oppressive cultural silence within families and societies. When Anthony Kubiak invokes Cathy Caruth in his claim that an intrusive memory is traumatic because it "will not be translated,"[195] he's not only talking about time, but about story.[196]

A coherent sense of self depends on a coherent story about that self, one that is neither grandiose nor excessively diminished, and that locates the experience of trauma as a memory and not a current event. When that memory is no longer intrusive, making claims on

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[194] Salam, Maya. "6 Women Sue Harvey Weinstein and his Former Business in Proposed Class Action." *The New York Times.* December 6, 2017. Accessed January 10th, 2018. < https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/business/harvey-weinstein-class-action.html>

[195] Kubiak, Anthony. "Splitting the Difference: Performance and its Double in American Culture." *TDR* 42, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 91-114.

[196] Ibid., 108.

our agency in the present, we are free of trauma's power: not only do we know what's now and what's then, but that knowledge leaves us able to "make happy stories in our minds."[197] Perhaps the Survival Girls' work suggests that in order to resist the abusive fictions of oppression, the story one tells does not need to be happy, but true. Insofar as it is deliberate political and cultural obfuscation of the other defined by the fact that it is, in Said's words, "*not even trying to be accurate*,"[198] orientalism is absolutely at work here, in the dynamic of sexual abuse and the ensuing continued subjugation of its victims. McGowan's is an example of trauma inflicted by a modern empire: a grid of knowingly false stories designed to disempower its subject by distorting her grasp on reality and discrediting her testimony. Weinstein's empire was enabled by money and power, as that of Western civilization entire, but Weinstein's is first and foremost a *sexual* empire. The currencies creating and enforcing both are interpellative. Beyond that I find no conclusion to draw about Jacqueline's extraordinary metamorphosis, because I fundamentally believe that there is no thesis statement for rape. Those other people with awful lives, which may at times and from some perspectives include the Survival Girls: they're why I tell it slant. Jacqueline *has* little to no shelter. There is no thesis statement for rape, for violence that undoes what we call structure. *It is not discursive it is violence it is pain.*

That is why I ask more questions, and proffer less answers, than is perhaps palatable from the perspective of ethnographic writing, writing that purports to have any kind of critical bent. When a question mark announces itself, two things happen: one, more space

[197] Van der Kolk, Bessel. "On Being." Podcast with Krista Tippett. Posted June 6, 2017.

[198] Said, 71.

blooms out, space implied by the impending search for answers. Two, that space is made discomfiting, uncomfortable, uneasy; things aren't clear and tidy, the way they would be if there were tidy answers to the question: Why did Jacqueline want to (re)enact the soldier who raped her? What *was* that for her; what did it *do*?

If there are cogent ways to theorize about the interiorities of the humans rendered disordered misfits by profound trauma and unspeakable violence, I do not presume to know them. If there is a structure to violence, I do not presume to know it.

*

> *As a child I had a picture book with exquisite illustrations called The Twelve Dancing Princesses. The princesses went every night to an enchanted castle where they danced their dancing slippers to tatters, but to get there and back they had to walk through a forest of silver, a forest of gold, and a forest of crystal. When it rains at night, drops clinging to dark branches lit from behind, hanging like jewels, I am given a gift, I walk through my own conscious wonderland. I see the bark glisten in the dark. Lately, I have been ashamed. I have fallen back. The daydreams behind my irises but in front of my brain (though I know, I know, they are inside it) are clouding my vision; I cannot see as easily what is divine and dripping with clusters of crystals. I am grasping in the dark. I am walking to a saddening soundtrack, it is night too often, it is wet too often, the sidewalks are dark with moisture too often, and I like the sweet syrup of sadness too much. I am nursing its warmth, it bleeds all over my face and into my eye sockets, I am blinded by my own demonic devices to the miracle of my small square of light in the quilt. Remember, I tell myself, barely tethered to my own body, to the wet sidewalk, what you see is light, all we are is light slowed down, and you don't even see much; we talk about miracles as angels on the head of the pin, but have we talked about whether we can* see *them, waltzing and iridescent?*

Advocate Tiana Burke's creation of the "Me Too" movement in 1997, along with founding a nonprofit in 2007, brought visibility to the victims of sexual assault finally gained mainstream attention when it was employed as the hashtag #MeToo on social media. That

hashtag was revived after Farrow's series of exposés in the *New Yorker* was published in the autumn of 2017. Writing in the wake of the #MeToo movement, Rebecca Traister describes the results of structural abuse enacted through centuries of this deeply entrenched cultural practice of silence and silencing:

> *No, you dope*, I yelled in my head. *The power you had over those women was professional. What you should have learned [was] how your actions damaged their careers.* The harm done to women simply doesn't begin or end in the hotel room with the famous comic masturbating in front of them. It shades everything about what women choose to do — or not do — afterward; it has an impact on those who weren't even in the room…What makes women vulnerable is not their carnal violability, but rather the way that their worth has been understood as fundamentally erotic, ornamental; that they have not been taken seriously as equals; that they have been treated as some ancillary reward.[199]

Traister's claims here illuminate the web of dehumanizing messages undergirding a sexist culture as one made of what she calls "broader horrors, whole complex systems of disempowerment and economic, professional vulnerability."[200] This web of disempowerment has effects that reverberate beyond the moment and time of certain of its social expressions, "shading everything about what women choose to do." Traister's are claims made in terms familiar to both Said's description of orientalism: women's worth "understood as fundamentally erotic, ornamental." Those raped and traumatized Viennese? women were not recovering from their anguish, in part, because the web of abusive

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[199] Traister, Rebecca. "This Moment Isn't (Just) About Sex. It's Really About Work." *The Cut*. December 10, 2017. Accessed January 18th, 2018. Web article: https://www.thecut.com/2017/12/rebecca-traister-this-moment-isnt-just-about-sex.html

[200] Ibid.

messaging undergirding the social control dominating their lives required the enforcement of a narrative that invalidated their memories as fictions: that what had happened to so traumatize them had not happened. These abusive fictions, meant to turn their worlds into "fuhouse mirrors," might also be termed a slow form of systematic murder in the form of social death and its concomitant suffering. The social stigma guaranteeing their condition, and the cultural impossibility of naming its origin is an example of the function of negation and absence in the process by which an oppressive dominant narrative traumatizes the least powerful among its subjects. The results of this institutionalized mistreatment of women and those in racially othered bodies are trauma that is as evident in what it produces as in what it does not. It is easier to trace deterioration through a survey of what was there: a young black body bleeding out on the street in St Louis, Missouri, or the shouts and pushing and removing of a woman's underwear in one of Weinstein's sexual assaults. It's harder to delineate the crystal ships of what, as a result of systemic oppression, never was: whatever murder victim Michael Brown may have grown up to accomplish if he had not been murdered, whatever the beleaguered production assistant may have created if she had not abandoned her dream of screenwriting after being assaulted. The "deterioration" of the brain that Caruth notes is a symptom of trauma[201] is mirrored in society entire, and it includes the elusive shape of what did not come to pass. Such is the slow process of destruction created by the toxic web of an oppressive culture, those social expressions working in concert to ensnare their prey.

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[201] Caruth, 65.

Subjugation inherently fashions its targets that way, across a variety of the more and less privileged, from a blacklisted white actress in Hollywood to a person of color gunned down in the street. Herman's point about the great damage done to a public that does not honor the truth of the most marginalized people in it is echoed across various discourses. In all versions of oppression, not only does abuse damage its subjects' relationship to time and to information relevance; Said's work illuminates how deeply such effects thereby corrode the subject's conceivable relationship to truth. Michelle Alexander makes a forceful case for American legislation as a main method of maintaining a "new undercaste"[202] of black men, a method both borne out of and reinforcing racist ideology that creates a "closed circuit of perpetual marginality"[203] In naming the orientalist discourses that produce the otherizing of people and their cultures—the discursive construction of a "closed field" hemming the other in with exoticizing and fetishizing assumptions, Said foregrounds Alexander's claims about systemic violence as a closed circuit. I would argue that the words of the Survival Girls member, about not being able to stop the memory and her thoughts about the memory of her rape, tell us something about the nature of subjugation as closed circuit ensnaring their subjectivity within themselves, a closed circuit within their own selves repeating the most toxic of the messages they have received about their own worth. The experience of trauma is one that departs from a linear experience of time and a normative experience of subjecthood through the sheer agony it causes someone to be so loosened. In general, people enter into

[202] Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: New York (2010).

[203] Alexander, 95.

those spaces in times of unbearable pain. Time is not experienced in a linear fashion during these moments of unbearable distress. These moments reduce the subject to witness, either to their own crisis or someone else's.

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> *The shifting is supposed to be the function of my brain. I have held myself up with the walls before, under the water.*
>
> *I was participating in a kind of sexual voyeurism when my family got cable and I watched one of those soft porn shows on Starz in the wee hours after everyone had gone to bed. I was ten. I watched a B-movie with explicit sex in it and felt an achy heartbeat, only in the wrong place.*
>
> *Imagining the simultaneous funerals of all immediate family members is probably not normal. Winters whose ascension carries a freeze give way like seduced bodies, supply, to sweet breeze. Lamp-posts, and by the mere imagining of it I realize that the people from whose forms mine is made tether me to this earth. Left to my own devices, I leave it in all but body. Leave it until the thought of violence leaves me conscious of the ways I am cradled by this night street, walking where I will. I think that the words "to humble" and "to ground" are similes is not an accident. I get to dream because I am safe. They hurt me, yes, but without tethers (velvet ropes) I think I might just run over the rim and fall upwards. Branches of a tree, if you're looking up from under the tree, are like veins of a leaf.*

In the overpowered victim of violence, the self dissociates, and so the "her" one stands next to need not be another person but one's own person. Herman, Van der Kolk, and Lipsky, therapists who have spent decades working with traumatized people, have all written about this effect on a trauma victim's relationship to history and to their unity of self, or cohesion of agency. Returning to Caruth's idea that "trauma is confrontation within an event that…cannot be placed within schemes of prior knowledge," we approach the possibly 'queer' nature of trauma studies insofar as "schemes of prior knowledge" may be read as "regimes of truth": that Foucauldian web of cultural messaging meant to exert social control and thereby mold subjectivity. By departing from normative experience of time, trauma may

overlap with what David Eng, David Kanzanjian, et al[204] highlight as the revolutionary potential of queer frameworks to be sites of production rather than loss. Literary theorizing – that is, treating trauma as a metaphor – runs the risk of abandoning the oppressed person to anguish that they don't want. Eng asserts that "as both a formal relation and a structure of feeling, a mechanism of disavowal and a constellation of affect, melancholia offers a capaciousness of meaning in relation to losses." Here queer frameworks actively resist that dehumanization Morris asserts is a product of assuming any social practice means any one thing, and open up a multiplicity of possible meanings in the identity of a person who has suffered a sense of loss. The multiplicity in melancholia might then not only be in the terrible repetitive loop that the women in the Survival Girls want out of their minds, but in the multiplicity of meanings they might make of their lives as they move through them. This is the antidote to trauma and its insidious effects: inscription from the inside-out this time. Identity is not static, which means the stories we are told about ourselves might be, but the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves can change and multiply, asserting multivalent levels of willpower, emotion, and perspective within one subject.

The introductory chapter of this dissertation touches on the anecdote Van der Kolk uses to explain his fascination with trauma as an object of study: the veteran who thought of his pain as what made him a living testimonial. What does it mean to be a living testimonial for something that no longer exists? Is that what it means to be trapped in amber? And are both metaphors for the traumatized condition? Again, Phelan recounts visiting the hospital

[204] *Loss*, edited by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press (2003): 522-538.

bedside of her beloved Julie, whose brain tumor left her comatose, and whose fevered skin turning gray sends Phelan into "a space without geometry or physics, a space without subject or perceiver."[205] Such liminal spaces seem most true to the experience of the aggrieved, of the traumatized, of the realm of disturbance as it occurs, without meaning or narrative. "Why should our bodies end at the skin?" Haraway asks.[206] Why, indeed? A space subject or perceiver is a not only a space without subjecthood but it must also then be without the social construct of time, or much in the way of social constructs at all. Marcus references Haraway's in his argument that "multi-sited ethnography is "a revival of a sophisticated practice of constructivism" that "define [s its] objects of study through several different modes or techniques."[207]

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> *That which is visible in the world around us abounds, and of it we only see slivers. What we register visually is shaven down to what we know, which is to say, shaven down by gigantic leaps and bounds. We see what we know to be there, hemmed down by what we don't want to admit is there, slimmed down by what we have time for, blurred down yet even more by the fact that most of the time. We are not actively seeing objects in front of us; rather, we are daydreaming, and looking at the movie behind our irises. I am writing and the shadows of my fingers intersect; as I write each respective light source casts a different shadow. My pen tip's shadows fall at four different points on the paper at varying levels of intensity. There are four different light sources in the room. Depending on the areas where more shadows prevent light from reaching the page directly, some parts of the myriad soft curved – but even in dissecting this I haven't conveyed what I meant to; what I mean is, the shadows of my fingers are like a sea animal, like some other fold in the body, like fallopian tubes, like soft sea grasses. The shadows of my fingers*

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[205] Phelan, 23.

[206] Haraway quoted in Mason, "Terminating Bodies: Toward a Cyborg History of Abortion*."* Halberstam and Livingston, eds. *Posthuman Bodies (Unnatural Acts: Theorizing the Performative).* USA: Indiana University Press (1995): 225-224.

[207] Marcus, 90.

betray their bodiness, their sameness to all those other folds and biologically alive shapes, more than the fingers themselves. Fingers lose their fingerness. On the page a nest of soft line and curve I can't hope to replicate.

A body
Fold is a body
Fold.
Repeating fold repeat shadow fold body image repeat fold finger fold body shadow image

The introductory chapter also explores Freud 's work on the aetiology of 'hysteria' in the late 1890s, which connected emotional disturbance in the women he treated with sexual assault that they had suffered in their past; in that work he described those women as "suffering from reminiscences." One way the memory of Jacqueline and the Survival Girls encourages me think of it is that trauma leaves marks that are invisible as well as visible. It is those invisible marks that interest me as a performance scholar, as a creative researcher, as the director of the Survival Girls' play, as a development worker, as a person. Social control created by such dehumanized thought functions best when such dehumanizing messages are believed by their subjects, which belief means trauma leaves marks that are invisible as well as visible. Visible marks, often from violence, mark a traumatic event on the physical body. The invisible ones are marks on the identity of the subject, made dehumanizing interpellations that came from 'outside-in.' The effect of that dehumanizing interpellation is the constitution of subjects whose identities incorporate the messages they're given. "Self-identity," write Halberstam and Livingston in the introduction to the anthology *Posthuman Bodies*, "is ultimately a system of parasitic invasion, the expression within me of forces originating from the outside."[208] Geertz' "social expressions" here show themselves

[208] Halberstam and Livingston, *Posthuman Bodies:* viii.

able to assume sinister aspects, as outside forces creating an "invisible freak" identity in a traumatized subject as well as internal forces propagating that identity.

The 'parasitic invasion' of traumatizing messages has such a profound effect on identity formation that posthumanism as a lens has produced a way of thinking through trauma that casts humanity and agency in new light. Whether consciously aware of it or not, the subject's sense of agency is removed, disturbed, or re-distributed. It is perhaps for this reason that severe trauma sometimes results in what Western medicine defines as schizophrenia, and sometime what it would define a personality disorder such as Multiple Personality Disorder, which Allucquere Roseanne Stone discusses in *Posthuman Bodies*.[209] A summary of Multiple Personality Disorder as Stone elucidates it might be that a person never has access to all her memories at once. One personality remembers a night of drunken revelry; the other wakes up the next morning and wonders at the new bruises. If the memories are hellish enough, perhaps it's the brain's way of granting itself mercy. If you don't remember it, then you're not the person it happened to.

Conquergood's critique of the scriptocentrism of the West echoes Stiles' analysis of "cultures of trauma" producing layers of coded language that resist political oppression when he points out:

> Oppressed people everywhere must watch their backs, cover their tracks, suck up their feelings, and veil their meanings. The state of emergency under which many people live demands that we pay attention to messages that are coded and encrypted; to indirect, nonverbal, and extralinguistic modes of communication where subversive meanings and utopian yearnings can be

[209] Stone, Allucquere Roseanne. "Identity in Oshkosh." *Posthuman Bodies*: 23-37.

sheltered and shielded from surveillance.[210]

Verbal and gestural interpellations work in twain to perform oppression, and the scriptocentrism of the dominant cultures creating putative objects through the othering force of dehumanization breeds resistance communicated outside that script's narrow bounds. Scriptocentrism is linked to the heavy influence of the ocular on oppressive frameworks, or what Conquergood says "links the powers to see, to search, and to seize." Agency is interpellation that begins within the subject, and operates outward: when one "hails" oneself.

The schizophrenic experience, in turn, is arguably one wherein what I call "nodes of agency" are distributed *beyond* the boundaries of the individual body. "The schizophrenic," writes Shaun Gallagher in *How The Body Shapes The Mind*, "feels that he is not the *agent* of his own actions, and that he is under the influence of others – some persons or things seem to be moving his body"[211] (emphasis mine). In other words, the schizophrenic's brain skips a step and so his thoughts feel like they've come from without, often in the form of commands from certain objects or other nodes of agency. Gallagher distinguishes between ownership and agency, arguing that the loss of the latter is what characterizes some positive symptoms of schizophrenia, including that of "inserted thoughts:" "Action itself is experienced as owned, but the *source* of the action, an intention or command, is *dis*owned[212]...the subject, in recognizing a thought as inserted, does not claim that his recognition of this fact is inserted"

[210] Conquergood, 36.

[211] Gallagher, 178.

[212] Ibid..

[213] (emphasis mine). In her essay about watching her beloved die, Peggy Phelan describes Orfeo's experience as he leads his wife Eurydice out of the underworld, trying not to look back at her and thereby lose her forever, in terms that might be understood through Gallagher's lens of schizophrenia and through the lens of the traumatized condition: "Orfeo begins to doubt...Orfeo hears a noise *whose source he cannot place*"[214] (emphasis mine). Gallagher could just as easily be writing about traumatized people when he writes that "schizophrenic patients feel alienated not just from their own thought and action; they also feel alienated from affects, from their own body and skin, from their own saliva, from their own name, etc."[215] Herman and Van der Kolk touch upon such alienation often, as a regular description they hear from their clients about how distant their trauma has made them feel from the realm of "ordinary" or "normal" human life. Both psychologists also write extensively about dissociation, a necessary and involuntary division of self in a moment of traumatic crisis that afflicts the less powerful in the moment of trauma and in the survival of the moment's memory thereafter. Phelan movingly describes the dissociated subject's experience when she writes that "I felt a strange loosening, not a simple "letting go", a much more intense *turning from myself*. It was at once both painful and consoling, a kind of dream and a kind of horrible tearing" (emphasis mine).[216] Echoing Rosaldo's world "expanding and

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[213] Ibid., 185.

[214] Phelan, 19.

[215] Gallagher, 205.

[216] Phelan, 23.

contracting, visually and viscerally heaving,"[217] this description raises the possibility that dissociation, also, is a kind of mercy, a kind of balm for that which is unbearable but which must be borne.

Trauma specialists maintain that dissociation is a necessary and involuntary division of self in a moment of traumatic crisis, particularly in anyone who has been overpowered, and it remains a near-universal symptom of rape victims across the world. Halberstam and Livingston refer to nodes as loci where posthuman bodies "emerge": "where bodies, bodies of discourse, and discourses of bodies intersect to foreclose any easy distinction between actor and stage, between sender-receiver, channel, code, message, context."[218] Phelan's description of unbearable, melancholic grief as a space without object or perceiver finds resonance here. My notion of agency finding its home in different nodes may extend to the experience of violence and the repression of its memory. The dissociative experience could be summarized as an extension of agency beyond the body, a kind of projection: a node up in the far corner of the room, a safe vantage point wherefrom the witness, "loosened" and "turning from herself," watches her own body used like a rag doll.

Trauma is inherent to the refugee experience – at the very least, that of the loss of one's home and an imminent sense of danger, and at most a chain of murder, rape, fleeing armed forces or people, losing all possessions, losing family, seeing them murdered, being tortured. Working with refugees is working with traumatized persons, and Nairobi's UNHCR office has processed well over 500,000 refugees. Each of the five members of the Survival

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[217] Ibid., 9.

[218] Halberstam and Livingston, 2.

Girls who chose to tell me about her experience in the wake of horrific violence described a sense of seperateness and detachment. In the wake of this dissociative survival tactic, the journey back to embodiment for the subject is an anguishing and sometimes impossible one, largely because the subjective marks left by trauma identify rape victims *to themselves* as carriers of dirtiness and shame in the wake of the traumatic event. And it is in the memory of hearing several members of Survival Girls' anguished words -- *"I can't control my thoughts. I can't stop replaying what happened. I'm afraid I'll never be like the other girls. I'm not a normal person. I can't stay where I am; I keep going back." – that there is* confirmation of that effect. And it is in that confirmation I heard from members of the Survival Girls, that the nature of creative research as an intervention lies. That intervention presages and requires the "pleasure and burden of representation" of advocacy that D. Soyini Madison notes "is always already so much about ethics."[219] Several members of the Survival Girls have told me, in public and in private, that they take strength from creating material drawn from memories of the violations they have suffered. They asked to use the space of our workshop to create theater about those memories. They chose to continue the group when I flew back to America. There are vestiges of colonialism all over this advocacy work, and certainly they crop up any time I speak 'on behalf of' or even about these women, especially to a privileged audience. I presume to do so because the marks left by trauma identify these women *to themselves* as carriers of dirtiness and shame. Once again, this toxic interpellation is one of dehumanization and it inscribes the self-perpetuating closed circuit of social stigma

[219] Madison, D. Soyini. *Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2010): 11.

