Silence, Intimacy, and the Other: Rhetorical Storytelling in Asian And Asian/American Feminist Writings

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Philosophy in English

Title: Silence, Intimacy, and the Other: Rhetorical Storytelling in Asian And Asian/American Feminist Writings

My dissertation, *Silence, Intimacy, and the Other: Rhetorical Storytelling in Asian and Asian/American Feminist Writings* investigates how Asian and Asian/American women have used storytelling as a form of discursive transgression. I argue that rhetorical studies tend to understand speech acts as something only accessible to those who are *formally* represented, which implies that those who are *informally* represented cannot speak. Reading through Chanel Miller's *Know My Name*, Cathy Park Hong's *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, and Sharika Thiranagama's *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka*, I argue that the discipline's traditional approach to analyzing speech acts has failed to consider how informally represented communities have always been speaking in silent and intimate ways that are not always legible. Drawing from cultural rhetorics and women of color feminisms, my dissertation traces how Asian and Asian/American feminists have used different forms of storytelling, a speech act in itself, as a means of revising the racial and gendered subjectivities placed on them.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: TRACING A GENEALOGY OF INFORMAL REPRESENTATION

"Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."

-Ludwig Wittgenstein

"We need to know more about the rhetorics of *silence* as well as rhetoric of *listening*."

-Lynn Worsham

"For me, the question, 'Who should speak?' is less crucial than 'Who will listen?"

-Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Introduction

In the "Introduction" to *Race, Rhetoric, and the Postcolonial* (1999), editors Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham regard that, "those who are able to read their world and then have voice within it are positioned to have a certain modicum of power within the world and over their destinies," (xi). Essentially, what Olson and Worsham are getting at is how formal representation or specifically, the "ability to speak and be heard" (Alcoff 22) is essentially grounded in our access to critical literacy. However, what about those who are informally represented? Are they able to access speech and if so, in what ways do they access speech? These questions are central to my dissertation. In particular, I am concerned with informally represented groups, like Asian and Asian/American feminists, speak in silent and intimate ways that are not always legible to those in dominant social locations. By closely reading Chanel Miller's *Know My Name*, Cathy Park Hong's *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, and Sharika Thiranagama's *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka*, I arrive at new insights into how informally represented groups access speech. Specifically, I examine how methods of rhetorical storytelling are used by Asian and Asian/American feminists as a form of

speaking which also functions as a discursive transgression that revises the gender and racial subjectivities placed on them through formal representation. Rhetorical storytelling is a way of telling stories in a *persuasive* manner. We can see this in my chapter analyses where Asian and Asian/American feminists use their stories to persuade those in dominant social standings to rhetorically *listen* to what they have to say. In order to understand the possibilities of speaking for informally represented groups, we need to understand what the discipline of rhetoric has theorized about critical literacy. By tracing the discursive, historiographic, and phenomenological theorizations of critical literacy, we have a more nuanced understanding of how Asian and Asian/American feminists have always been speaking, but we fail to listen to them.

The field of rhetoric is intrinsically about critical literacy and how it either enables or dislodges democratic (self) representation. Understanding this connection is critical to the field of rhetoric. Without a doubt, rhetoric as a discipline is rooted in critical literacy and therefore, rhetoric is always a "political activity," (Olson and Worsham xi). In particular, scholars of language invoke critical literacy as a reading practice of resistance that enables people and groups to intervene in the world. However, what about those who are informally represented? Does informal representation limit their access to equitable and just forms of speaking? Moreover, are those who are informally represented lack access to critical literacy?

Informal representation means that all of us-centered or marginalized- have our voices translated into power by someone we did not knowingly elect to do so. Informal representation is neither a good thing nor bad thing. Rather, it is a discursive condition that offers a prism to understand the ethical consequences of speaking for others. Informal representation occurs because democratic representation is a privilege that not everyone can access. Within this

dissertation, I argue that a critical literacy reading practice that is informed by cultural rhetorics and women of color feminisms can provide new orientations of thinking about how informal representation can also lead to the "ability to speak and be heard," (Alcoff 22) for those who cannot access formal representation. Cultural rhetorics and women of color feminisms are subfields within rhetoric that are focused on language use as determined by community, storytelling, and healing.