Alexander suggests is characteristic of marginality. When the Survival Girls members have unkind thoughts about themselves, where do those thoughts come from? Where does the self-identification with pariah status described by Alexander *come* from?

They come from without. Such self-hating thoughts begin from outside the subject, seeds planted there by people and society both, a disease of subjugation that is a feature, not a bug, of identity formation in marginalized subjects. The effect of such inner-outer confusion as this culturally-produced and subjectively-reinforced stigma might be called a body that is "deviant," as Adams might term it, in ways we can't see: a raped woman, who feels like an invisible freak; who, in other words, believes the dehumanizing messaging inherent to the act of her own rape — a woman who believes, in other words, that she is dirtied by an aspect of her experience in which she didn't have a choice. It's possible, then that the self-hating and shameful feelings Alexander asserts are constitutive of a societal pariah lend themselves to the notion that a person's status as freak need not be a racially designated status. It need not be visible at all to be harrowingly real to the subject. It's possible that some forms of deviance derive from private experience and are not always embodied visually, or even remembered consciously.

A status as a deviant, freak, or pariah need not be visible, or visible all the time to the naked eye, to be legislated and socially enacted into being. My preoccupation with dehumanizing, or toxic, interpellation relates to the social theory of contagion – in this case, the spread of beliefs – and their relationship to deliberate misreading suggested by Said's theory of orientalism. Brenda Foley explores just such a link in her examination of the 2000 supreme court case of *City of Erie v PAP's A.M.*, or "the Kandyland case," in which the city

of Erie sought to require exotic dancers not to remove g-strings and pasties. Foley points out that the Cal State Fullerton's track team coach, who removed athlete Leilani Rios from the team for her off-track career as an exotic dancer, implied "that there is nothing wrong with *seeing* an exotic dancer but something unacceptable about *being* one," which in turn "calls the moral character of the exotic dancer into serious question."[220] Foley argues that thus constituting the subject of the exotic dancer casts her in terms of contagion, which serve to justify removing her from where she might spread that flaw in her moral character to others: "Coach Elders's assumption that exotic dancing reveals and promulgates an immoral and contagious self whose pathogenic effects require containment" is one made in response to performative female sexuality. Justices O'Connor, Kennedy, and Breyer mention in their response "the harmful secondary effects associated with nude dancing," making explicit what Foley describes as "assumptions of contagious negative secondary effects as well as a *deliberate misreading* of exotic dancing's theatrical basis."[221]

Foley's use of the very phrase "deliberate misreading" suggests a strong link between the abusive fictions Said worked to expose, and the way subjects of abusive fictions are constituted according to those falsehoods – that they have flaws in their character, or that they are otherwise somehow dirty. This link is what greases the engine of Foucauldian lenses of power relations: the containment and control of bodies is linked to deliberate misreadings of them, and the suggestions those misreadings make about the humanity and worthiness of

[220] Foley, Brenda. "Kandyland" 2002, *NWSA Journal*, Vol 14, no 2: 2002. 1-16.

[221] Foley, 2.

their subjects. This example of the Supreme Court legitimizing the character attack embedded in Coach Elders' expulsion of Leilani Rios is one of how the social disease of subordination works upon the individual body through dehumanizing person-to-person messaging that is then normalized at ety-wide levels through legal frameworks. In this way the social contagion works both ways: it works to regulate the movement and behavior of individual bodies through a cultural code meant to demoralize the selves inside those bodies. Foley also nods to Patricia Williams' claim that "the extent to which technical legalisms are used to obfuscate the human motivations that generate our justice system is the real extent to which we as human beings are disenfranchised."[222] Deliberate obfuscation thus joins deliberate misreading in the tool box of oppressive othering, and their both features, not bugs, of subordination. Alexanders' preoccupation with the humanity of those subjects created through mass incarceration as pariahs finds common ground here with the women who became, in the eyes of the track coach and the law, putative objects. Through the transmission of unduly negative belief to self-belief, or, put another way, the creation process of the pariah: dehumanizing narratives exerted through legal frameworks, both inspired by and inspiring further the person-to-person mistreatment so effective in damaging identity formation. Clarifying this effect on the body of deliberate misreading and power relations, Foley quotes Kathy Davis: "conditions of embodiment are organized by systemic patterns of domination and subordination, making it impossible to grasp individual body practices, body regimes, and discourses about the body without taking power into account."

[222] Patricia Williams quoted in Foley, 3.

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The effect of severe trauma is one of self-identity as less than human, and it is a feature of the system of social control that intentionally subjugates. Foley points out that "the telling use of the phrase "outer ambit" in the Supreme Court ruling solicits the disenfranchisement of exotic dancers "as deviants who act without regard for culturally sanctioned norms of behavior." The social construction of deviants is, Foucault might argue, necessary for the longevity of power relations. Foley points out the Justice O'Connor's "intentional conflation of the female body with the space it occupies..at once dehumanized its targets (hence erasing any concern for speech), and continued the judicial attempt to fix boundaries whereby contagion and its mobility might be minimized."[224] Through the abusive effect of marginalizing and othering certain people through one person's word and the legal framework that officialized that word as a dominant narrative, the identity of the subject is dehumanized.

What does that mean, exactly? What it is to be dehumanized? In the worst kind of outside-in inscription, wherein the dirty, shaming thoughts that belonged to others begin to feel like our own when they did not originate within us. Shawn Gallagher could easily be talking about a war veteran hitting the concrete at a barbeque when he posits that a schizophrenic's lack of protention, a "motor process that precede[s] action and translate[s] intention into movement,"[225] is responsible for the loss of *agency*, but not *ownership*, of the

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[223] Kathy Davis quoted in Foley, 14.

[224] Foley, 9.

[225] Gallagher, 194.

schizophrenic's thoughts and actions. I did the thing, but I'm not sure how it is I came to be doing it. Gallagher writes that in the case of people with schizophrenia, "without protention, in cases of both intended thought and of unintended thinking, thinking will occur within the stream of consciousness that is not experienced in the making."[226] Traumatic flashbacks could arguably be described as *memories* that "occur within the stream of consciousness" and "are not experienced in the making."

While I wrote above that preparing for their performances included private talks requested by individual members with me, conversations that prompted occasional flashbacks, none of the Survival Girls, that I know of, have been diagnosed as schizophrenic or as having multiple personalities. What I see of the flashbacks is more of a blank affect than anything else. It is nothing like what I have heard and read is true of trauma-induced schizophrenia; my roommate in Nairobi was a case worker at the United Nations Refugee Agency, and she did a home visit to a man whose detention and torture in Congo had resulted in paranoid schizophrenia and who lived chained to the bed.

Traumatic intrusive memories have the effect in common with what Gallagher writes is the effect in schizophrenic people of "unintended thinking": that the "common temporal structure of embodied movement, action, and cognition" is "a structure that breaks down."[227] Violence breaks down those structures, too, as it dwells outside the realm of the sayable, at least for its subject, whose identity is constituted by the implicit dehumanizing message that

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[226] Ibid., 195.

[227] Gallagher, 205.

the subject then struggles with for untold time thereafter. Halberstam and Livingston propose that the human body is a “figure through which culture is processed and oriented.”[228] I would argue both that culture is processed and oriented through interpellation’s effect on subject formation, and that perhaps that breakdown of embodied movement, action, and cognition is the inevitable effect of such a process if the messaging encoded therein is dehumanizing. Culture arrives at the human body through interpellation. As violence is not outside the realm of culture, the human body is also a site through which *violence* is processed and oriented by dehumanizing messaging in particular. Importantly, Van der Kolk specifies that in the case of life after a traumatic event, “you’re not allowed to feel what you feel [and] know what you know,” in which case “your mind will not integrate what goes on, and the mind will get stuck on the situation.”[229] In other words, trauma breaks down the internal structure by which we could be said to know ourselves as well, which might be part of why the experience of alienation more generally ascribed to the postmodern and capitalist experience seems often to be explored by cultural theorists using the metaphors of illness and pathology. Marcus helpfully points out that postmodernism is a “label” for a certain “wave of intellectual capital,” one that “examine[s] the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space.”[230]

The assumptions and problems with this reading of Jacqueline’s

[228] Halberstam and Livingston, vii.

[229] Van der Kolk, Bessel and Tippett, Krista. "On Being: How Trauma Lodges in the Body." Posted March 9, 2017. Podcast. Web page: https://onbeing.org/programs/bessel-van-der-kolk-how-trauma-lodges-in-the-body-mar2017/

[230] Marcus, 79.

performance, and with the work I do that engages it, resound, as do other questions about the work Survival Girls: as Adams describes her use of the terms “freak” or “queer,” is the identity of a rape victim also “a concept that refuses the logic of identity politics, and the irreconcilable problems of inclusion and exclusion that necessarily accompany identitarian categories”? I don’t apply Adams’s term to identity formation in rape victims because it fits perfectly; nor do I do so to make a sloppy claim about postmodernism. However, insofar as postmodernism could be described as the admission that binaries are dissolvable and specifically Western claims to and of order interrogable – that we don't really know what's going on and that the world changes us as much as we change it – there is more room for progressive understandings of trauma in a postmodern framework than in premodern ones. If the dissolution of previously accepted orders; the loosening of historically accepted hierarchies; and the weakening of formerly identitarian categories are all tenets to postmodernism, then perhaps the people who live in those liminal spaces – schizophrenics, freaks, traumatized people – are the ones who are most “awake” to how untidy life truly is even as they suffer anguish involuntarily living out of step with it. Perhaps the posthuman condition is the one most amenable to what Western academia would term “postmodern” and what Western medicine would term “disorder.” As such, the traumatized condition is an experience that might be termed the postmodern experience of a posthuman body whose sense of agency and time, as well its physical borders, are malleable and porous.

It’s possible that posthumanism functions as a catch-all metaphor for trauma, whether that trauma be the result of racist, sexist, rhetorical, or physical abuse. It’s also possible that schizophrenia has functioned conceptually as a catch-all metaphor for those of us wishing to

engage theoretically with postmodernism, and that as such, this and any summary will always fall short of the ethical mark. I believe that it is incumbent upon me, even as I find aspects of survival worthy of celebration in examining my memories of events in "developing nations" that I have gone to at will, to consider the constraints that culture and my own vocabularies place on my examination of trauma – of anything – in people of different cultures than mine, especially those people who don't have the resources and privileges that I do. Stone asserts that "the idea that personal identity is so refractory is a culturally specific one," reminding us, as Rosaldo does, to consider the constraints that our own culture and our own vocabularies place on our examination of trauma in people of different cultures than ours.[231] In his discussion of Multiple Personality Disorder (also known as Dissociative Identity Disorder, or DID), Anthony Kubiak specifies that it is a rather recent and "distinctly American invention,"[232] and points out that "what is often overlooked in both recovered memory and DID therapy, and in performance and performance theory, is the rather obvious intersection between certain modes of American religious practice, performance, and pathology."[233] While the use of English, the language of empire, and the restraints of academic writing, the language of privilege, render this intersection perhaps unavoidable, Stone and Kubiak remind me us that talking or writing about trauma from a position of privilege is an imperfect balancing act. Kristine Stiles provides that balance,

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[231] Stone, 24.

[232] Kubiak, 99.

[233] Ibid., 104.

noting that:

> Many theorists of postmodernism celebrate schizophrenia, or decentered fragmentation, as the cultural sign of postmodern political resistance to holistic models of self and society associated with the hegemony of the humanist paradigm. My personal experience, knowledge of Romania, and scholarship, all support different conclusions. For such theories fail as viable theoretical constructs when called upon to address the actual experiences of Romanians…These theories collapse before the *actual* conditions that real people with multiple personalities suffer; and they cannot account for, or move toward healing the terrible incapacitating fragmentation and the agonizing internal struggle for unity without which it is impossible to survive and function.[234]

There remain epistemological gaps and possible ethical holes in any theorizing about illness as metaphor, and conversely, in any theorizing about trauma that writes entire groups of marginalized people off as sick in some way. The balance is a worthy, if unattainable goal: when theorizing about suffering, particularly the embodied suffering of others, it is an ethical imperative to distinguish between the literal and the metaphorical. Rosaldo's project included a critique of Geertz's interpretive approach grounded in the identity politics at Stanford in the 1980s. "All interpretations are provisional," he points out; "they are made by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others."[235] Geertz's interpretive approach granted an objective position to the "reader," or in this case the anthropologist, and it also approached culture as a closed system circumscribed in ways the subjective experience of contemporary global culture might contest at every turn. Even Clifford and

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[234] Stiles, 537.

[235] Rosaldo, 7.

Marcus (whose arguably misogynist claims Lil Abu-Lughod took issue with for good reason) noted that "if 'culture' is not an object to be described, neither is it a unified corpus of symbols and meanings that can be definitively interpreted."[236]The remarks the women in the Survival Girls group made to me about the way the treatment of their violation made them feel – like a non-person, someone who was deeply different from the people around her in painful and emotional ways – restore to the realm of the progressive just one aspect of Geert's interpretive theory of culture, and that is the interpellated nature of subject formation. I suggest that self-identity as Livingstone and Halberstam define it revitalizes Geertz's seemingly antiquated theory insofar as self-identity is a creation of those messages constituted by social expressions. Orientalism is a form of mistreatment precisely because of its reliance on story to promulgate a sense of othered humans as less human than the ones telling that story. For traumatized people, memory will intrude unbidden and the physiological autonomic response will be unmanageable in scope. When that's the case, it's easy to believe the worst stories. The resultant damaged ability to trust oneself is widely acknowledged by contemporary researchers to be at the heart of the loss suffered by traumatized people. It corrodes a sense of confidence and well-being to wonder whether one's memory is true, or one's interpretation valid, or one's reaction reasonable. It's difficult to "make happy stories in our minds," as Van der Kolk puts it, if the social and domestic order rests on seeing us, and our seeing ourselves, as inherently bad, abnormal, or less-than – if the familial and cultural holders of power are trading in dehumanizing narratives.

I changed buses when I worked with the Survival Girls in Nairobi, which required

[236] Clifford and Marcus, 19.

being downtown in a grittier city part than lush Westgate (the mall where I would type up these notes about the Survival Girls, that was attacked by Al-Shabaab two days after I left Nairobi in a two-day hostage crisis). However, there was a Hilton gym there in the city center, and I would go through the metal detectors, hand uniformed guards my backpack, and go up to where the pine smell of the sauna room would lull me into my remix of the Emotional Freedom Technique: touch pressure points, and all the while recite the things that bring me back into the present (though what "me" and "the present" are, exactly, remains debatable). "My name is Ming. I'm twenty-eight." Tap the temples. "I'm in Nairobi." Tap the cheeks and above the lips. "I have a place I can come and relax that I am grateful for." Touch the tips of the fingers with the other tips, and tap them together. "Today I worked with women who amaze me and whom I love, and they don't have these things, and I'm sad about that. It's September seventeenth, twenty thirteen..." And so on. Twice I got a massage from women who told me how they pray. One of them had lost two sons. There was tea outside the massage room. Chamomile.

I think of Jacqueline holding her fake gun, Jacqueline sobbing by the wall, Jacqueline bellowing over the bodies of her fellow players. Jacqueline going back to her scant bed in the slums while I got my massage at a hotel in the city. We never had a conversation that wasn't mediated, and she doesn't grace these pages. Not the woman in Nairobi. It's only the memory trace of her, permuted over and over again through a kaleidoscope of refractions and contrivances, through the process of recalling and writing about an act of catharsis and courage I can barely describe, let alone understand. This is the story of the ethnography that failed. Through my attempt to comprehend, the woman who is the referent, the woman

violated, has again been violated here.

Jacqueline.

[Jacqueline.]

Chapter III.

"It My Fault She Dead": An Examination of Trauma in Gurira's *Eclipsed* and Nottage's *Ruined*

As a scholar who works at the nexus of bearing witness to testimonies of trauma in vulnerable human subjects—a scholar who would like to reduce the amount of objectification required by the pesky anthropological spyglass that is the unavoidable baggage of anyone creating scholarship about vulnerable subjects—I believe it may be worth it to ask: what if the trauma such as that gestured toward by Jaqueline's story in my preceding chapter were already well-illustrated in contemporary plays? Performance studies, specifically the province of play analysis, may here step in to honor that gap between me and what is unknowable and unspeakable, and provide some approximation of an object for analysis offering salient examples of Van der Kolk's more important claims about trauma and its effects. I argue that that very salience makes an implicit case for trauma research as transnational and even postfeminist in its examination of the trauma victim as a postcolonial identity category.

Here that examination honors the gap between me and Jaqueline's story by turning our attention to two plays in particular: Danai Gurira's *Eclipsed*[237] and Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*.[238] Written by African-American women and arguably the two most successful plays concerning sexual violence in Africa to be produced in the last decade, *Ruined* also won the

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[237] Gurira, Danai. *Eclipsed*. New York: Theater Communications Group, Inc (2015).

[238] Nottage, Lynn. *Ruined*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc (2010).

Pulitzer Prize for Drama and *Eclipsed* was nominated for a Tony and won the NAACP Award (it was also the first Broadway production to have an all African-American and female cast and creative team). As this chapter aims to illuminate, both plays employ a deft look at trauma and inventive use of stage direction to ensure its faithful depiction onstage. Here, the situations and histories of characters may "stand in" for those of someone like Jaqueline in the textual space of this writing. The specifics of Jaqueline's story remain unknowable—and, if Van der Kolk's research has anything to say about it, possibly unspeakable even by her—however, it is hopefully not too indulgent to hope the prize committees might be discerning and progressive enough that those plays they award could be assumed to bear those qualities also. Certainly, differences between the Survival Girls' performance and any American playscript exist; for one thing, the Survival Girls didn't *write* a physical script for this performance. For another, the two plays in question are written by American women who attended this country's most elite private schools and attained advanced degrees. Nottage grew up in Brooklyn, went to St Ann's, and picked up a couple of Ivy League degrees at Brown and Yale. Gurira was born in Iowa, and while she spent some of her childhood in Zimbabwe, she went to a private Catholic high school there and then it was off to Macalester College before an MFA at New York University's prestigious Tisch School of the Arts and a successful acting career on popular television series *The Walking Dead*.

However, *Eclipsed* is set in Liberia during the Civil War at the LURD Rebel Camp Base, with an all-female cast of characters who are the captive wives of a rebel officer. *Ruined* is set in a village in the Congolese rainforest like the ones from which the members

of the Survival Girls hailed. Nottage interviewed refugees in a camp in Uganda as preparation for writing *Ruined*, a liberal contemporary adaptation of Brecht's *Mother Courage and her Children.* Descriptions of unthinkable violence like the ones to be found in *Eclipsed* and *Ruined* and in Jaqueline's testimony, the kind that renders its 'real-life' subjects and witnesses unable to find words for it without some distance and a sense of safety, raise ethical questions around claims of the universality of human experience. In a humanities dissertation in 2019, what generalizations, if any, can be made about that experience? Feminist theory, as well as contemporary research around neurodivergence, suggest that are perhaps exceptions to be found to most simple generalizations about what it means to be human and to thrive, even such simple basics as 'we all breathe' and 'we all defecate.' (What about iron lungs? Hirschsprung disease?) One central idea raised by the last fifty years of trauma research is that it is precisely what cannot be articulated that unites trauma victims across inherently colonialist racial and national divides, which I will use Sharon Friedman's work to argue suggests a transnational analysis of *Ruined* and *Eclipsed* as supportive of the identification of trauma victim as a decolonial identity category. Bessel Van der Kolk's generalization, to be found even in the title of his book,[239] is that the body keeps the score: trauma always has an effect on those who suffer it, and those effects seem largely to transcend historically colonial essentializing barriers. Rape victims in wartime subsequently suffer from similar bouts of dissociation and flashback any time their symptoms are observed and recorded; presumably, this means that rape victims across time and place suffer in similar

[239] Van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Random House (2014).

ways that transcend historically entrenched taxonomies. It is that general presumption of commonality that foregrounds my analysis of *Ruined* and *Eclipsed* as inherently transnational, postfeminist work, and also as an acceptable object of analysis instead of the unspeakable and unknowable details available to Jaqueline but not to me. Instead of examining Jaqueline's story for its grisly detail, let us instead turn to two plays written about characters who lived through atrocities similar to hers.

While both *Ruined* and *Eclipsed* employ ensemble in a way that Sharon Friedman argues "signif[ies] a shared condition within a specific historical context"[240] in the tradition of earlier forms of feminist theater, I also argue that the plots of both plays hinge upon the traumatic memories and transformation of one character more than the others, and that their commonalities suggest a transnationally feminist approach. Central to both plays is an enigmatic girl who has been subject to gang rape and is forced into slavery amid continuous and devastating civil conflict. *Ruined,* set in a mining town in the Congolese jungle, focuses on Sophie, who Nottage specifies—both in stage direction and in character's words in the script—is a very pretty girl who has already suffered for it. Sophie has been "ruined" by sexual violence such that Mama, who can smell the "rot" of Sophie's flesh, cannot employ her for sex work in her brothel (so Sophie performs other tasks, like singing, instead).

Eclipsed, set in the waning days of the Liberian Civil War, follows the conversion of a character simply called "the Girl" from newly captive wife of a rebel soldier (one of four such wives) to a soldier herself. Friedman correctly describes *Ruined*'s Sophie and Salima,

[240] Friedman, Sharon. "The Gendered Terrain in Contemporary Theatre of War by Women." *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 62, No. 4: Contemporary Women Playwrights (December 2010): 593-610.

the girl she arrives at the Mama's brothel with, as "seeking asylum." So, too, is *Eclipsed*'s "Girl," who Helena and Bessie, wives number One and Two, respectively, hide from their captor husband under a washing basin until the Girl is apprehended by the captor as she relieves herself, and he literally rapes her into the status of his "wife" Number Three in captivity. Van der Kolk specifically addresses the plight of asylum seekers who are not believed by the authorities and whose cases are dismissed, writing that he has "seen dozens" of those dismissals "because asylum seekers are unable to give coherent accounts of their reasons for fleeing."[241] As we will see, both Sophie from *Ruined* and the Girl from *Eclipsed* (as well as other rape victims in each play) are afflicted with this same speechlessness when reminded of the very trauma that led them in the first place to seek refuge in places where there isn't any.

Ruined and *Eclipsed* each offer ample examples of both traumatizing circumstances — a largely unseen force of war and traumatic memories of sexual violence — and the physiological effect such trauma has, through what is unsaid as much as what is said. When it comes to the realm of the unspeakable, silence does extra work: the unspoken is the province of subtext. In these two plays, atrocities are as deftly illustrated by an ellipsis in an actor's lines as by the details that *are* given speech. Van der Kolk's notion that the body keeps the score[242] also nods directly to an epistemological claim: that information is not only held in the conscious mind, but also takes the form of knowledge that can be held in the body. This

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[241] Van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*: 245.

[242] Ibid.

claim is not new: oppression and trauma have explicit effects on the body even after bruises have healed. It may follow that the bodies of trauma victims "remember" more. To be sure, they remember a great deal in the worlds built by Nottage and Gurira. In the textual word of the play script, as well as the world built through the shared imagination of the players of the stage, much of the substance is in the stage direction. A glaring example is the "strange walk," or gait, both Nottage and Gurira specify as evidence of the physical pain of sexual violence suffered by Sophie and the Girl, respectively. So in each play, the physicalized injury of rape afflicting the main enigmatic girl who is the focus of the story, and on whose repressed memories of trauma the world of the play exerts itself until those moments are expressed in decisive and untimely ways, renders explicit what otherwise evinces ellipses and hushed tones.

Nottage and Gurira also effectively employ the use of subsequent monologues to fill in those ellipses. The monologues function as a kind of narrated flashback in both *Eclipsed* and *Ruined.* "If things are bad," the tough-as-nails brothel owner Mama Nadi ("Mama") explains to Sophie in *Ruined*, "then Mama eats first."[243] Shortly thereafter, we see Sophie smile for the first time as she eats a chocolate from the box Christian gives to Mama, clearly in an effort to sweeten the deal for her taking on his niece Sophie and another girl called Salima. In a tight and strong piece of theater, props are used over and over again to illustrate numerous character moods and shifting power dynamics. Mama demands the chocolates from Christian as part of payment for her making the sacrifice; but then again she only

[243] Nottage, 12.

demands it once she asks Sophie if the soldiers who gang-raped her with a bayonet "hurt [her] badly," and Sophie begins to cry as a result, prompting Mama to wipe her eyes with her skirt.[244] Mama feeds her a chocolate, which prompts Sophie to smile. "Why are you smiling?" Christian immediately asks Sophie. "You're a lucky girl. You're lucky you have such a good uncle. A lot of men would have left you for dead."[245] In response, the stage directions describe the very first smile the audience sees on Sophie's face disappearing. Such disrupted attempts to enjoy life result in what psychologists refer to as learned helplessness, which Van der Kolk describes to heartrending effect in a discussion of a colleague's experiment wherein dogs were administered with electric shocks. After enough painful results of attempts to eat or escape, the dogs simply lay there even when the doors to their cages were left wide open. Enough negative feedback like Christian's at unexpected turns, in other words, would cause this gang rape victim's smile to go from rare to nonexistent. We see similar behavior in The Girl in *Eclipsed*, who before recruited by one of the captive wives into being a soldier herself, enters the play in what Gurira variously calls in her stage direction a "dazed" and "numb" state—the same words that Van der Kolk uses the 1984 research of Steven Maier to identify as common to the victims of severely traumatic events and unmistakably related to learned helplessness.[246] The more or less compact nature of a movie or a play leads to a tendency for the stories therein to focus on memorable days. Van der Kolk points out that experience tends to run together in the memory when it's quotidian;

[244] Ibid., 13.

[245] Ibid.

[246] Van der Kolk, 30.

trauma is one of those things that makes a memory stand out by being stored differently in the brain than non-traumatic memories.

A play set in wartime not only strengthens the dramatic stakes of a play world across the board, not least through the distribution of resources. That distribution, and the disturbance — and even the suggested disturbance — thereof gets ample attention in both *Eclipsed* and *Ruined*. One main difference between *Ruined* and *Eclipsed* is that *Eclipse* is made up of solely female characters, whose lives are largely determined by male characters offstage. In *Ruined*, while explicit sexual violence is *not* depicted onstage, verbal abuse and physical harassment of Mama's employees *is.* The important events in *Eclipsed*, which also revolve around sexual violence or the threat thereof, manage to be important even when no male characters are there to issue the threat with their presence. The men onstage in *Ruined* mainly provide a foil to the women; with the arguable exception of Christian (the merchant who woos Mama), they all harass, demean, insult, order around, and steal from the female main characters. In *Ruined*, Salima is upset by drunk and disheveled guests of Mama's brothel touching and harassing her; Mama reprimands her, but Sophie takes her aside:

> SOPHIE: Are you all right, Salima?
> SALIMA: The dog bit me. (*Whispered.)* I'm not going back over there.
> SOPHIE: You have to.
> SALIMA: Filth! It's a man like him that —
> SOPHIE: Don't. Mama's looking. (*Tears well up in Salima's eyes.)*
> SALIMA: Do you know what he said to me —
> SOPHIE: They'll say anything to impress a lady. Half of them are lies. Dirty fucking lies! Go back, don't listen. I'll sing the song you like. (*Sophie gives Salima a kiss on the cheek.)*[247]

[247] Nottage, 20.

The reader/viewer does not yet know what “a man like him” did specifically to Salima, only that the nameless rebel soldier in Mama’s brothel reminds her of him, and that the memory of what he did is upsetting enough to cause tears to well up in the eyes of an ostensibly practiced survival sex worker. Nottage here employs a specific stage direction, which suggests that the whispered confidences and private tears were important enough to her as a playwright not to leave up to the actor. Once again, the nature of Nottage’s play script, here in the stage direction, suggests a commitment to an exploration of trauma and how traumatic memories function in the present moment of the character in the world of her play. Sophie does not address the memory prompting Salima’s upset, but rather gives us one of the rare moments of overt physical affection between any of the characters at any point in the play, elucidating if not the “rap group” nature of the bond between the women in Mama’s employ, the fact that they operate in the face of harassment from rebel soldiers as a united front against Mama as well as the soldiers themselves.

Play analysis also asks us to consider the relationship between stage direction and subtext, especially with stories around violence so severe it is ‘unspeakable’ in the classic sense of the term. With the exception of that all-important flashback to traumatic events that each play leads up to, initially the details are not named, but suggested by the silence that intimates the unspeakable nature of the atrocities suffered. Not only do these pregnant pauses afford the actor the chance to use all the other forms of communication than the verbal, but such pauses also strengthen the quality of the play by staying true to the lived experience of trauma through honoring how hard—impossible, even — that lived experience is to narrate.

Van der Kolk's research leans heavily on MRI scans of the brain, which show how un-linked the sense-of-self area of the brain becomes from the language structure that gives communicative order to experience. Indeed, the business of naming — naming each other, naming themselves — is so central to the journey of the characters in *Eclipsed* that this preoccupation remains in the mind of this reader as the play's most important refrain. Importantly, the person most affected by the names other gives her, and most empowered by the name she gives herself, is a character referred to in the play script simply as "the Girl." Gurira's aim here seems less to gesture toward the universality of the Girl's experience — indeed, the Girl's monologues of the frightful experiences she has lived through echo Nottage's script for *Ruined* in the specificity of detail that traumatic memories carry — and more to how obliterated the sense of self becomes in a trauma victim who has been through unspeakable atrocities without the time or safe space to process them. Gurira indicates more than once in her stage direction that the Girl begins her tenure in the camp that is the set of the play traumatized in her actions and demeanor; specifically, after she leaves the hiding place the other wives have made for her out of a washing basin in order to urinate and is caught and raped by the husband. Namely, Gurira uses the words "almost in a trance of silence"[248] to describe the Girl early on in the first scene; and "dazed" in her stage description of the Girl after she returns from that first experience with her captor (or "the CO").[249] The Girl's first concern is not to wash herself — she has already, she informs the other wives,

[248] Gurira, 14.

[249] Ibid., 16.

who are startled to know she is already aware of the routine doings of a sexually active woman — but to know her place in "de rankin" of wives in relation to them.

Freidman points out that "studies of the specific effects of war-making on women's lives examine the ways in which different groups of women suffer and respond."[250] The wives in *Eclipsed* arguably each represent one of those different groups. The characters operate in tandem with and in contradistinction to one another in keeping with the shifting agendas and power dynamics between four wives whose hierarchy is so determinative of their experience of life in captivity that they refer to themselves and each other with those very numbers. "Watch your mouth oh," Helena warns Bessie in *Eclipsed*'s first scene: "You forgetting who Number One."[251] The strength of a play script lies in clever exposition of just such fixations, in how many ways a few spoken words can build a world of tension between characters and their competing agendas as well as those agendas that press upon them from larger "backdrop" events (ie, civil conflict). Nottage quickly sets up an initial such conflict between Christian and Mama:

> MAMA: …I don't have room for another broken girl.
> CHRISTIAN: She eats like a bird. Nothing.[252]

The difference in the content and nature of the monologues in each play gesture to the difference in the level of agency felt by each woman. In this respect also, *Eclipsed* illustrates

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[250] Friedman, 595-6.

[251] Gurira, 14.

[252] Nottage, 11.

Van der Kolk and Herman's arguments that a sense of agency is a main factor in distinguishing recovery from trauma and resilience that can either preclude that trauma or is required for such recovery. Mama's monologues in *Ruined* tend to be assertions of either her agency, for better or worse (as when she orders Sophie to suffer what is almost certainly sexual violence at the hands of the warlord Sophie offended); or her grasp of nostalgia. As she eats the caramel chocolate she had demanded from Christian, she muses about how "the smell reminds [her] of [her] mother": "She'd take me and my brothers to Kisangani. And she'd buy us each an enormous bag of caramels."[253] Even though Mama's monologues reveal that she and her bothers would sit on the banks of the river, eating caramels, while her mother "visited with uncles"— a euphemism for sex work — the sense one gets from each of Mama's monologues is the resilience necessary to re-narrativizing the past in an empowering way, not unlike E Patrick Johnson's description of his own grandmother's oral performance of her history as a "mammy" to a white American family.[254] While almost all of the other monologues in each play are those recounting clearly traumatic memories, Mama's forays into the land of memory demonstrate her control over what might be called the subject material — those sensory details that animate recalled experiences when those experiences are either especially traumatic, especially meaningful, or both. Even when the material recalled is not particularly cheerful, she shows enough command over such memories that the recounting thereof does not happen in a triggered state but within the bounds of more normal

[253] Ibid., 13.

[254] Johnson, E. Patrick. *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity.* North Carolina: Duke University Press (2003).

conversation. "You sound like my old Papa," she tells Harari (who is described in his introduction in the second scene as a 'handsome, tipsy Lebanese mineral merchant'); "He drove his farm hard, too hard. When there was famine our bananas were rotting. He used to say as long as a forest grows a man will never starve."[255]

Harari the mineral merchant, in turn, is the character who bookends *Ruined* with monologues adeptly sketching out the traumatizng nature of wartime, beset as it is with precisely those changes in circumstance that prevent the physiology of a trauma victim from the calm routine requisite for recovery. Van der Kolk employs recent technologies such as MRI scans to indicate that the brain stem and amygdala become "overactive" in traumatized people — their autonomic functions don't resume once the circumstances are "back to normal" if "normal" keeps coming and going.

> MAMA: …how does a woman get a piece of land, without having to pick up a fucking gun?
> HARARI: I wish I could tell you, but I can't even hold onto a fucking pair of shoes. These idiots keep changing the damn rules. You file papers, and the next day the office is burned down. You buy land, and the next day the Chief's son has built a fucking house on it. I don't know why anybody bothers. Madness. And look now, a hungry pygmy digs a hole in a forest, and suddenly every two-bit militia is battling for the keys to hell.

Not only do those two-bit militias keep "changing the damn rules," but in order to do so, they're changing the story about what's going on. The dominant group in any culture, in peace or in wartime, is the one in charge of the story, which narrative dominance might be the best way to describe what oppression *is* when it comes to systemic violence. Local

[255] Nottage, 14.

warlords Kisembe and Osembenga are ostensibly on opposite sides of the regional conflict in *Ruined*, but what they have to say about the other — that the violence is necessary, and "how it has to be" (according to Kisembe) or "what must be done" (according to Osembenga, just a few minutes later) — is nearly identical; indeed, the 2009 production of *Ruined* at the Manhattan Theater Club double-cast the actors playing soldiers on each side of the conflict.[256] Citing Colleran and Spencer's use of the term "cultural practice," Sharon Freidman writes that *Eclipsed* and *Ruined* number among those plays "informed by or inflected with feminist critiques" that further demonstrate "hybrid intentions."[257] Freidman also uses Colleran and Spencer's definition of "political theater" as theater that "ranges from 'act[s] of political intervention'…raising awareness and encouraging a specific agenda, to plays that function as civic forums…provoking a critical and active response from viewers."[258] That's straightforward enough, but the act of double-casting actors on either side of warring factions does even deeper work; Freidman argues that the hybridity of plays like *Eclipsed* and *Ruined* lies in what Colleran and Spencer call "covert… 'disturb[ance] of complacent spectators'" that "implicitly demand a reexamination of 'official versions of history'—in this case, accounts of war focused exclusively on the political actions of warring factions, numbers of

[256] Brantley, Ben. "War's Terrors, Through a Brothel Window." *The New York Times*. Feb 10, 2009.

[257] Friedman, Sharon. "The Gendered Terrain in Contemporary Theatre of War by Women." *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 62, No. 4: Contemporary Women Playwrights (December 2010), pp. 593-610: 595

[258] Colleran and Spencer quoted in Friedman, 595.

casualties, and military victory and defeat."[259] By double-casting actors, in the case of *Ruined,* and using all-female characters, in the case of *Eclipsed*, both plays examined here make that implicit demand. The effect of Nottage's clearly intentional conflation is to train the attention of the play to the aftermath of the trauma her central characters have suffered at the hands of men like Kisembe and Osembenga, as evidenced by the attunement displayed by the characters around the warlords — all of whom, as less powerful people in the dynamic, owe their survival to that attunement. Mere moments into the first scene of *Eclipsed*, Gurira's stage directions indicate that Helena and Bessie, two of three captive wives of the same rebel army officer, "*both look up at a man and watch him, they jump into line as thought in an army formation*."[260] Once Bessie gathers it's her he wants, she walks offstage to join him, and returns "wip[ing] between her legs with a cloth."[261]

It's not until one of the final scenes of the play that Sophie, the "ruined" girl who has therefore not been working as a sex worker per se, but more as a chanteuse, loses her self-control. One of the local warlords, Osembenga, calls her a "pretty girl" in French and grabs her to pull her into his lap. Sophie hisses, spits on his shoes, pronounces herself dead, and accuses Osembenga of necrophilia. Nottage writes in the stage directions that "*this is the first time we've seen Mama scared.*" Enraged at how Sophie endangered them all, she sends Sophie off where Osembenga wants her: "around back," so he and his henchmen can "teach

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[259] Colleran and Spencer quoted in Friedman, 595.

[260] Gurira, 11.

[261] Ibid.

her a lesson." "I'm trying to bring order here, and this girl spits on my feet," Osembenga says. "You see, this is what I have to deal with. This is the problem."[262] Thus does the reality and stakes experienced by the less-powerful characters change on a dime, the dime of the story the powerful man is telling about what is going on, as an outraged Mama sends Sophie to be raped by Osembenga and his men out back.

As the conflict in which the brothel is caught escalates, and artillery fire can be heard, Harari reappears, and once again describes the inherently traumatic no-man's land of war's shifting landscape:

> HARARI: It keeps fracturing and redefining itself, militias form overnight and suddenly a drunken foot-soldier with a tribal vendetta is a rebel leader and in possession of half of the enriched land, but you can't reason with him, because he's only thinking as far as his next drink[…]The man I shake hands with in the morning is my enemy by sundown, and why? His whims. Because?! His witch doctor says I'm the enemy. I don't know whose hand to grease other than the one directly in front of me. At least I understood Mobutu's brand of chaos. Now, I'm a relative beginner, I must relearn the terms every few months, and make new friends, but who? It's difficult to say, so I must befriend everybody and nobody. And it's utterly exhausting.[263]

Harari is giving voice to the experience of each character we have followed throughout the play, most viscerally the women who must sleep with soldiers who would kill each other in order to survive, and convince each of them that she is on his side. In *Eclipsed*, Helena, wife Number One, puts a similar predicament another way: "I want NO man but how

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[262] Nottage, 55.

[263] Ibid., 59.

I go survive I don't have one?"[264] The "whims" of intermittent reward givers, such as the "CO," or husband/captor of the wives in *Eclipsed,* are those winds of change that render so barren the internal landscape of any victim who cannot escape their power and assert her own. Throughout *Ruined*, the character of Mama vacillates between compassion for this "broken girl" and the viewpoint that she can't abide yet another mouth to feed, especially one that is, in her whispered aside to Christian, "damaged goods." In an interview in 2009, Nottage specified that this moral ambiguity is not an accident, and is descended from the work she adapted of Brecht's. Furthermore, such moral ambiguity serves to do what Freidman cites Miriam Cooke to call "dismantle the metanarrative of the war story that artificially divides 'beginning and ending; foe and friend; aggression and defense; war and peace; front and home; combat and civilian.'"[265] Such insights can build upon monologue like Harari's descriptions of wartime to support the neurological and physiological basis for what Van der Kolk and Herman maintain happens in the brains and bodies of severe trauma victims: their interpretation of experience is disrupted, and everything that happens is a threat. Whether in wartime or an abusive household, the experience of terror changes the brains of trauma victims. In the early 1980s, before advanced MRI imaging helped Van der Kolk's research, Herman made the all-important intervention of pointing out that the two kinds of terror have the same psychological effects on victims.[266] Their trauma research

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[264] Gurira, 28.

[265] Cooke quoted in Friedman, 596.

[266] Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Political Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Perseus Books (1992).

supports Cooke's insight that "'what used to be labeled civilian experience—being bombed, raped, expropriated, and salvaging shreds of living in a refugee camp—some name combat experience'"[267]; furthermore, it suggests that the "hybridity" dismantling the "mythic wartime roles" of "the official 'war story'" was, like Herman's research in the 1980s, built on the women's movement. Friedman quotes Alexis Greene's analysis of plays by women from the 1960s through the '90s in England, America, and northern Ireland; namely, Greene's identification of those plays as sharing a concern with "deconstruct[ing] the notion of wartime heroism" and "draw[ing] a connection between violence in battle and violence in the home."[268] Revision of the "canonized narrative of war" is part of the feminist agenda writ large, an agenda whose historical tradition Nottage and Gurira both build on not only by focusing on the effect of wartime on women's lives, but doing so in a way that communicates their trauma effectively.

One way in which both playwrights do so is in the aforementioned moral ambiguity of their characters, which moral ambiguity renders those characters what trauma researchers would call "intermittent" caregivers. The disastrous effect of such intermittent caregivers; and the attunement to them that Van der Kolk and Herman describe as characteristic of both intimate partner domestic violence victims and childhood domestic violence victims, is illustrated by the shifting power dynamics that make each play gripping throughout. Mama's attitude towards Sophie seems to vacillate between two poles depending on how the forces of

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[267] Cooke quoted in Friedman, 596.