I plan on first mapping the genealogy of how critical literacy has taken shape in the field of rhetoric. By tracing this scholarship, I can arrive at a nuanced perspective into understanding how rhetorical studies currently defines critical literacy as a pathway to formal representation. Additionally, I will come to articulate how our current scholarship around critical literacy might or might not consider its relationship to those who are informally represented. Moreover, I aim to provide evidence on how those who are informally represented are still intervening in the world around us. I plan on doing this by articulating a critical literacy reading practice that is informed by cultural rhetorics and women of color feminisms. Furthermore, I will apply that theory into praxis by closely reading three studies of informal representation. These texts are: Chanel Miller's *Know My Name* (2019), Cathy Park Hong's *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (2020), and Sharika Thiranagama's *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka* (2013).

The first study will be on the story of gender and sexual violence experienced by Asian/American women. The second study will be on the story of anger and silence in the forming of an Asian/American identity. The third study will be on the story of kinship in the context of the Sri Lankan Tamil genocide. These three studies are bounded together by subjects/objects whose voices have historically been silenced. My analyses are also

representative of experiences characterized by Asian womanhood. My reasoning for looking at these specific studies is two-fold. First, as a Sri Lankan Tamil woman in the diaspora, I often find that rhetorical studies has yet to look at Asian and Asian/American feminist experiences as a critical site of cultural knowledge. Secondly, these studies show that a rhetorical storytelling reading practice that is informed by cultural rhetorics and women of color feminisms, can lead to "the ability to speak and be heard" (Alcoff 22).

Critical Literacy and (In)Formal Representation

Women of Color feminist writers have provided new ways of thinking about representation in public discourses and private imaginaries. In particular, new insight into how women of color feminist writers approach formal representation is a testament to the field of composition and rhetoric. For example, the period between the late 1980s to the mid 1990s was a pinnacle point in feminist writing and thinking. During this time, the work of feminist rhetoricians such as bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldua, Trinh Minh Ha, Linda Martin Alcoff, and Gayatri Spivak came to the forefront of public discourse on formal representation. Their writings have influenced our understanding of who "has the ability to speak and be heard," (Alcoff 22). However, a blind spot within rhetoric and composition is what we can learn from women of color feminists about what they have to say about informal representation.

Informal representation is dialectical with formal representation. Formal representation is the ability to self-represent. Formal representation means that an individual or group can intervene in the world in a democratic way. For example, in *Race, Rhetoric, and the Postcolonial*, editors Gary Olson and Lynn Worsham write, "those who are able to read their world and then have voice within it are positioned to have a certain modicum of power within the world and over their destinies," (xi). In other words, formal representation is what happens

when some has access to critical literacy — a form of agency. Whereas, informal representation occurs when the voices, of those both in the margins and in the center, get translated into power by someone else — usually a non-elected representative. However, informal representation is linked to critical literacy as well. In particular, this critical literacy is informed by Cultural Rhetorics and feminist of color pedagogies. Specifically, this is a critical literacy that might not necessarily make sense for those who can self-represent. This critical literacy is one that is linked to silence, stories of the untranslatable, and intimacies that arrive through the ethics of care.

In order to understand a critical literacy reading practice informed by cultural rhetorics and women of color feminisms, we need to historicize critical literacy. Critical literacy, in its broadest sense, is the ability to understand our own experiences in relationship to the systems of power around us. Critical literacy is a concept that is most widely talked about in the following disciplines that all relate to the quality of language use: rhetoric and composition, education, and linguistics. I am most interested in understanding the historiography of critical literacy within a rhetoric and composition framework. Within this discipline, critical literacy is most often associated with educator Paulo Freire. In his pivotal book, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), Freire thinks of critical literacy as a two-step process as he writes,

> In the first stage, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all men in the process of permanent liberation. (40)

Freire argues that critical literacy is a tool of agency in which marginalized groups can intervene in the social injustice around them and transform it.

For Ira Shor, a longtime collaborator and scholar of Freire, critical literacy is the possibility of transformation in society as he writes, "Critical literacy challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development," (2). But, how are we actually coming to define critical literacy? If literacy is a social action, then critical literacy is our understanding of those actions through discursive possibilities and encounters. Critical literacy is in its broadest sense, an understanding of self as impacted by other worldly factors or as Shor writes, "critical literacy is the language use that questions the social construction of the self," (3).

But, what are our sites of critical literacy? Traditional composition and rhetorical perspectives may orient us to thinking of critical literacy only occurring in sites of discursive productions like that of school setting. However, in thinking through cultural rhetorics and women of color feminist perspectives, I would argue that any encounter in which we come to understand the "social construction" of ourselves is a site of critical literacy. For example, Ira Shor, describes the site of critical literacy as when local culture exists within a global context (3); for him, that was growing up in a working-class Jewish neighborhood and then eventually, his leaving that area for an "elite university" in 1962 (3).

When we think of critical literacy in those lenses, it opens up possibilities for individuals and/or groups who live in the margins to think about the ways they can also access the "ability to speak and be heard" (Alcoff 22). In other words, a critical literacy that is a reflection of our local and global cultures provides a more nuanced insight into how systems of power operate. Moreover, it also allows us to think of the limits of formal representation that occur in school settings. This is evident when Shor talks about how his elementary school principal shut down the newspaper he started with a friend as he writes, "When the principal abruptly ended our literate venture, I learned that eleven-year old's in our democracy can't publish a paper without

prior official approval. The suit's word was power and law. Our kid's word vanished," (3). What Shor's anecdote suggests is that discursive acts are never politically neutral.

In thinking through these lines, we can question if critical literacy is "innocent or neutral," (Shor 5). Critical literacy is never a neutral activity. In fact, critical literacy as a discursive framework is a call for action in its truest form. In other words, critical literacy is the interrogation of received knowledge as a way to challenge inequity. The reason we want to challenge this inequity is because by doing so, individuals and groups can access formal representation. Formal representation can be thought about as the, "the ability to speak and be heard." (Alcoff 22). This means that individuals and groups are able to self-represent. Gary Olson and Lynn Worsham describe formal representation as those "who are able to read their world and have a voice within it," (xi). Formal representation occurs when someone uses critical literacy as a discursive tool to make an intervention into the world. This is also possible because those folks have access to agency. In other words, their voices are rendered legibly enough to be heard.

However, what does critical literacy have to show us about those who are informally represented? The folks who are informally represented are typically those who do not occupy the center of society. Oftentimes, these voices are untranslatable. Informal representation means that they have access to a world by means of someone else acting as an interlocutor. Informal representation is neither a good thing or bad thing. Rather, it is a discursive prism that provides us insight into how people in the margins come to have a say in things when they are not equitably represented in the public discourses or private imaginaries.

The politics of representation is not a new concept. Philosophers and other scholars of language have been talking about the variances in representation for over 200 years. However,

the field of rhetoric and composition has not really explored the concept of informal representation. Specifically, women of color feminists have been talking about the concept of informal and formal representations since the 1980s. While we have listened to what they say about formal representation, we have failed to listen to their writings on informal representation. Oftentimes, what women of color feminisms teach us is that these conversations go hand-in-hand, sometimes existing together. I think it is important to revisit what these scholars have to say about (in)formal representation.