[268] Greene quoted in Friedman, 597.

civil conflict act upon her, with Sophie either the grateful recipient granted reprieve, or the re-traumatized victim cast out, near the end of the play, to be violated at the hands of a warlord. Sophie's rebellion against her own mistreatment, as is often the case with traumatized victims, comes out of step with time in that it is a delayed response to the initial sexual trauma, and her outburst risks her place at Mama's. However, after sending her to suffer offstage at the hands of the warlord, Mama then uses the rough diamond referred to throughout the play as her "insurance" to attempt to secure for Sophie the surgery that might relieve her pain. Instead, Harari, the acquaintance she entrusts with the diamond in order to accompany Sophie, leaves without the girl, as an aid worker beckons him offstage amid escalating conflict that guts Mama's brothel near the end of the play.

Throughout *Ruined*, Nottage uses stage direction (italicized here) to employ dancing in ways that illustrate the complexity of agency so well-explored by Saidiya Hartman.[269] In what is arguably what Hartman would call a "scene of subjection," Sophie "*plows through an upbeat dance song*" when dancing is something she carries out as part of a job for "*drunk and disheveled rebel soldiers*." Toward the end of the play, when Salima's husband, Fortune, has taken up a stalker-like post outside Mama's brothel in an effort to relocate the wife he abandoned, and rebel soldiers from warring factions have begun to use the brothel as territory for their pissing contests, Mama's employee Josephine dances. This time, however, it is a dance in which the woman dancing ostensibly for the soldiers "*becomes increasingly*

[269] Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

frenzied. She releases her anger, her pain…everything. The men cheer her on, a mob growing louder and more demanding. Josephine desperately grabs at the air as if trying to hold on to something. Her dance becomes uglier, more frantic. She abruptly stops, overwhelmed. Sophie goes to her aid."[270]

This skillful stage direction does everything it can not only to accurately depict a woman who has undergone trauma, but the complexity of agency within oppressive scenarios that Hartman's work on subjection establishes. "How is it possible to think 'agency' when the slave's very condition of being or social existence is defined as a state of determinate negation?" Hartman asks.[271] Scenes with stage direction like the one Nottage writes above arguably stand as an answer to that question, by literally embodying a slave's "social condition" as one with a polyvalence of agency, conflicting emotions and desires.

In addition to skillful stage direction, another way in which the unspeakable is honored in the writing of each play script is in the use of the ellipsis, which denotes a pause in the actor's delivery of the line. Nottage's use of the ellipsis evinces a convincing delivery of unspoken traumatic information in this excerpt from *Ruined*, a conversation between the traveling salesman Christian and his old sparring partner (and the recipient of what the play eventually reveals are romantic poetic recitations) jaded brothel owner Mama:

> CHRISTIAN: Salima is from a tiny village. No place really. She was captured by rebel soldiers, Mayi-mayi; the poor thing spent nearly five months in the bush as their concubine.
> MAMA: And what of her people?
> CHRISTIAN: She says her husband is a farmer, and from what I understand,

[270] Nottage, 42-43.

[271] Ibid., 52.

her village won't have her back. Because…But she's a simple girl, she doesn't have much learning. I wouldn't worry about her.
MAMA: And the other?
CHRISTIAN: Sophie. Sophie is …
MAMA: Is what?
CHRISTIAN: … is … ruined. (*A moment.*)
MAMA: (*Enraged*.) You brought me a girl that's ruined?[272]

The reader/playgoer with even cursory knowledge of civil conflict and its harrowing accoutrements can more or less infer the atrocities that befell a girl from a "tiny village" in Congo who was "captured by rebel soldiers." Though the humanitarian view of compassion would not have this be the case, the notion that sexual violence "ruins" someone is not specific to civil conflict in central Africa but to civil conflict everywhere; and research on trauma indicates that the view Christian voices here is the one internalized by the toxic interpellation of most, if not all, human culture. "The child has nowhere else to go," he says in an aside to Mama; "[…] as you know the village isn't a place for a girl who has been…ruined. It brings shame, dishonor to the family."[273] The fact that Sophie, the girl Christian is talking about as a ruined, broken girl, is his niece, only serves to underscore the brutality Gurira and Nottage explore. Indeed, Friedman argues that the shame and stigmatization on top of the rape itself render the characters in both plays "doubly victimized."[274] Mama reifies this cultural attitude towards raped women – one that turns out to be a classic projection – when she counsels Salima not to accept the husband who

[272] Nottage, 10.

[273] Ibid., 11.

[274] Friedman, 598.

abandoned her to be raped by soldiers and who has taken up a post outside the brothel in hopes of reuniting with her:

> MAMA: […] The woman he loved is dead.
> SOPHIE: That's not true. He—
> MAMA: (*To Salima.)* He left her for dead. (*A moment. Mama's words hit home.)* See. This is your home now. Mama takes care of you. (*Mama takes Salima in her arms.)* But if you want to go back out there, go, but they, your village, you people, they won't understand. Oh, they'll say they will, but they won't. Because, you know, underneath everything, they will be thinking, "she's damaged. She's been had by too many men. She let them, those dirty men, touch her. She's a whore." And Salima, are you strong enough to stomach their hate?

I'd argue that Mama's last question is a spoken half of a pair that drive the internal locus of each play. Along with the question, "Are you strong enough to stomach their hate?" exists an equally noxious one; namely, "are you strong enough to stomach your own?"

Nowhere is this question asked by the playwright more suggestively than by harrowing monologues of memories of sexual violence that occur more than once in each play. Salima's husband posting himself outside the brothel prompts one of the more powerful trauma monologues in contemporary theater. From a trauma studies standpoint, Salima's monologue is believable as a reliving of her traumatic memory: Salima has yet to process it both in its detail, and in what *prompts* this sudden flow of words from her. The man who abandoned her in her hour of need has reappeared, and this has what trauma therapists would immediately recognize as a triggering effect, which logically leads to her outpouring:

> SALIMA. Do you know what I was doing on that morning? I was working in our garden picking the last of the sweet tomatoes. I put Beatrice down in the shade of a frangipani tree, because my back was giving me some trouble. Forgiven? Where was Fortune? He was in town fetching a new iron

> pot. "Go," I said. "Go, today, man, or you won't have dinner tonight!" I had been after him for a new pot for a month. And finally on that day the damn man had to go and get it. A new pot. The sun was about to crest, but I had to put in another hour before it got too hot. It was such a clear and open sky. This splendid bird, a peacock, had come into the garden to taunt me, and was showing off its feathers. I stooped down and called to the bird. "Wssht, Wssht." And I felt a shadow cut across my back, and when I stood four men were there over me, smiling, wicked schoolboy smiles. "Yes?" I said. And the tall soldier slammed the butt of his gun into my cheek. Just like that. It was so quick, I didn't even know I'd fallen to the ground. Where did they come from? How could I not have heard them?

The above lengthy excerpt constitutes a mere third of Salima's heartbreaking monologue. She goes on to describe the murder of her baby girl by one of the invading soldiers, and the five months she subsequently spent "chained like a goat" as their prisoner, weaving her harrowing story with seemingly unrelated, associative additions about a splendid peacock wandering in the garden and tomatoes that were "ripe beyond belief"; finally returning twice more to the refrain of self-blame so familiar to trauma victims: "How could I not hear them coming? […] I must have done something." The excruciating minute detail in this monologue, replete with multiple sensorial images, is true to what we now know about how traumatic memories sear themselves into the brain of the victim and are stored differently than "normal" memories. In addition, Salima's self-castigation — "How could I not have heard them?" – is also consistent with the guilt and self-blame often experienced by trauma victims.

Additionally, at work in both plays is a believable schism between the ways in which, and moments at which, each woman holds and processes the memory of trauma. The Girl has

only to remember her parents to exhibit signs of her trauma:

> THE GIRL: I just know when de army go where — I hear my fada and moda talking and — (*THE GIRL goes quiet, looks away, almost in a trance of silence.*)
> BESSIE: So how many years I got?
> (*THE GIRL doesn't answer, curls up in a corner and looks away*.)
> BESSIE: Hey, what ha problem oh?
> HELENA: Leave ha, She may be thinking on tings dat happen.
> BESSIE: Plenty, plenty happen to me, I neva look like dat.[275]

Bessie is hard-pressed to understand the Girl's dazed demeanor as the evidence of trauma that it is: "She go lay wit de CO, it not even grieve ha! […] de first time for me I was crying for two days […] she act like she got no problems. Like notin bad jus happen."[276] Later, Helena and Bessie are bickering over the "rankin" again, and who gets what, when the Girl reappears, "walking strangely," and silently washes between her legs before "reading intently" her book about Bill Clinton in the corner. Bessie once again marvels at this reaction to sex with her captor, and takes the Girl's quiet countenance as proof that the Girl is "used to it now. See, look at ha […] she fine."[277]

Van der Kolk would disagree in his discussion of why "trauma victims often withdraw," and their stories become "rote narratives edited into the form least likely to provoke rejection."[278] If the Girl offers none of herself to the other captive wives, they cannot

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[275] Gurira, 18-19.

[276] Ibid.

[277] Ibid.

[278] Van der Kolk, 246.

hurt her more than her rapist captor does when he does whatever leads her to walk strangely. Van der Kolk puts it simply enough: “It is an enormous challenge to find safe places to express trauma.”[279] It may even be the case that, to generalize, both plays are about what happens when those safe places don’t exist *and* when the trauma is unspeakably brutal. And what happens, according to Van der Kolk, is that what is repressed in the trauma victim finds expression at moments that are out of step with the world around them. Midway through *Eclipsed*, as the Girl reads aloud from her book about Bill Clinton, the wives chat about his impeachment and liken his affair with Monica Lewinsky to his having a “Number Two” that he lies about. The Girl interrupts the flow of that conversation with a sudden and unusual slip:

> THE GIRL: My pa only love on my ma.
> HELENA: How you know?
> THE GIRL: I KNOW. He good husband. He tell me only be wit man who loving on me.
> HELENA: He no know dis war comin when he tell you dat.
> BESSIE: Keep reading. I wan de part when he come to Africa.
> THE GIRL: (*Suddenly agitated.)* No, I tired now.[280]

Helena understands what upsets the Girl, and after sending her to deliver food to the captor husband, tells Bessie that she’s “missing family.” At the next opportunity, Bessie asks her directly:

> BESSIE: You miss your pa and your ma?

[279] Van der Kolk, 246.

[280] Gurira, 34.

THE GIRL: Ya…(*Tears brimming.*) I wan my ma.[281]

The Girl spends the first half of *Eclipsed* in something of a fugue state in the present, except when a strong emotion grips her from the past. Only then does she become animated. Given the wartime sexual violence and situation as captive that the audience knows the Girl is currently facing, such a plaintive, childlike, and universal need as "wanting ma" stands out as a sharp cry. But Bessie can't get to the place of empathy and compassion Helena can, and repeatedly interprets the Girl's fugue state evidence that nothing is wrong, instead of evidence that *everything* is.

Another productive tension in *Eclipsed* between female characters and their grip on truth and trauma is raised with the entrance into the compound of Rita, a "peace woman" – ie, a member of the Liberian Women's Initiative who has experienced travel and schooling beyond what the captive wives have. Helena is performing a menial task of a rural wife, pounding cassava, when Rita enters the compound. Within a few short exchanges Rita cannot contain herself, and sets about shocking the captive women into awareness of the very pain and injustice they have survived by ignoring. Rita code-switches from a higher register to more colloquial speech as she addresses Helena: "You tink it normal you wifing some self-proclaimed general in the bush? You tink it normal a boy carrying a gun and killing and raping?"[282]

Van der Kolk and Herman maintain that recovery from trauma only becomes possible

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[281] Ibid.

[282] Ibid., 39.

when it becomes bearable to "know what we know," which can be so painful that trauma victims can go years burying memories that are too untenable to acknowledge. Given that protracted captivity often results in the confused attachment known as Stockholm Syndrome, and that repression of the horror of captivity is what enables the captive wives to function, Rita's intervention is disturbing indeed to the all-important pecking order that gives the wives' impoverished world its structure. Helena both wants to read and write like Rita, but "I just don know if I can learn now," she says; "I getting old to be sometin different."[283] Rita thinks for a moment, grabs a stick, and writes her own name in the dirt. She asks Helena for her name, and Helena responds with the only answer she allows herself to know:

> HELENA: my nem? Numba One
> RITA: The one your ma and pa give you!
> HELENA: NO. I wife Numba One to the Commanding Officer of LURD Army — I —
> RITA: WHAT DID YOUR MOTHER CALL YOU?
> HELENA: I — I neva use it — I —
> RITA: You MUST know it. Tell it to me — now.
> HELENA: It…it…I can't
> RITA: (*Seeing Helena is shaken.)* Okay, it's okay, just whisper it to me, try […][284]

Helena does whisper her name to Rita, who writes it in the dirt. But the fact that Helena is shaken for the first time only then, two-thirds into the play, supports the notion that, like the Girl's memories of her parents, buried memories of a healthier, happier, more liberated past can evoke substantial pain in the present, enough to interfere with ordinary

[283] Gurira, 39.

[284] Ibid.

functioning. Upon review of the 2016 Broadway production of *Eclipsed*, Charles Isherwood sums it up nicely: "It's more painful to remember than to forget."[285] When Maima, who used to be wife Number Two, returns to the compound after becoming a soldier in the army herself, she wastes no time in similarly upending the Girl's world, resulting in the first time the Girl shouts:

> MAIMA: […] (examining her closely.) So de CO he like you, ha? He jump on you a lot? You like dat? Look at me. Is dat what you want? Hmmmmhmmm? Did you like dat?
> THE GIRL: No.
> MAIMA: (Militarily.) What?
> THE GIRL: NO.[286]

Far from accepting the Girl's passive fugue state as Helena does, or assuming it means that nothing bothers her like Bessie does, Maima seeks to remedy the situation and jump-start recovery by forcing the Girl to face pain she has hidden from herself and reenter the spirit of resistance she gave up in order to survive her ordeal. Shortly after getting the Girl to shout "NO" in response to repeated questioning about whether she liked being raped by her captor, Maima gives the Girl a gun. The Girl again protests, frightened, but fires the gun when Maima yells at her too. "*The girl fires the gun,"* the stage direction reads; "*She gasps, panting. Adrenaline flooding her system.*"[287]

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[285] Isherwood, Charles. "Review: In 'Eclipsed, a Captive Lupita Nyong'O is Captivating." *The New York Times*. March 6, 2016. Retrieved from web July 2019: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/07/theater/review-in-eclipsed-a-captive-lupita-nyongo-is-captivating.html

[286] Gurira, 45.

[287] Ibid.

This is the only instance in which a stress hormone is named in the stage directions of either play, in spite of the fact that both stories revolve around what happens when abnormal amounts of them are loosened in the system of trauma survivors at inopportune times. In one fell swoop, Maima gets to the heart — or nervous system, if you will — of the matter: she gets the Girl to confirm that nothing is, in fact, okay; and then she gives the Girl a powerful thing to do. It should come as no surprise that the Girl is never the same. When the Girl reappears at the compound, Bessie is visibly pregnant with their captor's child, and Gurira uses all-caps, multiple exclamation points, and stage direction to ensure a vast change in countenance in the Girl when Helena challenges her choice.

> HELENA: […] You no know what you talking about little gal. Hey go men you do all de ting you see when you and your family have to run, all dose ting and worse […] Day got meh you slit a moda's stomach and tek out de baby to see if it boy or a gal.
> THE GIRL: (Explosively.) I NO GON DO NO TING LIKE DAT!!! But if I soldier, I no have to stay ere no more!
> HELENA: It betta ere den —
> THE GIRL: NO it not. Look at ha! She gon have his beby. I NO WANT DAT!![288]

Survivors of sexual assault often bury their own dissent so deep that they never find it. "People can never get better without knowing what they know and feeling what they feel,"[289] Van der Kolk writes, which is perhaps one of the things that makes the intimacy between Mama and Christian so poignant at the close of *Ruined*. Christian finds Mama in the bar she

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[288] Gurira., 49.

[289] Van der Kolk, 27.

owns in spite of the fact that the establishment and surrounding areas have been ravaged by warring factions and the rough diamond that is her "insurance" has been stolen. Christian makes plain his desire to settle down with Mama, finally naming the chemistry between them as such; Mama initially rebuffs him, then as he walks toward the door, she calls after him that she is "ruined": that she herself suffered gang rape at the hands of rebel soldiers, as five of the Survival Girl group members told me they had suffered in "real life," in small mining towns in Congo like the one in which the play is set. That being internally injured by gang rape was stigmatized is easily enough understood; for audiences of *Ruined* to be so moved by character of Mama's admission of a shameful secret she had carried her life long speaks to the immense courage of the Survival Girls group members *not* to carry theirs without sharing for decades. "Failure to attend to" the "simple human need" of disclosure "results in a stunted existence,"[290] Van der Kolk plainly states. On the rare occasion that the safe space required for life after trauma allows them to allow their anger to take up space, the experience is one of agency after a long while without it. That agency, while instrumental to trauma recovery in general, does not extend as far as the Girl contests that it does. Helena turns out to be right; Maima orders the Girl to round up young women for the soldiers they fight alongside to violate the way they violated her.

In addition to the use of an all female cast of characters, Gurira's conversion of two of those characters from "wife" to "soldier" does what Friedman uses Elaine Aston and Geraldine's analysis of the "utopic (post)feminist movement" to identify as (post)feminist

[290] Van der Kolk., 28.

work, in that it not only “deconstruct[s] essentialized concepts of gender and sexuality” but “consider[s] the ways in which violence, inequality, and injustice continue to be perpetrated in terms of identity categories.” Writing in 2003—the same year in which *Eclipsed* is set—Aston points out that such a turn refuses “colonial othering of gender, race, and nation” for a feminism that seeks to understand the social and cultural conditions in which women live through the lens of local and global.[291] Gurira’s and Nottage’s work can therefore be read as transnationally feminist, or even (post)feminist, in part because their female characters are just such women; Maima, like Mama in *Ruined*, is so hardened to the reality of war that when Rita asks her for the name her ma gave her, as she did Helena, Maima goes on a tirade about how she is not one of those whiny girls who misses her parents and pities herself because she was raped. Rita backs down, and not unlike Samila in *Ruined*, launches into a monologue about how she lost her daughter to rebel soldiers — in this case to the LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy), who dragged her daughter away. Samila ends her monologue in *Ruined* with a question that cannot be answered — “How could I not have heard them?”[292] — and so does Rita in *Eclipsed,* who wants to know: “How long you tink you can mock God before he mock you back?”[293]

Such fruitless ruminations are the hallmark of the self-blame inherent to the experience of a trauma victim, particularly one who has been overpowered as in a rape. “Post traumatic stress,” Van Der Kolk writes, “is the result of a fundamental reorganization of the

[291] Aston quoted in Friedman, 598.
[292] Nottage, 45.

[293] Gurira, 56.

central nervous system based on having an experienced an actual threat of annihilation or seeing someone else being annihilated, which reorganizes self-experience as helpless."[294] Both Salima and Rita lost daughters to rapists with guns and were helpless to stop it; a more fecund territory for such an eternity of self-recrimination that solves nothing there perhaps never was. Van der Kolk writes that even friends of trauma victims "can lose patience with people who get stuck in their grief and their hurt."[295] Those lamentations, which take the form of questions that can't be answered, and which have worn a groove in the tortured consciousness of each woman, constitute an adroit example in each case of what "getting stuck in grief and hurt" might look like in a world of violent atrocity and its aftermath. I would even argue that Herman and Van der Kolk's research might support an "identity category" of trauma victim over of those using gender, race, or nation as an initial marker. Their focus on the similar effect of trauma on the brains of trauma victims, from domestic violence victims to war veterans, is therefore decolonial work. Insofar as their depiction of the effect of trauma on its victims is concerned, Gurira and Nottage support the case for recent trauma research as (post)feminist work, also.

At the other end of the characterization spectrum from such circular self-torture as exemplified above are morally ambiguous figures like *Ruined*'s Mama, who Friedman notes both "exploit[s] and protect[s]" the women who work at her brothel, and *Eclipsed*'s Maima, the wife Number Two turned rebel soldier. Both women arguably enjoy the most power among the other women, largely because both have accepted, to some degree, the sacrifice of

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[294] Van der Kolk, 258.

[295] Ibid.

other women—their freedom, their bodies—to rape and bloodshed in order for the chance to thrive in the 'theater' of war. Mama admonishes Sophie for risking the lives of all of the women who work at the brothel when Sophie talks back to Osembenga, a murderous local warlord, and defends to Christian her decision to send Sophie in back with Osembenga to "make sure his cock is clean."[296] "FIRM YOUR JAW!" Maima shouts at the Girl in boot camp. "You can't be thinking about mama and daddy anymore!"[297] Maima further counsels the Girl to find "someone to love on," "someone you like, high rankin" — seemingly without the self-awareness that she has simply chosen one fixation with "rankin" over another: namely, the rankin that used to matter when she was a wife with a number, and that matters so much to Bessie that even when the war is over at the play's end, she won't leave their captor.

The world of a soldier proves no more of a balm to the Girl's weary soul, as she wipes away tears to answer Maima's question, "why are you fightin?" with what Gurira is careful to denote in the stage directions as a "*recitation* of what she has been taught," not an "explosive," all-caps shout anymore. Caught in what Jill Dolan, in her examination of *Ruined*, calls "the crossfire of men's war," one that offers "no peaceful refuge,"[298] so too has the Girl has traded one kind of brainwashed captivity for another' Maima's endowment of the Girl with the name "Moda's Blessing," rather than comforting and empowering the Girl,

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[296] Nottage, 56.