In the early 1980s, we saw the publications of bell hooks' *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981) and Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984). These works interrogate the absence of black women in feminist discourses of the time. From these scholars, we learn that (white) feminism has informally represented the voices of black women and other women of color. Similarly, the publications of *The Bridge Called My Back* (1983) by Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga and Gayatri Spivak's, "Deconstructing Historiography," (1985) inform us about the voices that are untranslatable through a white lens. Moreover, in Chandra Talpade Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes" (1984), Minh Ha Trinh's *Woman, Native, Other* (1989), and Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1993), we have new insight into how Asian women and or the "third-world women " have been collectivized into a single identity that erased their differences. Furthermore, in Linda Martin Alcoff's 1993 essay, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," we learn about the consequences of representing a group we are not part of as well as the consequences of being represented by someone we did not elect.

Critical literacy shows us how individuals can make an intervention into the world and thus, access formal representation. However, what about those who are unable to intervene in the same ways? How are they represented? Women of color feminist scholarship suggests that those

who cannot access agency are informally represented. Are those who are informally represented able to participate in critical literacy? I argue that they are because critical literacy is the understanding that power and knowledge are interconnected (Shor 21). I argue that a critical literacy built on the tenets of cultural rhetorics and feminist of color pedagogies shows us the limits of formal representation. Us scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition must think of ways that will support those who are informally represented.

In her 1993 essay, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," Linda Martin Alcoff brings up three examples of informal representation. In the first example, Anne Cameron, a white Canadian woman writes novels about Native Canadian women (1-2). At a conference, Cameron gets called out by indigenous women who accuse her writings of "disempowering for Native authors," (1). The second example is about how the Panamanian dictator, Manuel Noriega, overturned the 1989 presidential election results. U.S. President George Bush states that, "the voice of the Panamanian people have spoken…The Panamanian people want democracy not tyranny," (qtd. in Alcoff 1). In the last example, a theorist was invited to speak on the issues of postmodern politics. However, during the lecture, he refused to speak on the given topic because he felt that, "as a white male he does not feel that he can speak for the feminist and postcolonial perspectives which have launched the critical interrogation of postmodernists politics," (1). These examples show us how informal representation usually occurs when it is a non-elected representative that decides to translate the experiences of groups or cultures they do not belong to.

Informal representation, or the discursive act of standing in for others, is contested amongst many different groups. In particular, feminist philosophers and anthropologists tend to think that informal representation enables hegemony. In describing the unease that some

academic activists feel about informal representation, Alcoff writes, "speaking for others—even for other women—is arrogant, vain, unethical, and politically illegitimate," (2). In thinking through feminist discourses and particularly Joyce Treblicot's writing on the matter in the magazine *Sojourner*, Alcoff states that some feminists are highly against informal representation as it is a kind of "discursive coercion and even violence," (2). Similarly, feminist philosopher and anthropologist, Trinh T. Minh-ha is against informal representation. Minh-ha argues that informal representation is never for the people it is representing as she writes, "'them' is always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless…'them' is only admitted among 'us,' the discussing subjects, when accompanied or introduced by an 'us,'" (Minh-ha qtd. in Alcoff 2) The ethical instability surrounding informal representation or the act of speaking for others is why it is such a contested idea in feminist practices.

Critical literacy is most often informed by Paulo Freire writings on critical consciousness (1972). Critical literacy is the process of naming the social structures and systems of power in the world we live in. It is also epistemological as it "claims from each person a critical reflection on the very act of knowing," (Bizzell 101-2). Critical literacy, as a reading practice of resistance, aims to arrive at new ways of thinking about how to "develop strategies for a more equitable, just distribution of the ability to speak and be heard," (Alcoff 22). For example, critical literacy is used as a tool by writing instructors to think about ways they are having students engage with their understanding of the world. One way of doing this is by naming the issues or as Victor Villanueva writes, "writing is not only a way of learning but also a way of fostering critical consciousness, more than a means of problem solving but also a means of problem posing," (171). Moreover, in illustrating their programmatic goals, Adam Banks, the Director of Stanford University's Program of Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) outlines one of the fundamental debates in

rhetorical studies when he concludes the "Director's Message" with the following set of questions:

> How can we create and improve conditions for civic dialogue in our increasingly multicultural society where we can reason through difficult conversations in the pursuit of greater good? How can we all help to improve possibilities for healthy, deliberative democracy domestically and prepare students (and each other) for lives as global citizens? (Banks, https://pwr.stanford.edu/about-pwr/directors-message)

Banks' questions are fundamentally asking about critical literacy as a way to access democratic representation. Likewise, Allan Luke and Karen Dooley (2009) define the transformative power of critical literacy as the, "the use of texts to analyse and transform relations of cultural, social, and political power," (1). For these scholars, literacy is viewed as liberation or as they write, "the normative process of this work [language teaching and learning] is that the *telos* of literacy as a human capacity is a will towards freedom, equality, and emancipation," (1). Critical literacy is a way to read and access the world in a way that leads to democratic representation.

Critical Literacy and Cultural Difference

Rhetoric is an interdisciplinary discipline. Rhetorical studies is often influenced by scholars who provide new insights into rhetorical studies even though they might not identify as a rhetorician themselves. This does not mean rhetoric is a discipline without an "identity." Rather this means that rhetorical studies is concerned with the quality of language use as it appears in different forms. For example, much of rhetorical studies is informed by the scholarship that finds its origins in postcolonial theory. In fact, the stakes of democratic representation as dependent on critical literacy, is something that is also prominent in postcolonial theory and discourse. The reason being is because critical literacy is a way to find just and equitable representation for

marginalized communities. This is something that is critical for the telos of postcolonial theory. When we think about how writing studies from the perspective of postcolonial theory, we can understand how it is connected to agency. For Homi Bhabha, writing is always about access to agency as he states, "literacy is absolutely crucial for a kind of ability to be responsible to yourself, to make your own reading within a situation of political and cultural choice," (qtd. In Olson and Worsham 3).

Moreover, postcolonial theory informs us how this relationship between democratic representation and critical literacy cannot exist without cultural difference. Cultural difference becomes a problem when the difference becomes a site of abuse by more dominant groups. Conceptualized by Homi Bhabha, cultural difference is the departure from cultural diversity or other forms of multiculturalism. In particular, cultural difference is "constructed discourse" (Olson and Worsham xi). Cultural difference is "the process of the *enunciation* of culture as knowledge*able*, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification," (Bhabha). Cultural difference, then, is the meaning-making process behind culture that is neither fixed nor monolithic as cultural difference has no boundaries. Critical literacy is a way to enunciate cultural difference which leads to a "politics of discrimination," (Olson and Worsham 5). In other words, when we think about critical literacy under the guise of cultural difference, what ends up happening is that democratic representation of racialized minorities becomes essentialized and contained by more dominant groups in society.

Similarly, Stuart Hall talks about the issue of collectivism in his work on cultural identity. Cultural identity presumes, simultaneously, both a singular and collective experience. On the one hand, cultural identity is always ongoing. On the other hand, despite these individual differences

and experiences, cultural identity is also a shared experience. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall writes about this dual understanding of cultural identity when he states,

> There are at least two different ways of thinking about 'cultural identity.' The first position defines cultural identity in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self' hiding inside the many other, more superficial, or artificially imposed 'selves,' which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people,' with stable unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history (223).

Hall is writing to and for the Caribbean diaspora and Black experience. However, the ideas of cultural identity, I believe, can inform us on what current scholarship has to say about the relationship between critical literacy and democratic representation.

The Ethics of Speaking for Others

Moreover, it is not only a question of who or what is being translated but also a question of *who* is doing it. For instance, in the three examples that Alcoff introduces in her essay, the voice that is rendered legible occupies a powerful social position. For instance, Anne Cameron writing fictionalized accounts of actual Native Canadian women harms the latter. This is because Cameron as a white woman is not occluded from the benefits from white supremacy. Whereas, the Native Canadian women occupy a marginalized social location that is only possible because of white supremacy. This also ties into why Minh-ha was criticizing informal representation especially from an anthropology perspective. This is evident as she writes that informal representation is, "mainly a conversation of 'us' with 'us' about 'them,' of the white man with

the white man about the primitive nature-man…in which 'them' is silenced," (qtd. in Alcoff 2). For Minh-ha who is being represented is always rendered illegible. The interrogation of the "speaker" or "representor" is always coded in the social location they are associated with. For instance, Alcoff writes, "a speaker's location (which I take here to refer to her social location or social identity) has an epistemically significant impact on that speaker's claims, and can even serve either to authorize or dis-authorize one's speech," (2).