[297] Gurira, 57.

[298] Dolan quoted in Friedman, 599.

prompts the monologue toward which the entirety of *Eclipsed* has been building: the Girl thinks she is cursed, and in a full page of tortured monologue peppered with the same level of detail as those of the other trauma victims in the plays, she mirrors the guilt Samila and Rita felt about their daughters' loss with that of her mother. "I didn't protect ha like I usually do,"[299] the Girl laments as she recounts the childhood memory of watching her mother literally be *gang-raped to death*, vomiting what looks like rice or grain and bleeding out until her eyes stared emptily at the sky—at which point the Girl did as the soldiers ordered, and helped to throw her own mother's lifeless body in the river. The Girl rounds out this unthinkable narrative with the assertion that in spite of the fact that she was a child and that these were armed and dangerous rapists killing her mother, "it my fault she dead."[300]

It is this purely terrible memory that was lying in wait for the Girl as she looked just fine to Bessie, robotically washing herself after the captor husband raped her and curling up quietly with her book about Bill Clinton. Such arresting content is what supports Friedman's contention that *Ruined* and *Eclipsed* "jolt audiences" to think about sexual trauma "in specific historical contexts."[301] While both plays are about wartime, a gun is fired onstage only once, by the Girl at Maima's behest during her conversion to soldier. That the gruesome nature of their monologues alone serves to "jolt" audiences in an act of intervention not only identifies them as political theater; that the jolt is delivered via a focus on the memories

[299] Gurira, 65.

[300] Ibid. 66.

[301] Friedman, 598.

whose eerily timeless detail Van der Kolk and Herman might argue are always symptomatic of severe trauma victims also supports my argument that a transnational feminist reading of the plays identifies "trauma victim" as an identity category over essentialist notions of nation, gender, and race.

When Helena informs the rest of the group that their captor/husband has sent her away with the end of the war, she shares her own tragic history almost as an aside in her confused glee at her own sudden freedom:

> HELENA: […] all dose years, he ted all dose years, he met me leave my Chile when we running […] he met my Chile die in de bush, all alone, he met it so I don't get born no more, he met me so sick my stomach broken, den he go just trow me away like dat […]

Helena goes on to start laughing at the absurdity, the tragedy of her life; she now needs to remember what had for years and years been useless information, like her own name and where she's from. She grabs the Girl's hand, aiming to bring her along out of there, assuring her that the bad things the war made her do were "not how God mek you."[302] The Girl responds, Gurira writes in the stage direction, with "*almost primal sounds of aggression, her eyes flashing something verging on demonic*" as she slaps Helena and points her rifle at Helena's throat.[303] "Long after a traumatic experience is over," Van der Kolk writes, "it may be reactivated at the slightest hint of danger…precipitat[ing] unpleasant emotions, intense

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[302] Gurira, 70.

[303] Ibid.

physiological sensations, and impulsive and aggressive actions."[304] To someone who has suffered a trauma as unspeakable at the Girl's violent loss of her mother and the witness of her violation, every seemingly nonsensical act of aggression may tie back to that original trauma, which forces "post traumatic reactions [to] feel incomprehensible and overwhelming." This is due to the trauma victims' stuckness in responding to more or less any event as a threat if the traumatic event was overwhelming enough, which is not a conscious decision and which condition has a physiological basis that Lipsky Van der Noot memorably compares to being trapped in amber.[305] Victims of the kind of trauma the Girl underwent also undergo physiological changes in the brain as a result, essentially keeping the threat-scanner of the brain constantly "on." Long before there were MRI scans to prove it, Van der Kolk notes Abram Kardiner figured out that World War veterans shared a "traumatic neurosis"[306] resulting from their wartime experiences that had a physiological basis. Friedman also notes Janet Brown's use of bell hooks' "merged ego" theory as a way to understand the "group (collective) protagonists" of the women in each play as distinctly feminist constructions of selves that "exist 'in relation' to others on whom [they] rel[y] for 'psychic and physical survival.'"[307] Such a feminist definition supports a relational understanding of the self supported by Van der Kolk's writing on trauma in modern

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[304] Van der Kolk, 2.

[305] Van der noot, Laura Lipsky. *Trauma Stewardship: and Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others.* (2009).

[306] Van der Kolk, 12.

[307] Brown and hooks quoted in Friedman, 600.

neuroscience:

> Modern neuroscience solidly supports Freud's notion that many of our conscious thoughts are complex rationalizations for the flood of instincts, reflexes, deep seated memories that emanate from the subconscious…Trauma interferes with the areas of the brain that manage and interpret experience. A robust sense of self—one that allows a person to state confidently "This is what I think and feel" and "This is what is going on with me"—depends on a healthy and dynamic interplay among these areas.[308]

With the above assertions, Van der Kolk clearly defines a robust sense of self as the product of rationalizations for what emerges from the subconscious. I would posit that such rationalizations are functions of putting language to experience, which Van der Kolk here argues is vital to, though not solely responsible for, trauma recovery. Language, inescapably a product of social relation, is therefore inherent to a feminist notion of the self as defined by Brown and hooks. Trauma's documented interference with the proper functioning of brain areas that manage and interpret experience does not only support one of Freud's more durable arguments; but Van der Kolk notes that the failure of interplay between those parts of the brain precludes a robust sense of self. Van der Kolk further credits Stephen Porges' 1994 work on the Polyvagal Theory as central to a modern understanding of social relationships as "front and center" to that of trauma. Brown's argument that the "psychic and physical survival' of the characters exists in a relational construct of the self is supported by this lineage of trauma research, which builds on Darwin's ideas to connect "visceral experience" in the body to "the voices and faces of people around us."[309] I would argue that

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[308] Van der Kolk, 249.

[309] Ibid.

this connection of social constructions of self as interfered with by trauma on a visceral level supports not only a feminist, but a transnationally feminist notion of the self as it arguably places the burden of taxonomy on what Freidman cites Aston's work to call a "cross-border connection" "touching the local and the global" in an "ameliorat[ion] [of] "'the *social* and *cultural* conditions under which a majority of women…live their lives'"[310] (emphasis mine). When Van der Kolk references Ed Tronick's idea that "the brain is a cultural organ,"[311] I contend that he supports such a transnational, postfeminist reading of the socially constructed self as one that challenges essentialist notions, thereby doing the distinctly decolonial work of opening up the possibility of a more progressive taxonomy.

That taxonomy, because it would be built on an understanding of trauma symptoms supported by modern neuroscience, would also be one built on courage. "The critical issue," Van der Kolk writes, "is allowing yourself to know what you know. That takes a tremendous amount of courage."[312] That courage is shown by the female characters under examination here in *Ruined* and *Eclipsed*, because it was shown by the actual women the playwrights interviewed. The Survival Girls group members, especially Jaqueline in the previous chapter of this dissertation, demonstrate that courage to the point of creating original theater about their traumas. Such courage unites women the world over, beyond and between old notions of borders, race, and nation, as they endeavor to leave what happened to

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310 Aston quoted in Friedman, 598.

311 Van der Kolk, 85.

312 Ibid., 234.

them in the past, where it belongs. We will next turn to the best living example I know of someone doing just that, and learn about what sustained, embodied recovery from severe trauma can look like.

Chapter IV.

“Allow Me To Remind You”: Tautahcho Muhuawit, Oral History, and the Performance of Recovery

I met Tautahcho Muhuawit, a Santa Barbara area man of Chumash heritage, in 1999, when I began to take Aikido lessons from him in Santa Ynez, California. I was fourteen; Tautahcho was in his late forties. Tautahcho's grandmother was brought as a slave from the Carmel Mission to the Santa Ynez Mission. She was one of the last people to be buried there, in an unmarked grave, where all the green grass grows after the rains. Tautahcho was drafted into the Vietnam war, but only after he enlisted, so he made a show of burning his draft notice at Santa Barbara High School. When he returned from Vietnam, where, according to his wife, he “saw people blown up,” he, according to his stepdaughter, dealt a lot of cocaine. His teachers, Grandpa David and Semu, helped him heal, with rattlesnake, thunderbolts, and other medicine. Tautahcho wears regalia that honors his teacher through those symbols, and uses pumpkin seeds in ceremony to honor Grandpa David, a small Hopi man who lived to be 117 years old. Tautahcho went through an intense detoxification process as part of his recovery from the trauma of war, a process which included an “ego death” portion, wherein small children cleaned up junkies' puke. He now does not partake in drug or alcohol consumption. His arms are scarred with the marks of surgery where the Veteran's hospital did a bad job of clearing out cancer in his bone marrow. His arms also bear the tattoos of his children: fire wolf, white owl, flowing water, fire woman, and butterfly (Sam, Levi, Vita, Anwanur, Cassie). He lives with his second wife, Betty, off the grid in the mountains outside Los Olivos, where each of the buildings in their compound they made with their own hands

out of natural building cobb.

Tautahcho has been a very important father figure in my life ever since I met him as a cowering, be-braced adolescent in his dojo. This does not mean I have truly absorbed the wisdom he has been giving me, or that I know all there is to know about him. It just means that I have looked up to him and sought him out for over half my life. It means that during my stints doing international development work. in Ecuador, Bolivia, Russia, Kenya, Mongolia, Suriname, Turkey, and Syria, Tautahcho has asked the spirits to watch over me during his morning sunrise ceremony, and I fully believe this is why I did not suffer mortal harm while away. It means that I bring him back a wooden or ceramic owl from each place I go, to honor him as my teacher, as he honors his teachers with what he wears, says, uses, and does. I am technically agnostic, but I do believe that I've survived my sometimes-dicey experiences abroad because Tautahcho sends a pack of guardian angels to watch over me, bouncer angels with the brawn of Mr. Clean. Tautahcho has known me over half my life, since before I ever left America. The fashioned likenesses of owls I bring to Tautahcho live in nooks in his earthen house. I brought my grandmother's ashes there, driving them down from Lummi Island, Washington, before leaving for the summer that included a trip to a refugee camp in Syria. I left her on the hill near the yurt Tautahcho shares with Betty, the hill good for watching sunsets, and imagine her, faint against the sky as a photo slide in a daylit room. We call Tautahcho “T”, and T's home “the mountain,” and I go to the mountain regularly.

Before the majority of my time in those faraway places, in late 2005, Tautahcho suggested we do a book project together.

That's not what he did, actually.

He didn't suggest it.

He said, “Ming! When are we doing our book?”

“Our book, T?” I asked.

“I have a message for the world,” he said, “and you need to write it. It will be called ‘*Allow Me To Remind You: Conversations with T*.”

So, that summer, in 2006, when I was 21, I began not just asking Tautahcho about life but recording our conversations about it with a tape recorder he produced for us to use.

A short way to summarize his effect on my life might be that Tautahcho taught me what it means to “be with”; part of how he did so was to “be with” me as I experienced the world thousands of miles away from him. To theorize that relationship, I have consulted the transcripts of interviews I conducted with Tautahcho over the years and my journaling about him over those same years. I encounter some personal shame as I revisit them to write this ethnography, because when someone has helped raise you, as Tautahcho has helped raise me in many respects, they have seen you be a child. I believe I stayed a child for a long time. I have worried and felt sorry for myself and been work for others, and Tautahcho has been one of the people to do that work for me. A great deal of the suffering in my family is generational, as my father is Jewish and most of his family died in concentration camps in Poland; the way that such violent trauma is expressed decades later is psychological, buried in either our DNA or, as Tautahcho might put it, in our mind (as distinct from our bodies and spirits). My father is a difficult man with a bad temper, though he is also very loving and intelligent. When Tautahcho met me, he met a fourteen-year-old who was terrified of getting

things wrong, and ridden with anxiety such that she had to stop doing Aikido for days at a time when acute muscle spasms prevented her from walking. Tauhahcho's trauma was inherited more from the immediate physical experiences he had, since he had been a soldier in wartime. My trauma had more to do with invisible things like mean-spiritedness and emotionally abusive family members' power trips; my father punched a hole in the wall, but he didn't punch us. In many ways I was very well-provided for, but I struggled with major depression and suicidality in 2006, the same year that Tautahcho and I began our interviews, and I can only imagine how sensitive I must have seemed to Tautahcho, and how out-of-proportion my depression and broken hearts and anxiety all were. Reflecting on what the village that raised me has taught me, in other words, is a reflection on what I have asked of them.

This writing is an attempt to describe and integrate some of the wisdom Tautahcho has given me both in our interviews and outside of them, and conceptualize the profound effect of that wisdom on my life and worldview as a way in which what Spivak might call a "subaltern" figure might speak – or, in the words of J. Maggio, how the subaltern might be translated and heard.[313] Such work is meant to investigate my relationship, and Tautahcho's, to Linda Tuhiwai-Smith's guiding questions for ethical practices when it comes to researchers working with indigenous people: "Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart?

[313] Maggio, J. "'Can the Subaltern Be Heard?': Political Theory, Translation, Representation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political.* Vol 32, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2007): 419-443.

What other baggage are they carrying?"[314] Those questions, Smith argues, are the ones that can decolonize methodologies. And I think it's safe to say, as an academic in 2019, that if I'm not out to decolonize my methodology, I have no right to submit any material about Tautahcho to the machinations of the ivory tower and its sneakily oppressive spyglass. Accordingly, I make no claims herein about either Chumash culture, nor about indigeneity. Rather I offer the most personal stories of mine to come up in my interactions with Tautahcho, that his personal power to enact his own recovery be given a certain kind of attention. While highly charged personal stories of the researcher herself, and not her subject, are rarely the type to make it into a dissertation and stay there, my commitment to them is decolonial in nature. After all, Tautahcho and the women in the Survival Girls group trusted me with their vulnerability in these pages, and it wouldn't do to hide behind the questionable and privileged fortress of critical distance any more than I must. Tautahcho demonstrates a good amount of trust in me to use the material he gives me here, which implies a certain kind of vulnerability. The women in the Survival Girls group exercised the vulnerability of people who had been subject to violence recreating that violence for their communities onstage. I believe the more personal stories from my life help in a limited way to balance that offering with my own.

Gómez-Barris writes that using the lens of phenomenology as a researcher allows her to interact with indigenous cultures and the field of the earth itself is decolonial work in that it allows, "subject position in relation 'to the field,'" which in turn makes possible a

[314] Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: Zed Books (1999): 10.

“deepen[ed] analysis and interpretation…especially through a nonnnormative femme position that allows the field and cultural texts [she] engage[s] to make its impressions upon and through [her].”[315] To allow the field and cultural texts of my conversations with Tautahcho to make their impression upon and through me is certainly my goal, and indeed a phenomenological methodology—hopefully a decolonial one, though it’s unclear to me how nonnormative I am in this context: whether conversations with Tautahcho at his invitation and at his house, but for my writing and research, privilege his norm or mine is a wonderfully open question. This is the sort of fresh and tantalizing ‘radical openness’ that an intersubjective approach affords.

Furthermore, it is how Tautahcho counsels, advises, teaches me, leads my gaze, and points out new ways to see my own life struggles that he demonstrates his power. Clough asserts that “Auto ethnographic writing about trauma is called to go beyond itself, beyond speaking of the incapacity to speak, beyond a compulsive repetition of memory that fails to master dramatic effects.”[316] If Tautahcho’s life story is to be extracted from herein, so should mine be, in no small way because if any script should stay hidden, it should be Tautahcho’s inner monologues. This work takes the position that attempting to write about Tautahcho from a more traditional ethnographical distance would necessarily involve an attempt to tease out those monologues, which are hidden from me and my anthropological spyglass for good reason. Better to offer him my own, and write about what he does with *them*. Gómez-Barris

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[315] Gómez-Barris, 9.

[316] Clough, 9.

acknowledges the debt she owes to Tuhiwai Smith for offering a model of the stakes of decolonial research, specifically that Tuhiwai Smith's "focus on knowledge formations and ethicality is essential to a decolonized academy, as is the consideration of native worldview that meaningfully shift the terrain of encounter, interpretation, and analysis to decenter the colonizing power of disciplinary knowledge."[317] Sharing personal stories to render explicit Tautahcho's empowerment, to illuminate the trauma-recovery-in-action that is his mentorship, is a bid to decenter the colonizing power of disciplinary knowledge in a way that honors the ethicality Gómez-Barris points out is foundational to decolonial scholarship.

Gómez-Barris refers to her episteme as one "allowing the field to speak rather than foreclosing on the conditions of possibility, or presuming that a disciplinary frame of analysis will unlock and straighten out the complexities of the colonial condition."[318] One of those conditions of possibility is for my certainty that the spirits with whom Tautahcho speaks, the ones he hears, are real. And it is at the feet of these ineffable certainties that Western psychological tradition fails to honor the fecund territory of possibility decolonial theorists are working hard to turn over. Tina Chanter writes quotes Rancière in her decidedly decolonial analysis of in the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* and its central character, the indigenous youth Molly, that it is "the speech of the invisible crowd that haunts our thoughts."[319]; that "mute things themselves speak"; and that "in this sense, 'everything is trace, vestige, or

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[317] Gómez-Barris,10.

[318] Gómez-Barris, 63.

[319] Chanter, 74.

fossil.'"[320] These voices of the invisible that so define decolonial cosmologies could perhaps be those ghostly ontologies the affect theorists are searching for. "And perhaps it is this speech," Chanter surmises, "that haunts the story of Molly's reading of the land as the signs of a map that shows her the way home as she gives a voice and a body to the 'voiceless speech of a nameless power.'"[321] Grace Cho indicates the legacy of Lacanian philosophy, but also the ghostability, if you will, of the forces he wrote about when she speculates that "the hearing of voices constitutes an undoing of the exclusion of the real from the symbolic enclosure that produces the subject of speech."[322] There needs to be scholarship that sniffs around the edges of such symbolic enclosures, not least because such symbolic enclosures themselves are inescapably colonial even as they may be more bendable than at first glance. Indigenous cosmologies often acknowledge only one symbolic enclosure, and that is the language of the colonizer. "It is no wonder," writes Chalfin, "that wherever one returns to indigenous narratives, there is the great mother—animate earth—as the underlying system of meaning in human existence. Mother Earth always functions as the spiritual, relational home." Nevermind potential fecundity in the world of theory; the hidden scripts not intended for the anthropological spyglass are written with, written in, and spoken by Pacha Mama herself.

As a white interloper creating scholarship for the academy—which Maggio aptly

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[320] Ibid., 73-74.

[321] Ibid,, 74.

[322] Cho, 164.

describes as a "bazaar of ideas" where "the subaltern are forced to compete" and "where the deck is stacked against them by years of colonial rule"[323] —I firmly believe it is not my place to do so. Rather, it's Tautahcho's worldview I seek to theorize, which worldview is unto him, and is what E. Patrick Johnson might quote Dwight Conquergood in terming a "slippery," "side-winding"[324] blend of identities: Chumash, native, masculine, war veteran, aikido sensei, sufferer of PTSD. And I mean to do such theorizing with the same amount of loving transparency Johnson labors toward with his study of his own grandmother's oral history performance, and furthermore, with an eye to how Tautahcho uses his role as my mentor to steer our conversations in directions that are decidedly therapeutic for me, the researcher, who has also been a mentee of his since the age of fourteen. In doing so, I contend that they are therapeutic for him, as well, insofar as Judith Herman and Bessel Van der Kolk have established that trauma recovery includes not only being *witnessed* in one's story—what Johnson describes simply as "offering these people an audience for their performance,"[325] —but in trauma victims using their own hard-won narratives of wisdom to coach and help others in their lives. That other, in this case, is me; these exchanges constitute what Dwight Conquergood calls "co-performative witnessing," and in so doing, they break down easy dichotomies between subject and object, affector and affected, in the kind of ethnographic

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[323] Maggio, J. "'Can the Subaltern Be Heard?': Political Theory, Translation, Representation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political.* Vol 32, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2007): 431.

[324] Conquergood qtd in Johnson, E. Patrick. *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity.* North Carolina: Duke University Press (2003): 9-10.

[325] Johnson, 9-10.

encounter that can restore agency to the subaltern in the way only the lens of performance studies can.

While Gayatri Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"[326] is inarguably a foundational one to postcolonial theory, it would serve the notion that an "intellectual" like me writing about a "subaltern" person like Tautahcho forecloses his ability to truly "speak." Yet Tautahcho's role in these pages challenges some of the more problematic assertions Spivak makes, not to mention their implications, about the limits of representation and communication with the subaltern. One such problematic implication is in the very way she begins her critique, describing a transcribed conversation between Foucault and Deleuze as a "friendly exchange," one that "undoes the opposition between authoritative theoretical production and the unguarded practice of conversation."[327] It is perhaps the biggest 'tell' of all that Spivak's idea of communication is so narrow that she'd think any published and anthologized interview transcript between public intellectuals could fall under the category of "unguarded conversation." Certainly if the subaltern speaks to the anthropologist as an informant, Smith's account of the different questions native informants ask themselves and each other of a researcher reminds us that there is no such thing as "unguarded conversation" in the archival context.