In other words, Alcoff is arguing that there is a discursive move that occurs depending on who is speaking for whom. She explains that the speaker's social location can never be divorced from their speech. I would also argue that the person who is being informally translated can also not divorce themselves from their social location. Alcoff also talks about how many academic disciplines and/or departments are also suspicious of informal representation. For example, she writes,

> The creation of Women's Studies and African American Studies departments were founded on this very belief: that both the study and advocacy for the oppressed must come to be done principally from the oppressed themselves, and that we must finally acknowledge that systematic divergences in social location between speakers and those spoken for will have a significant effect on the content of what is said. (Alcoff 3)

What this statement brings to the forefront is how in many ways informal representation can lead to further oppression.

Alcoff posits a critical question within her essay, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," which follows, "is it ever valid to speak for others who are unlike me or who are less privileged than me?" (3). The question highlights a critical tension that foregrounds the complexities of informal representation. The tension is that it is always assumed that the speaker or perhaps the

representative, always occupies a different social location than the person they are speaking for. Moreover, it can be assumed that the speaker is in a more dominant social standing. This is why Alcoff argued previously that one of the pitfalls of informal representation is that it might lead to further oppression. In other words, those whose voices were silent are perhaps further rendered illegible through this process. However, another issue that arises is when we consider the limits of association. In particular, when is a person no longer part of a group? An example Alcoff includes to highlight this haziness is when she asks, "can a white woman speak for all women simply by virtue of being a woman? If not, how narrowly should we draw these categories?" (3-4).

Informal representation is not just a discursive lens to analyze ways of being heard and being able to speak. It is also a prism to understand the limitations of who can speak for whom. In particular, as Alcoff posed earlier, can a white woman speak for all women on the basis that her identity is that of a woman? (4) As cultural studies philosophers and women of color feminists have pointed out, identity is both collective as much as it is individual. For example, Stuart Hall writes in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990) that there are two different ways we can understand cultural identity. The first way, according to Hall, is one that, "defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self,'" (223). Whereas, in the other way, we can understand cultural identity is one that, "recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are;' or rather—since history has intervened— 'what we have become,' (225). In other words, identity is always in flux. Therefore, a white woman may understand the collective experiences of the gender. However, that identity is always fluid.

Moreover, gender does not account for the other forms of (cultural) difference that exist, say for example, between a white Canadian woman and a Native Canadian woman. Furthermore, informal representation is also complicated because many individuals occupy multiple groups. This is evident in the example of the white Canadian woman. She may be a woman, but she is also, white. These intersections complicate whether or not it is ethical for her to speak on behalf of other marginalized women, like the Native Canadian women. As Alcoff points out, attempting to define boundaries of who belongs to what is also built on the false precedent that distinct boundaries exist as Hall points out that identity is always influx.

Informal representation is all about the politics of representation. It is a form of representation that is tied into ethics. For instance, ethics is about the principles that inform an individual's actions. Then what does ethics have to say about informal representation? In other words, what is the basis of representing someone else? Moreover, what is actually happening during this representation? I would suggest that the ethical reasoning why informal representation occurs is because we have a responsibility to help those who are unable to speak for themselves. In terms of the consequences surrounding informal representation, Alcoff argues that we must look at the conflation between "the issue of speaking for others and the issue of speaking about others," (5). Alcoff continues,