Maggio's solution to Spivak's problem is to replace the question "Can the subaltern speak?" with "Can the subaltern be heard?" and suggests that listening to the subaltern is a

[326] Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader.* Columbia University Press.

[327] Spivak, 66.

question of translation. "The subaltern speaks all the time," Maggio asserts; "we are simply unable to hear them."[328] Maggio further calls for the intellectual to translate "the nature and culture of the subaltern, while always being aware of her role *as* translator…recognizing [the subaltern's] difference and ability to communicate in non-Kantian ways."[329] Those "non-Kantian ways" of communicating are where the work of performance studies comes in handy, and as such, performance ethnographers might just be those "translators" Maggio sees as "fulfill[ing] Spivak's call for a more fluid epistemology."[330] Conquergood and his colleagues , including D. Soyini Madison and E. Patrick Johnson, provide a solid challenge to Spivak's critique through their enduring attention to those very concerns.

Subjective ethnographies brim with interventionist possibilities. When Spivak writes that "postcolonial intellectuals learn that their privilege is their loss,"[331] she opens a field for considering critical distance as a loss, too, since critical distance is inarguably a function of privilege: both the "epistemic violence" of conceiving of the other as such, and speaking about that other to a privileged audience. I aim to create scholarship about Tautahcho because perhaps scholarship like Johnson's, which is an ethnography of one person, a person he knows well and is sensed deeply by, helps to lessen that loss. Spivak links the "question of the consciousness of the subaltern" to those of method. Performance ethnographers might be

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[328] Maggio, 437.

[329] Ibid., 438.

[330] Ibid.

[331] Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader.* Columbia University Press (1993): 66-111.

in the best position to address Spivak's emphasis on the "notion of what the work *cannot* say"; perhaps they're the ones who can actually do what Spivak calls "the interventionist work" of "measuring silences." Maggio maintains that "the study of the subaltern must often examine the hidden texts" of culture. In his performance ethnography of his own grandmother's oral histories, Johnson remarks that his inclusion of his grandmother's words, in large chunks laid out like a poem on the page, are "a political move" to "grant agency to the marginalized, and help bring a silent voice from the margin to the center."[332] In this way his scholarship actively works against the epistemic violence whose circuitry Spivak argues "marks out" those margins.[333]

The intersubjective ethnographic approach owes a debt to, and works in tandem with, critical race theory, largely thanks to a shared ethical concern with praxis. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al stake out the *raison d'etre* of critical race theory as an "aspirational" one that seeks "not to merely understand" the regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color "but to *change* it"[334]. Insofar as the scholarship herein concerns one of those people of color — a man who, as a traumatized war veteran, a Native American, and a brown person in American society, probably qualifies as what Spivak deems "subaltern"[335] — so

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[332] Johnson, 112.

[333] Spivak, 78.

[334] Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, Thomas, eds. *Critical Race Theory: the Key Writings that Formed the Movement.* New York: New Press (1995): xiii.

[335] Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader.* Columbia University Press (1993): 66-111.

should this writing aspire. Insofar as critical race theory "rejects the prevailing orthodoxy that scholarship should be or could be 'neutral' or 'objective,'"[336] it strengthens and lends purpose to the ideological groundwork for subjective ethnographers to conduct research in such a way as to render explicit the fallacies—the unexamined assumptions, reductive biases, missed points, and blind spots — shaping the anthropological archive of the previous century. The role this hugely problematic anthropological archive has played in supporting white supremacy and its oppression of people of color is what Native American and postcolonial scholarship, importantly Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work on decolonizing methodologies, was created to resist.[337]

Furthermore, resistance to the anthropological practices that *produced* that problematic archive is arguably what animates Conquergood's "dialogic" ethnographic approach. Conquergood arrived at his approach through working with, and reflecting on working with, the 'subaltern': namely, members of the Hmong and Lao refugee communities in Chicago. Conquergood created ethnographies of these Hmong and Lao refugees' oral history performances, and the dialogic methodology he created to do so is, I contend, a decolonizing one. "It galls us," Smith writes, "that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with *some* of us."[338] The fact that Conquergood states plainly, regarding his performance

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[336] Crenshaw et al: xiii

[337] Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: Zed Books (1999).

[338] Smith, 1.

ethnography work, that "good will and an open heart are not enough when one seeks to express cultural experiences which are clearly separate from his or her lived world"[339] marks the co-performative witnessing of the dialogic approach as in keeping with what might be termed a decolonizing "outlook." By a decolonizing outlook, I mean one that critical race theorists arguably also tend toward with their focus on *changing* the circumstances of oppression they write about. A decolonizing outlook as a point of departure is what joins the otherwise methodologically disparate disciplines drawn from here in the common ground of an aim to do things differently enough, to depart from the problematic archive enough, to resist oppressive frameworks. When Conquergood writes of his dialogic ethnographic research that "performance does not proceed in ideological innocence and axiological purity,"[340] it seems Crenshaw et al live right next door to that claim when they state of critical race theory that "there is 'no exit' — no scholarly perch outside the social dynamics of racial power from which merely to observe and analyze."[341] While performance studies, and Conquergood's work in the field, do not concern themselves *solely* with questions of racial power, they do concern themselves with "social dynamics" and the power relations encoded therein; while the methods, concerns, and lenses of performance studies, postcolonial theory, and critical race theory are of course not identical, this shared negation of the flawed notion of neutrality when it comes to describing power relations is fecund common ground

[339] Conquergood, Dwight. "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance" *Literature In Performance* Vol 5 (April 1985): 4.

[340] Ibid., 2.

[341] Crenshaw et al, xiii.

indeed. Conquergood, as a subjective ethnographer working towards "deeply sensing" the other using his ears and heart, could be seen as someone working that ground—the ground of the front lines of encounter, perhaps ground like that of the effort set forth by critical race theorists to *change* the oppression they see as opposed to merely describing it—and doing so by identifying the "epistemological potential of performance as a way of deeply sensing the other"[342] as ontologically bound up with what he calls "the complex ethical tensions, tacit political commitments, and moral ambiguities inextricably caught up in the act of performing ethnographic materials."[343] When it comes to my journey with Tautahcho, it's fairly straightforward to identify this work as an attempt at an at least partially decolonized methodology; as Crenshaw et al put it, "scholarship—the formal production, identification, and organization of what could be called 'knowledge'—is inevitably political,"[344] and scholarship in the Western Academy that centers a worldview like Tautahcho's, and that furthermore takes its cues from him, is scholarship that promulgates a socially progressive political bent. The other part of this study of Tautahcho is its effect on my life and outlook as someone who learns from him, and the ongoing, "dialogic" process of Tautahcho's wisdom and its demonstrable effects on not only my attitude to the research, but the practice and findings of the research and the writing itself. Perhaps the subaltern can't speak in the narrow sense Spivak means it, but perhaps the subaltern in this case can "deeply sense" *me*, in the way that Tautahcho, as a father figure, a mentor, and a sensei, inarguably does.

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[342] Conquergood, 4.

[343] Ibid.

[344] Crenshaw et al, xiii.

Moreover, Conquergood's "epistemological potential"[345] here echoes the critical race theorists' preoccupation with the "transformative potential" that always exists, but that in American racial history is rarely realized, to *intervene* in politically meaningful ways — ways that may actually alter the oppressive superstructure against which all forms of politically progressive resistance work. Smith contends that "the intellectual project of decolonizing…needs a radical compassion that reaches out, that seeks collaboration."[346] I'd be hard-pressed to imagine a better opening into which might fit Conquergood's "ethnography of the ears and heart,"[347] which is a form of research that "reimagines participant-observation as co-performative witnessing."[348] That is the sort of spirit in which I create this scholarship about Tautahcho, with whom I performatively co-witness every time we sit down for an interview, as we have done for thirteen years: the sort of spirit that seeks to generalize less and specify more, and in particular to reclaim the rhetorical space of the anecdote as a textual ground for the possibility of meaningful change.

If the anecdote only speaks for itself, and is not used, as anecdotes often are, as evidence of something else, — as the basis for gross extrapolation about other people, cultures, places, and times — then the rhetorically imaginative world of the anecdote becomes a fertile ground of possibility, a place to contribute what Said calls "antithetical

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[345] Conquergood, 3.

[346] Smith, 2.

[347] Conquergood, 3.

[348] Ibid.

knowledge"[349] in ethnographic work in service of an ultimately humanizing and progressive end — one that, if it does not ultimately "change" the oppressive regime of racism in American institutions, indubitably changed the landscape of my human-scale interactions with the world. The anecdotes herein support the notion that Tautahcho's influence decolonized the research methodology (among other things) of yours truly, the Western researcher in question. Our very last interview of March 2019, in fact, includes an opener in which Tautahcho goes from asking about my doctoral work and its timeline, to, an hour later, basically telling me to get it together and use our interviews to get this PhD already while I hoot with laughter in the background. Such an enmeshed relationship owes itself as a possible subject of ethnographic study to E Patrick Johnson[350]. Johnson's brave and deft defense of his work with his own grandmother as an ethnography of one, with lessons to learn in a research context about performance, femininity, blackness, and other social constructions, constitutes the single greatest gesture toward my work with Tautahcho. Without Johnson's work, this work wouldn't exist as such in the ivory tower.

So how does a Western researcher responsibly and progressively present the product? of thirteen years of interviews with a Native American war veteran in ways that honor the moral imperative of enacting what Smith, Crenshaw et al, and Conquergood arguably all call for; namely, *change* to the structures of white supremacy designed to empower people who look, talk, and think like me, and to subjugate people who look, talk, and think like

[349] Said, 167.

[350] Johnson, E Patrick. "Dwight Conquergood 1949-2004." *TDR* (1988-), Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer, 2005), pp. 10-12.

Tautahcho? While Spivak's influential essay on encounters with the subaltern might foreclose the idea that this writing about Tautahcho could constitute meaningful change in this context, she also states clearly on social issues including domestic violence that "real change must be epistemic rather than merely epistemological."[351] To the extent that that such change might be the "political mobilization" that Judith Butler contends "implicate[s] bodies…as both the ground and aim of politics,"[352] worldviews like Tautahcho's may carry the seeds of the very change that contemporary performance theory, postcolonial theory, and racial theory are all looking to water. This is especially true if we follow Butler's suggestion that we "think..about the human body as a certain kind of dependency on infrastructure, understood complexly as environment, social relations, and networks of support and sustenance that cross the human, animal, and technical divides."[353] Long before I knew of Judith Butler, when I still had braces on my teeth, someone else was telling me as he sat outside his earthen house about rock people and tree people and the information the wind gives him—telling me, in other words, about seeing oneself as part of that larger "network of support and sustenance that cross[es] the human, animal, and technical divides." If those are the seeds in the common ground that will grow into the sort of change actually achieving politically meaningful intervention by transcending the epistemological for the epistemic,

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[351] Spivak, Gayatri. Podcast: "BBRG PRESENTS: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on Situating Feminism." March 8, 2010. Retrieved July 1, 2019. Youtube: < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=garPdV7U3fQ>

[352] Butler, Judith. *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly.* Boston: Harvard University Press (2018): 132-3.

[353] Butler, 133.

then Tautahcho's had those seeds in his pouch for a long time.

Crenshaw et al describe the writings of critical race theorists as "contributions to what [Edward] Said has called 'antithetical knowledge,' the development of counter-accounts of social reality by subversive and subaltern elements of the reigning order."[354] Part of that counter-account is made up of Tautahcho's words, excerpted within. Another part is made up of my scholarly words about them. Yet another is made up of the anecdotal accounts to follow of how Tautahcho—his character, his values, his actions, and his words—have shaped my approach to the research through substantially influencing my approach to everything else (my life as a scholar, as a researcher, as a daughter, as a teacher, as a lover, as an academic…). This chapter aims toward a contribution toward "antithetical knowledge" not because I am qualified to make a research claim about *Tautahcho's* "social reality," but because even as Tautahcho is a "subaltern element," his influence on *my* social reality is indubitably of the "reigning order" — the enormously influential, authoritative kind that is, to borrow again from Spivak, epistemic as well as merely epistemological; in other words, his reigning influence on my social reality leaves a *practical* mark: Tautahcho's contribution renders *me* the subject; his agency in these pages is elucidated in part by the lasting change it has engendered in me. Simply put, Tautahcho's influence decolonizes *my* social reality.

However, co-performative witnessing might too tidily paper over that which my work with Tautahcho demands I interrogate. The flux in which subjectivity finds itself, once we dispense with dangerous generalizations about the subaltern with facile claims about social progress in the academy, and with unexamined pretense to critical distance in anthropological

[354] Crenshaw et al, xiii.

tradition—that flux needs a champion. We find one in Jessica Benjamin for her dogged commitment to intersubjectivity in psychoanalysis, in particular to what she calls "the space created by two subjectivities."[355] Benjamin points out that intersubjectivity demands more than the "postulat[ion] that the analyst is also a participant,"[356] and in so claiming she opens the path for taking Conquergood's co-perfomative witnessing to a space of possibility, of plurality, and of a politically meaningful subjective flux. Tautahcho's world, after all, is not only peopled by him as the informant and me as the researcher. There are spirits attached to every rock and tree, and further, interpreter spirits who tell him what his granite and leafed brethren want him to know.

It stands to note that the rhetorical decision to describe some of this intervention in terms of anecdotes is a way to de-generalize, to reduce epistemological damage caused by what Smith contends is harmful and even fatal to those who have been generalized about, restoring not only agency to Tautahcho's role in the narrative, but restoring also the specificity that nourishes his personhood and humanity. My point of departure is that Tautahcho's worldview is unto him, and as such, not a vehicle for someone in my position of privilege, platform, and some amount of ignorance of the lived experience of that worldview to use to generalize about indigeneity, about the Chumash people of Santa Barbara county, or about veterans of the Vietnam war. This ethnography is an ethnography of one, and as such, the anecdotes herein are meant to elucidate not only how Tautahcho "deeply senses" me, but

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[355] Benjamin, Jessica. *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge (1998): xv.

[356] Ibid.

how his influence effects every step of this process. For his commitment to dialogic practice as a moral imperative to political progress, this work owes Conquergood a great debt. For her interest in “a potential space outside the web of identifications,” this work owes Benjamin perhaps an even greater one, because that “potential space” may indeed echo Conquergood’s “epistemological potential” for mutual witness as much as it does the “transformative potential” for political change so important to contemporary critical race theorists. Is the potential we are looking for, the common ground for meaningful structural change, to be found “outside the web of identifications,” in what Benjamin also calls “a third position of true observation”[357]? And could Tautahcho’s contribution be antithetical — could it constitute a politically meaningful counter-account of the reigning order by a subaltern element— because he may be one of the subjects most comfortable with and conversant in that third position?

Just as the animals, spirits, and beings that populate his world live in balance with one another, so too do Tautahcho’s above-listed identities, which overlap and blend, but rarely seem, in his telling, at odds. Over the course of our interviews over the past thirteen years, he has worn all of those hats through his performance of his life story. That they don’t contradict one another fortifies the resistance to what systems might oppress him, the resistance he performs in our interviews as he does in life. That strengthening symphony is an enactment of the strategies and modes for trauma recovery Van Der Kolk, Herman, and van Der Noot all elucidate. That Tautahcho thrived as a mentor, father, grandfather, sensei to so many is a

[357] Benjamin, xv.

testament to how thoroughly his worldview is a vehicle for the most effective methods of trauma recovery discovered and written about by a few white clinicians over in Massachusetts. (Indeed, in 2017 I noticed that a worn copy of *The Body Keeps The Score* sits on a bookshelf in one of the family buildings.)

The first time Tautahcho and I sat down for an interview in 2006, he lit his pipe at the beginning of our interview. I asked him what it was for. He explained that it was a procedure for calling the spirits, so they would know who to come to. And he is patient—patience, he explained, is key—and he listens for them. “They come in different forms,” he told me. “Some people are very fortunate and they can see it. I can't see it but I know when they’re here, because they whisper…like a person whispering in your ear. My ear is my whole body. That’s how they whisper. Every pore of my body is my ear. That’s how I know they’re here.”

While Tautahcho does not identify as an actor, he identifies as a shaman; he assumes certain roles, duties, and obligation within the space of a ceremony or ritual; and he uses props therein with specific and sometimes hidden functions. Sometimes these functions are to communicate not just with everything that’s alive, but with the spirits of the dead. Narrow western paradigms for understanding activities like those might theorize them as schizophrenic. Getting messages from non-alive-human-beings is hardly ever a good sign in the western paradigm’s system of medical epistemology. In moments when trauma experts like Herman and Van der Kolk are no help to the project of productively rustling up some theory out of practices like Tautahcho’s pipe ritual, performance theorists often are. “By ‘living,’” writes Bert O. States, “I refer to things that are alive in the sense of belonging to

immediate existence, to the steady flux of signs.. theater ingests the world of objects…it is exactly signification that has been ingested."[2] I would contend that such worldviews as Tautahcho's, where information comes from everything that's alive, are actually an inherent way of employing what clinicians like Herman identify as effective methods of recovering from trauma. Tautahcho's world, in which rocks and trees are other people, populates his daily experience with fellows, with a non-human but still-alive "rap group." He does not need to live among many people in an urban environment to find his rap group; hence, trauma recovery is possible within his worldview and life choices. Writes Doug Herman in the *Smithsonian*: "it is not 'romantic' to say that we are interconnected with and part of the Earth—to use the Lakota phrase 'all my relatives' in referring to the soil, the rocks, the water, the air, the plants and the animals. This is science. We are one with our environment."[358] Productively troubling the line between science and religion this way throws into relief the contingency of all epistemologies. In that vein, part of the project of contemporary indigenous scholarship is to throw into relief the knowledge intentionally hidden from (while sometimes in plain sight of) the Western interloper. While anthropology's main currency has historically been the Eurocentric "male gaze" of the anthropological spyglass presuming objective knowledge of othered cultures, indigenous scholars descended *from* those othered cultures often make explicit throughout their written and orally delivered scholarship that certain knowledges are simply not for everyone to know, and will *never* be shared with

[358] Herman, Doug. "A New Way." *Smithsonian.com*. 30 September 2014. Web: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/new-way-stewardship-mother-earth-indigeneity-180952855/?no-ist> retrieved December 19th, 2014.

someone who intends to add it to the archival pile of "research." While most contemporary ethnographers are trained in ethical considerations of what to leave in or take out of their reports, those norms of cultural sensitivity are only relatively strict and never static, and certain understandings and approaches will stay hidden from the view of the anthropological spyglass, and therefore out of the archive that often erroneously presumes objective neutrality, until someone of the culture in question is holding it.

Key to trauma recovery is the synthesis of parts of the self that once were scattered or broken apart. Tautahcho's worldview dovetails smoothly with such a synthesis, because inherent to it is an appreciation of his own body, not as a scarred and ravaged shell of violent memories, but as a sacred vessel for knowledge not his own, a receptor for messages from this world and others connected to what Butler, again, calls "the human body…understood complexly as environment, social relations, and networks of support and sustenance that cross the human, animal, and technical divides."[359] Trauma recovery as a practice in the western colonialist society has yet to catch up with Tautahcho and how he thrives in spite of severe PTSD, as the poet Mary Oliver wrote in her poem about wild geese calls, "announcing over and over your place in the family of things."[360] No one I have met is better at knowing his place in the family of things than Tautahcho. That knowledge animates his recovery; it is the backbone of his wellness.

In that vein, if there are blind spots to the three texts about trauma anchoring this

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[359] Butler, 133.

[360] Oliver, Mary. "Wild Geese." Retrieved 2 January 2019. Web < http://www.phys.unm.edu/~tw/fas/yits/archive/oliver_wildgeese.html>

exploration (Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, Van der Kolk's *The Body Keeps The Score*, and van der Noot's *Trauma Stewardship*), they'd be in Herman's book. One of them — a general failure to interrogate the gender binary, or acknowledge that abuse isn't always by men to women — can potentially be justified with the fact that it was written in the early 1980s. The other is Herman's apparent narrow-mindedness when it comes to what we in the theater community might call props, even as she is writing specifically about traumatized children and Vietnam veterans, of which Tautahcho is one:

> "..soldiers in wartime responded to the losses and injuries within their group with diminished confidence in their own ability to make plans and take initiative, with increased superstitious and magical thinking, and with greater reliance on lucky charms and omens…"
>
> "…years after [their] kidnapping…children continued to look for omens to protect them and guide their behavior. Moreover, years after the event, the children retained a foreshortened view of the future…"[361]

Here, Herman writes of traumatized soldiers' and childrens' relationships to certain special objects as "magical thinking" and seems to see that magical thinking as evidence of being too traumatized to thrive; specifically, that traumatized people "deprive themselves of those new opportunities for successful coping that might mitigate the effect of the traumatic experience"[362] In a world like Tautahcho's, where smoking a pipe as we began our first interview served as an invitation to the spirits to join him as he spoke with me, such writings-off are disrespectful at the very least; corrosively counterindicative to his recovery at worst. They throw into relief a schism between Herman's narrow view of a trauma

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[361] Herman, 47-48.

[362] Ibid., 47.

survivor’s relationship to their world and the things, both seen and unseen, that populate it; in addition, there is a layer of condescension to Herman’s mode of thinking exemplary of the many small ways supposedly progressive corners of mainstream (read: white) American culture are hostile to indigenous culture — even, at worst, directly counterproductive to trauma recovery the way Tautahcho accesses it. It seems not to occur to Herman that talismans might actually *be* a “new opportunit[y] for successful coping that mitigate[s] the effect of the traumatic experience,” and that the “foreshortening” at issue might be as much in her take on “magical” practice as in its practitioners.

In 2005, I was in Bolivia to do some literary translation and write about a doctor's clinic in one of the far tributaries of the Amazon. First I stayed in La Paz witn the Bolivian poet, Vicky Allyon, whose work I would translate. Vicky had two daughters about my age. One of them, Maria, took me on a hike into a cave near the edge of the city. We encountered a bag in a trash-strewn cave that may have contained a body. I deferred to Maria about the spirits, the mountain’s spirit and that of the possible cadaver we had to make our way past to find our way out, about the possibility of angering them. She was the Bolivian, the one with ancestors who lived on his land. Casually, she said, “*No, todo tranquilo, todo normal,* we open the bag, we look at the body, learn about natural processes, *gracias espíritu y vamos.”* But when it came down to it, neither of us wanted to open the bag. On the way down Tautahcho appeared, shaking his head at me, but lovingly so. *It's all you, the guilt and the tension*, he seemed to be saying. The earth loves you no less.

Tautahcho was there in his *hakama*, and I was remembering how he sat leading

Aikido class, because Maria started talking about martial arts as we clambered down. All I knew was I was grateful she did, and thereby nudged the poised domino of Tautahcho in my altitude-addled brain, because the entire way down the dark cave with the possible cadaver, the image and sound and feel of him comforted and distracted me from the dark cave and possible cadaver. The memory was a series of images: how we breathed, the exercisers we did in our *gis* to stretch. Suddenly I had a full body memory and imagination suit between me and the rocks and darkness and dust; I was brought through it by my own dreams of Tautahcho. *Anything I touch,* I thought. Anything is related to anything else. “The information I get,” Tautahcho told me in an interview the following summer, “I get from everything that's alive.”

At another point he remarked, “I don’t remember what I said because I wasn’t the one saying it. It’s my mouth and my voice, but it isn’t my information.” The body is not just an ear, but a conduit, a channel. His body was a channel for someone else with a message that wasn’t his, in another self-conception that might be typified as schizoid. In my head while I scrambled down the cave, Tautahcho surveyed me with the same humor and love he always surveyed my moments of guilt and anxiety and depression. *You gotta let more love in than that*, he told me, and led me down the dark, rank cavern. I take this to mean what Doug Herman wrote: everything that's alive is our relation. The information is offered up by my family: the rocks, trees, mountains. The decomposing possible corpse in the bag, the rocks of the cave, Maria, the sky outside the cave when we finally made it out: it's all alive, and it can give me good information, if I know how to listen.

Performance studies may again provide a healing balm for such schisms as the one between positivism and the ineffable world of the spirits and the contingency of memory, specifically by both highlighting the performativity of social processes, and restoring the prop some dignity and lateral freedom. In *The Stage Life of Props*, Andrew Sofer arguably builds a theoretical bridge between that unfortunate blind spot of Herman's, and the process of trauma recovery aided by "props" such as Tautahcho's pipe, when he claims that the "prop in performance is not a static or stable signifier who meaning is predetermined by the playwright."[363] Here Sofer perhaps releases a pressure valve on Herman's constrictive conception, by allowing for the idea that pipes such as Tautahcho's, if conceived of as props, are not "static or stable signifiers whose meaning is predetermined." In that state of flux, marginalized worldviews can grab the microphone, assigning their own meanings to the props in the theater of their lives.

Furthermore, such readings are interventionist from the perspective of postcolonial theory. Maggio comments that there is an "intellectual movement, rooted somewhat in Marxism, to read inanimate 'things' as if they communicated ideas," a movement that "collide[s]…with the recognition that the study of the subaltern must often examine the hidden texts of popular, native, or mass culture."[364] In writing off an important object as a talisman for magical thinking, and writing off that magical thinking itself, Herman is not just being condescending but perpetuating the epistemic violence Spivak argues is central to the

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[363] Sofer, Andrew. *The Stage Life of Props*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press (2003): 61.

[364] Maggio, 438.

imperialist project. The field of performance theory is therefore one of interventionist possibility here, because it is a field wherein even inert objects are endowed with active roles. There persists a peculiar tendency in performance studies toward the field of things, even (or perhaps especially) signs, having lives of their own. Patricia Spacks comments, in her writing about the practice of rereading, on directing a text "to our purposes over its intents,"[365] so she endows the supposedly inert object, the text, with desires of its own. This tendency extends occasionally to cultural theory, too; in *Untimely Matter,* Jonathan Gil Harris describes "the recent critical interest in the so-called lives of things—a recurrent phrase in the work on material culture—as fetishism guilty of 'magical' thought, insofar as it allegedly anthropomorphizes inert objects by lending agency to them."[366] Harris goes on to note that in *Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson writes of how "literary form, secreted like a shell or exoskeleton, continues to emit its ideological message long after the extinction of its host." If an object can emit an ideological message, perhaps it becomes one of those "hidden texts" of subaltern culture Maggio encourages us to listen to via an attempt not to *represent* the other but to "translate" their culture, an attempt the intellectual makes in order not to "know" the other but to "understand" them.[367]

Another important contribution of performance studies is the insistence of the ethnographic lens that all social interactions are performative, and as such, come already with

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[365] Spacks, Patricia Meyer. *On Rereading.* Cambridge: Belknap Press (2011).

[366] Harris, Jonathan Gil. *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (2009): 6.

[367] Maggio, 438.

the guarantee that they have more than one meaning (or, Johnson reminds us, Fanon's "operating in two dimensions"): the nominal intent behind an action, and the intent of the "secret" or "subversive" self. Here, too, knowledge is shielded from prying eyes like mine, as the white interloper: there may be other functions to the pipe when Tautahcho lights it in front of me. He may be hearing things from the sprits he chooses not to share, using, as Sofer might term it, the prop "as a tool for destabilizing he symbolism previously embodied"[368] by the nominal function of the action of lighting the pipe. Edward Said's *Orientalism* remains a central resource for this line of thinking for its insistence on the notion that assigning a single function to any social process is inherently oppressive. The nominal is what is known by the oppressor; other meanings are hidden from the colonizer's view. Ambiguity is vital to liberation, and there are things about Tautahcho's pipe and what it lets him do that I'm not meant to know.

In addition to objects in his world having magical properties, Tautahcho has referred in our interviews to both people and life itself as a text. Those comments deserve for us to return to Spaggio's "hidden texts" of subaltern culture, texts that might help one "understand" if not "know" the other through the radical, interventionist possibility of translating culture as a form of listening. The following snippet of Tautahcho's wisdom is from a 2006 interview:

> Human beings are books
> Every time you
> Reread a book you get different information
> I'm gonna reread Betty

[368] Sofer, 61.

Betty is Tautahcho's wife, and his definition of loving and being married to her is "rereading" her every day. His metaphor struck me as such a wonderful idea that in the spring of 2019, I mentioned that comment in a conversation we had during our interview about what real romantic love is. It stemmed from my updating Tautahcho on taking out a restraining order, which I was doing at the time:

Well the restraining order is in place. Hopefully I get to graduate this year. So it's in place until June. And he keeps fighting it. You know, 'I need to be here here and here,' making a triangle around where I need to be, that kind of thing. So it's it feels like I looked into that big, like, maw of the kind of person where they're so not at peace with themselves that they'll just keep trying to damage. And I'm so grateful not to be like that. I'm so grateful to have people like you and my parents who are different than that. You get somebody who's that unhappy, it's like a snake eating its own tail. I mean he's just going to keep going. And when I'm not there anymore he's not going to have anything.

Yeah. So uh, life is interesting.

Ha ha, yeah.

It's like the library. You can read books,
all kinds of books through people.
Like the chapters in each book can be so different
from the chapter you just read.
But, very informative!

Well the nicest one of the best things I heard about love was from you about Betty; you said you were going to reread Betty every day.

[Chuckles]
Yeah
you look at a person as being a,
it's your book,
but it's a new chapter in the book,
like more chapters in the book being added,
more chapters,
volumes, every decade
or what do you call it ten years

call it decade right?
Decade?
Ten years?

Decade.

Decade.
Every decade, it's a new volume.
Not a new book,
just a new volume to someone's life.
And you get to look back,
don't reread the last ten years,
but just look back at it,
and pick out the best parts of it,
and look at the next one,
which one's gonna be the next best parts.

Once again Tautahcho takes the opportunity to counsel me, and in so doing exhibits a worldview that treats life itself as a text.

Home for the summer of 2006, visiting Tautahcho for interviews but staying among long dry grass on my parents' ranch, I kept an eye on my mother as she recovered from heart surgery, and nursed my own broken heart from some jerk in college. I avoided walking outside in daylight as I always had for fear of snakes, kings and gophers and rattlers, I suspected to be out in force. E Patrick Johnson, in his discussion of blackness, invokes Richard Schechner's comparison of performance to a sidewinder snake: "Wherever this beautiful rattlesnake points, it is not going there"[369]: I watched movies in the cool living room, languishing instead of moving and growing unhappy for it. This time I decided I was

[369] Schechner quoted in Johnson, E. Patrick. *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity.* North Carolina: Duke University Press (2003).

going to try and send a snake love if I saw it, a decision made due to Tautahcho's influence. I saw four huge snakes in a month, on my parents' ranch, gold in high June heat. One of them had a long, densely-marked body lying among the thistles. When it moved it would inch along in little pushes led by its small head, little black tongue peeking in and out, then suddenly it would jet like streaming fluid. Snakes move in a way no other land animals do. Something about the very sight of one meant danger, caused an involuntary startling. I would always see them in dreams, which earmarked them as nightmares. Tautahcho said in our 2006 interview, when I asked him what to do about my fear, "Move like a snake: listen to the heart of the earth."

The afternoon of my mother's students' graduation, my mother had me ascend the railroad tie steps to carry something heavy from her car and there another snake lay. I in my brain, which was addled with a day spent hibernating then a burst of sunlight, addled with dreams grown vivid, I could not tell for flickering moments, standing there in the heat looking at the snake, whose head was hidden in the grass, if I was awake. Looking at the next snake I saw, on the road near the barn, I thought how different, how impressive, it was compared to other animals. No wonder the poor creature had been tagged as the devil. There is an undeniable power about it. All that raw power in a muscle languishing there. I called my father to come look, then turned and it had gone. I saw it again in the dry flowerbed, threading through stem carcasses. I called my mother. It disappeared again. When she went back down the stairs I carried her basket out of the car and there the rascal was, all four feet of him, stretched out on the rocks. I was tense but not terrified. He was playing with me! My mother finally saw him too, right as he careened through the bottom of her rose bush.

My old teacher Lynn and I held hands and cried while the little graduates sang wavily. During the speeches, I lifted my eyes to the tinny applauding of cottonwood and pepper trees. I understood I had been born without the mechanism to disengage, to just not go there, in the face of sadness or pain. I understood it was risky to live with my ear to the ground; grief can be deafening. One of the children in the graduation ceremony belonged to Tautahcho, who was not surprised to hear that the snake played hide and seek with me. I told him I was trying to remember to send snakes love and respect as other living things when I saw them. "They're showing themselves to you," said Tautahcho. "Animals sense fear. They also sense love."

Words are not dispassionate. Words cannot be inert when we created them. Words are inventions. Inventions are manmade and pieces of us end up in what we make. If a snake could speak, what knowledge would it impart? What if we were somehow, in speaking, saying something other than the words our mouths and tongues were forming? Inés Talamantez writes:

> Many Native American creation narratives refer to the origins of the land and the peoples' place on it. Through the minds of the ancestors this information is given and repeated yearly in the ceremonial cycle. In Apache sacred narratives, and their corresponding yearly ceremonies, there are detailed aesthetic descriptions of how and when the people got here. This information carries with it the responsibility to tell it exactly as it was heard. The language is explicit about repetition, emphasizing that words have a sacred power for Apaches.[370]

[370] Talamantez, Inés. "Reflections on the Study of Indigenous Theology." Unpublished essay. UCSB Seminar, 2014: 7.

In December 2013, a few months after returning from a work trip to Syria and Nairobi, were I worked in war zones and slums with refugee youth, I went to Tautahcho's house for Winter Solstice. I drove my dented, duct-taped, used van to a compound off the grid in the Los Padres Mountain range where Tautahcho lives with his family in cobb houses they built. On December 21st, Tautahcho led a Winter Solstice ceremony, informing the twelve of us gathered there that his work was difficult, but that he was the only one around who knew how to do it: how to open the West Gate to the valley of the shadow, where the spirits of the dead live. He warned us that the spirits of the dead would heed our prayers but especially because we were speaking in English we needed to be very specific. “Don't just ask for every person on earth to have water,” he told us, “because you might end up with a monsoon.”

Here, Spivak’s point about “verbal slippage” maintaining the epistemologically violent contradictions of imperial power relations is well-taken. That slippage, she writes, is what happens “when signifiers are left to look after themselves,”[371] and Tautahcho here echoes the potential violence of such abandon. Here also, performance theorists arguably bridge what otherwise seems a catastrophic, or at least prohibitive, chasm between then clinical Western view, which treats messages from non-humans as evidence of mental illness, worlds like Tautahcho’s: worlds that Talamantez cautions are evoked by telling something “exactly as it was heard.” Bert O. States writes that “there is a sense in which signs, or certain kinds of signs in a certain stage of their life cycle, achieve their vitality…not simply

371 Spivak, 70.

by signifying the world but by being of it…the power of the sign…is not necessarily exhausted by its illusory or its referential character."[372] It is in worlds like Tautahcho's where that seems especially true. After warning us that asking for water might bring a monsoon, he added: "And sometimes the spirits can be frightening when they visit, so be prepared for that." The next morning in the blue of dawn I awakened and walked to the cook shack, where Tautahcho sat with some coffee. He had charcoal smeared on his face, and explained to me: "at first light, just now, I performed the ceremony that closes the gate once again, the one to the west. I had to disguise myself, so I'm not taken."

The NBC comedy television show *The Good Place* is about the afterlife, and in the world of the show, people who have died have a number, a score, of just how good a person they have been on earth.[373] Doing something morally good will gain a person points (they end up in the Good Place), and doing something harmful (or even debatable, like attending a Red Hot Chili Peppers concert) will lose them points, land them in the Bad Place. The character Tahani Al-Jameel is a British socialite who raised billions of dollars for charity during her time on earth, but who also is insufferably snobbish and can't stop bragging about the famous people she knows and comparing herself to her famous artists sister. When it is revealed that Tahani is in fact in the Bad Place, she realizes it's because her motivations were

[372] States, Bert O. *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: on the Phenomenology of Theater.* Berkeley: University of California Press (1985): 20.

[373] *The Good Place*. Season 1, Episode 11: "What's My Motivation." Original Air Date: January 12, 2017.

corrupt.

The notion of corrupt motivations is at the heart of questions around advocacy as a would-be ally and researcher, and at the heart of the following personal anecdote about advocating for Tautahcho. The first editor-type to approach me with interest in publishing this work I am doing with Tautahcho was a senior editor at a nationally successful progressive magazine based in Santa Barbara. I met with him on his lunch break in October of 2018, mere days after Tautahcho finally identified as a PTSD survivor on the record for the first time in twelve years of interviews. In that interview, Tautahcho expressed a definition of PTSD much in line with van Der Kolk's in that it is a "lifelong condition" wherein he is at times "triggered" by "overwhelm." He went on to say that when a child is hysterical, he is triggered, and needs to leave the room, and one of his family members tends to the child. He chose not to tell me why this triggers him, and I didn't press. That was also the day I asked Tautahcho about his state of mind when he returned from Vietnam. We had covered in previous conversations that Tautahcho was an active alcoholic at the time. Did he know he was traumatized? "At the time I would have said I was doing great," he said, laughing.

E Patrick Johnson writes of his grandmother's voluntary departure as an employee from the household in which she deployed a performance of the "mammy" trope in a "trickster" fashion, and how the stated reasons for that departure differed between his grandmother Mary's account and that of her former employer, Mrs. Smith, *and* that of her children. The contextual information of differing accounts informed Johnson's understanding as an ethnographer of a past event for which Johnson was not present. Similarly, I heard from

one of Tautahcho's sons that the traumatic memory that triggers Tautahcho's PTSD involved a screaming Vietnamese child and gunfire at point blank range.

This story is neither technically verifiable nor one I am interested in trying to verify. As a researcher who would like to be an ally, I believe my role is rather to explore the way in which Tautahcho, by identifying what he cannot manage and entrusting the right people with managing what he can't, exemplifies the healthiest-possible scenario for someone with severe PTSD learning to thrive.

That was the point I wanted to make to the accomplished editor whom I met for lunch, the one who seemed interested in my work about Tautahcho. We had the following exchange:

> "Tautahcho has PTSD," I said. "It's a lifelong condition. He can't be around a screaming child —"
>
> "Well," the editor interrupted, "did he see children massacred?"
>
> I was stunned. "I'm…not going to answer that," I faltered.
>
> "Fine," the editor interrupted again, rolling his eyes, waving his arm dismissively.
>
> "It's just, I'm not sure if I have permission to share that part," I said. (I also didn't technically know the answer, just hearsay from Tautahcho's sons.)

This exchange could credibly be categorized here as anecdotal evidence that trauma-informed practice hasn't become a cultural norm among privileged gatekeepers in progressive media circles. It would be satisfying to point at the editor's insensitivity and

make generalizations about educated white men not seeing the forest for the trees, but that is the easy way out. It puts the onus on this editor, and not on me as the ethnographer — as, in that setting, the custodian of Tautahcho's story, which position of advocacy D. Soyini Madison memorably describes as "riddled with the pleasure and burden of representation."[374]

Dwight Conquergood's work on "an ethnography of the mind and heart" is what I am getting at when I use a performance studies lens on Tautahcho's oral histories, and it presumes advocacy to be the natural outcome of such a work. While there is much *I* am left not knowing, and, Tautahcho is not shy in telling me, not meant not to know, Conquergood's investment in the "epistemological potential of performance as a way of deeply sensing the other" is, I hope, borne out by the theoretical reflection after the fact. To approach recollections as an ethnographer is to presume the possibility that theoretical ruminations about a memory can be a way of "deeply sensing" the other. Smith's questions rise again to the fore, in that I have no right to deeply sense the other if I don't have a good heart or clear spirit. Conquergood writes that "when working with minority peoples and disenfranchised subcultures..one is frequently propelled into the role of advocate. The ethnographer..is compelled by the laws of reciprocity and human decency to intervene, if he can, in a crisis."[375]

Such a rosy assertion presupposes decency on the part of the ethnographer, which is perhaps hasty. There's more to this anecdote about the editor, which productively upsets the

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[374] Madison, D. Soyini. *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. USA: Sage Publications (2005).

[375] Conquergood, 2-3.

question of who, between Tautahcho and me, is deeply sensing who, and who is in the crisis: as long as Tuhiwai Smith is talking about hearts, I should mention this editor had been my boyfriend, and broken my heart by suddenly ceasing contact in the middle of a domestic violence crisis in which my previous ex-boyfriend harassing and stalking me. This editor had then asked to apologize in person, and I had read him the riot act, admonishing him that "ghosting" a traumatized woman will elevate her stress hormones. He was convincingly contrite, and I hadn't seen him since, though he'd written a formally-toned email asking about "work" and to meet in a "friendly context" for coffee. And there we were, in Alice Keck park, where we had the above exchange about Tautahcho. I did not take issue with the exchange then; instead, this editor got a cranky email out of the blue from me later that week, telling him how thrown I was by his reaction to my attempt to practice respect for Tautahcho's trauma. It felt good to be so righteous, and I could stay there now, writing this chapter, critiquing his insensitivity — but I believe such facile dismissal would be missing the forest for the trees as a researcher who would be an ally to a subject like Tautahcho. The performance of allyship is the most problematic aspect of the exchange to examine — *my* performance. On this one, my spirit was not altogether clear; on this one, the "baggage" Smith warns about was probably driving.

Tautahcho returns again and again in our interviews to the spirit in which something is done. He once told me, for example, that if food is made for me with love, given with love, that it can only be good for my body, and that a healthy salad made by someone with bad intentions won't be. Furthermore, I spent the thanksgiving of 2016 at the Standing Rock reservation, learning from the Lakota Sioux what their elders expected of white allies: that

we do things on their behalf "in a good way." They were consistent in their ask that direct action in solidarity with the people of Standing Rock be done in ceremony, that even the risk of arrest we took was one that they asked us to do in prayer. Instead, a fellow would-be ally stood in the middle of a frozen intersection in Bismarck on Thanksgiving Day as part of a direct action, shouting at three police officers standing a hundred feet away that "one in three police officers commits domestic violence, which means that one of you is an abuser!"

Needless to say, that comportment on their behalf wasn't what the Lakota elders were going for. It actually ran stone-cold counter to what they asked of us. And Tautahcho would not have had me handle my dismay at this editor's insensitive, invasive rudeness the way I did. When there arises an issue or conflict in Tautahcho's community, there is a respectful, in-person conversation about it. Johnson writes of his grandmother's slippery honesty with regard to her stated intentions as a performance that deploys and defies the "mammy" trope, invoking Fanon's "two dimensions" as her "survivalist strategy"[13] I cannot assume such a mantle of defying any "trope" with my two-faced behavior to survive, because I am not oppressed in this setup as much as myopic and heartbroken. Tautahcho may even have recommended opening my heart to this person, and inviting him to meet Tautahcho on the mountatin, because it's unlikely that anyone who did would find it appropriate to ask Tautahcho to his face whether he saw children massacred. In other words, it's not just that I was startled and dismayed by this editor's query. It's that I might have overstepped as an ally or researcher even by sharing what I did prior to it, or that I shared it for morally questionable reasons; in any event, it's also certain that the way I handled my dismay was out of step with the spirit in which Tautahcho means for me to represent him. Was I doing what

Tautahcho wanted, and trying to get the work out there? Yes, absolutely. But also, was I trying to impress an editor I admired? Yes: professional opportunism. Was I further trying to get someone I still had feelings for to see life a certain way — the way he would need to in order to manage his lifelong condition and allow him to partner and have a family with someone like me? Yes indeed. The missed opportunity to practice advocacy "in a good way" was the outcome of my own corrupt motivations. The editor's question was perhaps not the most trauma-informed, but it's equally possible that my intentionality was suspect; it's possible, in other words, that we in the largely white, privileged progressive media and academic community — editors, researchers, all of us — handle testimonies of trauma like Tautahcho's in ways that prove his philosophy of withholding information to be wise. Trauma-informed practices have yet to become as much of a norm as they arguably need to in order for cultures of the circles I in to accommodate the most humane approach to sensitive human subject matter. The way to transform that "social reality" is to transform my behavior so that it reflects Tautahcho's stated values. And that begins with the fact I, as an ally/researcher who professes to be trauma-informed & progressive, still need to examine my choices for what Tahani might call "corrupt motivations." Instead of solely being proof of the editor's insensitivity, the anecdote is also proof of mine, and may speak to the notion that the progressive community/media world is not ready for research about people like Tautahcho because scholars like me are not ready to perform allyship in the spirit, and with the personal bravery and restraint, that subjects like Tautahcho deserve.

The moral center of truly progressive advocacy — Madison's "burden" — demands a thorough and honest examination (a "moral inventory," if you will) of intentionality on the

part of the privileged advocate. What if I had approached sharing Tautahcho's story like a prayer? What if I had approached this conversation in the park as a ceremony? Anyone with the privilege —the "pleasure" — of safekeeping Tautahcho's story should rise the occasion, and their own social performativity would transform as a result. As an advocate and a would-be ally, the spirit in which I do something, and the intentionality behind why I do it, should be "good," and transparent. If I cannot do that, I cannot expect the people I share his story with to do it, and in that case Tautahcho's story doesn't belong with us, but with people willing for their behavior to *change* as a result of what they are hearing. That is the project Crenshaw et al gesture toward when they mention scholarship that overtly works to change oppressive social realities.

Tautahcho demonstrated just the sort of agency Spivak seems to think is unimaginable when he steered our subsequent conversation about this encounter with the editor and my role in it not to that knowledge which is not mine to know, but rather to the archive he and I are co-creating ("co-performing," if you will) with our conversations and my writing about him. Rather than impart knowledge that's not mine to know, or that, in to borrow Maggio's lens, I won't "hear" properly, Tautahcho refers to the archive made of our own interviews, conversations, and experiences. Tautahcho is the subject of a literary nonfiction piece called "Coyote" in my memoir, *Refuge*. When I spoke with Tautahcho about that conversation with the editor, he referred to the following passage from that essay:

> Since my school is on the way into town from the mountain, some days Tautahcho, or "T," or "Tauch," brought me to Aikido. One day I ran out to the parking lot to see his old red truck receding. I ran tearfully over to the

elementary school across the creek to see whether any parents were late in ferrying their offspring into the valley. I found Tara, one of the only other visible Chumash in the community and an adopted relative of T. She wasn't planning to leave quite so soon, but she gave me a ride.[376]

Tautahcho mentioned that moment in his response to my description of the encounter with the editor in our March 2019 interview:

I recall a time when you talk about
How you were gonna go to Aikido
and you saw my truck go by
and you ran,
right
and it was like aw
kind of a let down
it was kinda like AAAAUGH
[I'm laughing in the background]
what do I do now
but then you figured a way
of how to do something
you went to family school
and you got a ride
right
and you came into class
I don't know if it was cause
You were late or not
But you came into class
you still experienced the class
yeah
so look at that guy as a red truck

Tautahcho refers to the archive of the work we do, conversations we had, and the Aikido class of my teenhood—as well as my writing about it all—in order to find the right metaphor with which to counsel me. In so doing, in that sort of holistic drawing-from, he

[376] Holden, Ming. *Refuge: A Memoir.* Arizona: Kore Press (2018): 221.

successfully demonstrates what it means to see life as a book – as a text.

Our conversation about the editor continued this way:

So look at that guy as a red truck
so that's when you tell me about that young guy
that said you fell in love with

Yeah you know I had a conversation about you with him because he's also an addict who doesn't drink anymore but he's not recovered

Struggles

Yeah he's not engaged in his own recovery yet

Struggles with it

Yeah, he just keeps his world very small and keeps everybody out. And you and I had just had this conversation about recovery from PTSD and stuff and how when you experience a moment that's unmanageable other people can come help, when a child is screaming and you can't handle it. Then that's how we recover in community, you know, when one of us is overwhelmed the others know and they come in and help. And that's how you can thrive even with something like PTSD. And so I was trying to tell him that, basically because I wanted him to be able to do what you can do, and deal with recovery but also have a family, and also have love. And like so I tried to tell him that, but he interrupted me. He's an editor from the East Coast and he interrupted me and was like, 'Well so did he see children massacred' and I'm like, 'I don't know if I have permission to answer that.' And he said fine.

[Tautahcho chuckles]

And I said, I just I don't know if I have permission to talk about that. And I got really hurt. And I was like, I sent an angry e-mail [I laugh]

Ask him.

And I said 'that wasn't a sensitive question!'

[Tautahcho chuckles]

And then I thought about it more and I realized that I didn't deal with that the way you would want me to at all.

[We both laugh]

It was like I was heartbroken --

He's—
--and I was like—

He's—
---prideful about it and that wasn't right.

I was gonna say
he's in a battle
so he's gonna react like that
he's in a battle
so he's going to express himself like that
he's mad at himself

Well I got mad at him. [laughs]

That's okay
That's easier for him to take
Than to understand and
realize that he's mad at himself
He's probably not
Up to it, you know
To acknowledge that
I think people
Are controlled by alcohol

This transcript supports the notion that not only can the subaltern speak, but can, to borrow Conquergood's term, "deeply sense." Tautahcho's patience, kindness, and compassion here extend not only to me but to the editor himself, "deeply sensing" us both: encouraging me to move on to find another way forward than the "red truck" of a guy who left me in the lurch and then acted in an adversarial way; *and* the struggle and battle a guy who acts that way must be in. Tautahcho's compassion is radical, and it's just the sort of "subjugated knowledge" through whose "re-emergence" Foucault believes "criticism

performs its work."[377] Accordingly, these pages are those in which that side-winding "slippage between "romanticism, solipsism, and genuine dialogic engagement"[378] is taken as a given. Acknowledging the slithery nature of subject and object cedes some narrative control in this ethnographic setup to Tautahcho, hopefully liberating him from the epistemic violence of fixity, of being pinned as the metaphorical insect underneath the historical anthropological spyglass. Even in the most traditional anthropological studies, the cultural persuasions of the ethnographer are implicit in the object of his study; so too are the nature of my questions indicative of my interests as not only a researcher but a mentee of Tautahcho's.

Johnson notes that his grandmother's performance operates, in the words of Fanon, in "at least two dimensions."[379] An example of Tautahcho performing more than one identity at once can be found in the below transcript of a conversation he and I had in 2006 about snakes in particular, in which Tautahcho "drives" the conversation of a recorded interview as an opportunity for counseling me, the researcher. So too does the researcher in an ethnographic encounter occupy "multiple subject positions."[380] I am not only an academic researcher in the context of these conversations, I am a pupil of Tautahcho's; he is not only delivering his message to someone he expects to write about it, he is imparting wisdom to a mentee of some twenty years. Johnson maintains that the balance between being "drawn in" to, "while

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[377] Foucault, Michel. P*ower/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Writings.* New York: Pantheon (1980): 81-82.

[378] Johnson, 15.

[379] Ibid., 106.

[380] Johnson, 111.

maintaining critical distance" from, what he hears his grandmother say is what makes his ethnographic encounter with her dialogic[381]. I believe Tautahcho and I take this slippery, dialogic process of "destabiliz[ing] 'the expert'" a step further, rendering this study one that might be termed a *therapeutic* ethnography by virtue of leaning into what Johnson might term "impure" "role-play"[382]. It's obvious in the following exchange, for example, that Tautahcho is less constructing himself in opposition to a historical trope, as Johnson's grandmother does, as he is taking the opportunity to counsel me:

> The forest is being surrounded by towns
> and cities just closing in more and more
> That's how people can't understand why
> the animals are coming in their back yard
> It was their yard before it was ever your back yard.
> They're just going in the same pattern
> You're living in their space because you didn't want to live in [their own ??]
> You decided you wanted to go out live in the country and now you're telling
> the country *life* not to be there?
> Just go back to the city!
> Live there if you don't want to see animals
> in your front yard
> Learn how to live with them.
> They're very understanding.
> They won't come and bother you if you ask them not to.
> They can tell if you're not being truthful.
>
> *—My brother and I were always scared of snakes. We would see them on the ranch and be startled. it was like an automatic response.*
>
> Your nervous system.
> Let me tell you about that.
> It's a warning sign, like an alarm clock.
> It's waking you up.
> Hey, there's someone out there

381 Ibid.

382 Ibid., 110.

> Be careful.
> Don't step on that rattlesnake that's going by.
> Stop sign! [he uses sing song voice]
> Stop light.
> Telling you to stop and let that traffic go by.
> You don't need a neon stop sign to tell you to stop and let that traffic go by.
> Just stop and let it go by.
> Let it go on the way.
> Say good morning to it, let it go by.
> It feels the vibration.
> It's more scared of you than you of it because you're big.
> They don't want to get runned over.
>
> *I knelt in the road and I bowed to it and sent it some love. I got up and went my and it turned around and went into the grass.*
>
> Every being has the same nervous system alarm bell too.
> It feels fear too.
> If you feel fear, say the words, "I'm surprised!"
> Then the fear changes to surprise, oh, wow, cool!
> Seeing such a cool thing, you know?

Tautahcho is clearly taking the pedagogical opportunity to counsel me in trauma recovery here. He reconceives of alarm as a gift: a way of being around, interacting with, and ultimately being in harmony with other beings in the world – in this case, a snake. His suggestion to "say hi" to the snake neutralizes the alarm of the nervous system that he names as such. Instead of a problem, elevated stress hormones are a gift. He is also, from the kindness of his tone as well as his words, shepherding a scared girl whose mother has just had heart surgery in the direction of trauma recovery: he was helping me be in harmony with my own stress response, my own nervous system, and coaching me to see things in that holistic way for my own good health. The transformation from fear to surprise is that at the heart of moving past trauma. It paves the way for celebration and interaction, which are the

interconnective community practices Herman and van der Kolk recommend for sustained recovery. Tautahcho knew I'd feel better if the snake were, in my world, a part of my rap group.

Over the course of the first five hours of the Solstice ceremony at Tautahcho's house in 2013 (which were all I stayed awake for), around fourteen of us stood and threw tobacco into the flames, the fire burned and people drummed and we could come and go from the circle at will. Inside the cook shack, we had feasted. I had attempted apple pie from scratch and was delighted when Tautahcho stepdaughter, a chef, was shocked that I had made the crust myself. I'm a sensitive, clumsy, confused bimbo a lot of the time in America, and none of my close friends here can reconcile how I survive my stints working in far-flung places. I asked Tautahcho whether I could bring my journal by the fire and write what I had to say to the spirits. I was thinking of what I wished for the children at the refugee camp I'd visited in Syria, specifically, one beautiful girl with dark eyes whose picture I had decided not to take. I didn't want to get it wrong.

In response to my query about journaling, Tautahcho held up a mason jar and looked at me through it, so he blurred.

"That would be like this," he said. "Why make it harder for the spirits to hear you?"

I nodded, and didn't ask why we needed to be so specific with our words if words were an obstacle. "The semiotician," writes States, "..is concerned only with the sign-ness of things, and what they do in their own spare time is their own (or someone else's) business." In Tautahcho's world, what they do in their own spare time can be a danger, and therefore

absolutely his business, as his job at solstice was to protect us from unhappy spirits. States writes that "theater (*theatron*, derived from "to see") is a means of looking objectively at the subjective life..as something prepared for the community out of the substance of its own body."[383]

The summer of 2010, my nervous system suffered some damage, and the excess stress hormones in my body left me frightened, sleepless, and ill. I saw Tautahcho by chance at the Chumash Tribal Health Clinic, because I was still on medicare, and he was taking his son Levi for a dentist appointment. In the waiting room, I told Tautahcho how frightened I was that my mind was damaged beyond repair.

"The brain is a computer," he responded. "Your heart and spirit are fine. And the brain can be restarted at any time."

This was years before I read Tuhiwai-Smith's question: *Is her spirit clear?* It didn't feel like it, but Tautahcho seemed to think so. So I sat and prayed and bowed to the land when I got home to my parents' ranch in the July sun. And because words have power, and Tautahcho taught me that, I knew I could heal myself with what I chose to say to myself about my own mind. And I remembered something Tautahcho had told me in our 2006 interviews, when I first experienced major depression: "the remedy is within you."

I did get up the courage to visit Tautahcho and his family that summer, and as I struggled to articulate my lingering fear, Tautahcho stopped me with a gentle touch to my arm.

"Look, Ming," he said, pointing; "look who's come to be with us."

[383] States, 21.

Two hawks were circling overhead near the crest of the mountain. Maybe, when Tautahcho would look so kindly at me in the middle of my often self-created emotional upset, that's what he was thinking, and waiting for me to realize: the information I get, I get from everything that's alive – and the remedy is within me. And the remedy sometimes is as simple and profound as sitting still and observing who, among the many beings that are alive, has come to be with me. The remedy is to be with the earth and its creatures, who are my relations: this is healing.

Conclusion.

"What, Then, of Healing?"

> …Onto-epistemological questions are posed, along with their indeterminate grounds and topoi: who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? How do we know what we think we know?
>
> Jamie Skye Bianco[384]

My dissertation chair, Dr. Stephanie Batiste, put the above question perfectly to me at the end of my tenure as a PhD candidate as a way to conceptualize my research moving forward. My answer to her question is the backbone of the investigations I made in this dissertation: Healing is decolonial work. And while I have found a place in the academy to speak to that brutality and its possible effects on the psyche, it's much easier to find 'trauma studies' a home in humanities theory than 'healing studies.' After all, as Gómez-Barris points out, "if only we track the purview of power's destruction and death force, we are forever analytically imprisoned to reproducing a totalizing viewpoint that ignores life that is unbridled and finds forms of resisting and living alternatively."[385]

My research is animated by the hope that academic inquiry 'ignores life that is unbridled' less and less, which promises that it will follow in affect theorists' footsteps and, using Clough's terms, 'step out of the skeptical of the known' more and more, hopefully right

[384] Bianco, Jamie. "Techno-Cinema: Image Matters in the Affective Unfoldings of Analog Cinema and New Media." *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, 47-76: 47.

[385] Gómez-Barris, 3.

'into an inadequate confrontation with what exceeds it and oneself.' In an inspiring capping end to her introductory chapter as editor of *The Affective Turn*, "we have what is left," Clough declares, which is nothing less or more than "the remains of learning together, encouraging us to be braver, more creative and even less adequate next time."[386] Given that victims of severe trauma must create meaning in the brokenness, and come to some sort of peace with a space big enough to contain it all, perhaps the move Clough makes here is not only to make a home for affect studies but for trauma survivors themselves, whose defining characteristic is a feeling of inadequacy. I wrote in the introduction that trauma might not be possible without contingency; it follows that healing is not possible without it, either. Critchley, for example, states plainly that "trauma exerts the effects of repetition;"[387] if the remarks of the women in the Survival Girls group are any indication, he's right.

But Critchley also opines that "theater can be the mechanism that works through and potentially breaks that pattern of repetition," and the Survival Girls group prove him right there too. Their social bonds are indubitably parts of what holds their individual brokenness, causing the need for detachment and isolation that can kill the spirit to recede in favor of their powerful presence. "There is a strong neurophysiological dimension to this kind of detachment,"[388] writes Chalfin, one. wherein "the earliest evolutionary survival systems of immobilization override the preferred systems of mobilization and social

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[386] Clough, 28.

[387] Critchley, 26.

[388] Chalfin, 109.

attachment"[389] in a version of "feigned death"[390] that can become very problematic in terms of daily normative functioning. Clough sets up a clear mission for affect theorists to take up new work when she points out certain limitations of what she calls Freud's "sterilization of the death drive"[391] as one that "moves psychoanalysis from its focus…repression of sexual desire to anxiety," the threat to the egos definition or boundaries, a threat that, for Freud, comes from the environment. In light of the strong pull psychoanalytic theory exerts on affect studies and trauma studies, the scholar dedicated to those studies wonders what the death drive might look like if the death is 'feigned.' Perhaps this is what the future of performance studies might ask with Freud, but answer with the influence of decolonial or affect theory on readings of trauma. "The impossible dilemma of trauma is to either go crazy or to become psychologically dead," writes Chalfin; "when one holds this as a dialectic, however, a third possibility emerges."[392] The disciplines most interested in that third possibility are the ones least convinced that the first two possibilities were where the buck stops in the first place.

The hundreds (thousands!) of books speaking to the product of the violence of dichotomy and its aftermath peppering the humanities and social sciences speak to the history of genocide drenching and its devastating effects in human history. There are ethnic cleansing seminars and trauma theory reading lists aplenty; there are lectures on oppression

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[389] Ibid.
[390] Chalfin, 109.

[391] Chalfin, 117.

[392] Ibid.

galore. I pause between this doctoral research and the independent research as a scholar in my future to ask: What about healing theory?

Why isn't healing theory as prevalent as trauma theory? Why aren't there flyers postered all over university campuses about the lecture series in "recovery studies" the way there are for "genocide studies" or "trauma studies" — and why do I suspect that if a series of lectures in "recovery studies" were advertised, it might be only the social work majors who show up to listen? Whether they like it or not (I didn't, always), arguably anyone researching trauma in the humanities must contend with Caruth's landmark text *Unclaimed Experienc*e. What about *claimed* experience, and a theoretical space wherein the business of reclaiming experience takes up as much space as its loss—its lack?

The decolonial work of claiming experience is that of trauma recovery, which is not the same as 'making it go away.' Chalfin examines Heidegger's challenge to traditional notions of trauma through his view that, in her summary, people do not have situations, but more radically, they are their situations. These are, Chalfin admits, "muddy waters" that "can be scary for a trauma survivor to examine"[393]: "in some way," she asks, "are trauma survivors responsible for their own dehumanization?"[394] Such a stance demands that the trauma survivor do what can only be described as work overtime: "victims must recognize how they are thrown into corrosive trauma and must simultaneously reconstitute themselves and their world while responding to this dehumanization in each and every moment." While such a pill

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[393] Chalfin, 106.

[394] Ibid.

might be hard to swallow, Chalfin pivots to a message of empowerment and reconstitution that may indeed find fellowship among decolonial thought: "Trauma survivors are living resolutely. Their living is in their survival and in their persistent existence."[395]

That persistent existence is one of the warts of traumatic effects and all. Novack quotes Stolorow's insight that "although the possibility of emotional trauma is ever present, so too is the possibility of forming bonds of deep emotional connection within which devastating emotional pain can be held, rendered more tolerable, and eventually integrated."[396] Chalfin refers to such pain as vulnerability, which is also brokenness, a brokenness that one doesn't expect to go away: "A more complete relationship with existence develops when one recognizes vulnerability, or what will be referred to as brokenness, as a core existential structure." Novack references James Mitchell's exploration of the construction of the self through the assignation of meaning to one's experiences; specifically, that "the meaning of those experiences is not given; it is composed, created."[397] No one is better at that composition, in my experience, than Tautahcho, whom I have always wished could have met and mentored the women in the Survival Girls group the way he did for me, demonstrating kindness and respect in a paternal figure to vulnerable young women who had been hurt. And the woman in the Survival Girls group, in turn, compose that meaning for themselves, particularly Jaqueline playing the bad guy, that all the women watching her might access the good in one another and the empowered self within and through that affective tissue between

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[395] Chalfin, 106.

[396] Stolorow quoted in Novack, 147.

[397] Mitchell quoted in Novack, 153.

traumatized audience and traumatized performer. In the freedom to create meaning out of experience, there is the chance to perform that meaning, to affect that meaning, and to be affected by it. That intermingling of social forces is the healing social connection that makes what is broken worthwhile, and worthy.

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