> There is an ambiguity in the two phrases: when one is speaking for another may be described one may be describing their situation and thus also speaking about them. In fact, it may be impossible to speak for another without simultaneously conferring information about them. Similarly, when one is speaking about another, or simply trying to describe their situation in some aspect of it, one may be speaking in place for them, i.e. speaking for them. One may be speaking about another as an advocate or a messenger if

> that person cannot speak for herself. Thus, I would maintain that if the practice of speaking for others is problematic, so too must be the practice of speaking about others. (5)

The issue with this conflation is something that goes back to the "crisis of representation," (Alcoff 5). Specifically, as Alcoff describes, in both scenarios the representor is constructing the subject-position of who they are speaking for/about. These constructions are also always dependent on the representor's interpretation of who they are representing. Alcoff continues to say that this not only occurs during informal representation but also formal representation. In other words, even when we are able to self-represent ourselves, we are doing so knowing that we are representing ourselves in a certain way.

As previously stated, informal representation is neither a good thing nor bad thing. However, it is also something that is not collectively agreed upon. For example, in the title of her essay, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," Alcoff states that there is an evident issue with speaking for others as evidenced in the title. In particular, it's usually those who are unable to formally represent themselves that end up being informal representation. On the one hand, there is an ethical responsibility to help those who are not equitably represented. On the other hand, the act of informally representing someone else is often always a political activity. In particular, as Alcoff writes,

> the problem of representation underlies all cases of speaking for, whether I am speaking for myself or for others. This is not to suggest that all representations are fictions: they have very real material effects, as well as, material origins, but they are always meditated in complex ways by discourse, power, and location (5).

This is all connected with the rituals of speaking (Foucault qtd. in Alcoff 7). The rituals of speaking suggest that,

> these "rituals of speaking" to identify discursive practices of speaking or writing which involve not only the text or utterance but their position within a social space which includes the persons involved in, acting upon, and/or affected by the words. Two elements within these rituals will deserve our attention: the positionality or location of the speaker and the discursive context…Rituals of speaking are constitutive of meaning, the meaning of the words spoken as well as the meaning of the event. This claim requires us to shift the ontology of meaning from its location in a text or utterance to a larger space, a space which includes the text or utterance, but which also includes the discursive context (Alcoff 7).

An important aspect of representation that we must consider is those who self-censor. Self-censorship is the choice to silence one's discourse. In particular, self-censoring is when you are not affirming yourself or your identity. From my understanding, self-censorship is done out of fear. In particular, people often self-censor out of fear they might be excluded from a more dominant group. Similarly, a marginalized individual might self-censor in order to avoid drawing attention to themselves. Self-censoring is something that is also racialized. Specifically, racialized and minoritized groups might self-censor in order to avoid getting in trouble. Additionally, the racialized and minoritized groups might be from countries in which people were prosecuted if their discourse went against the dominant or governmental discourse. I bring this up because I am curious to learn about the relationship between self-censorship and informal representation. In moments of self-censorship, do those who are in a more dominant group feel it is their ethical responsibility to speak for someone else? However, in these situations, are we just

perpetuating further oppression of those marginalized groups? Additionally, are we also reinforcing stereotypes of those groups?

For instance, in considering Asian American experiences of womanhood, a stereotype of Asian/American women is that they are docile. This image of the self-censoring Asian/American women is something that is espoused by Orientalist perspectives and something that is enforced through white supremacist endeavors. In these situations, it is easy to see how those who occupy more dominant social locations, might want to speak for or speak about Asian/American women. For example, I can imagine a "well-meaning" white woman who wants to speak on behalf of other Asian/American women. However, does this still cement Asian/American women in a self-censoring and domicile place? In other words, in the efforts to speak for/about Asian American women, are we preventing any measure for them to speak for themselves?

In mapping the discourse surrounding informal representation, Alcoff highlights that many feminist circles view that, "speaking for others—even for other women—is arrogant, vain, unethical, and politically illegitimate" (2). The reason many feminists argue against informal representation is because of the erasure of difference when representing different races, genders, and orientations. The fear is that a power will arise from informal representation particularly for the person who is speaking for and behalf of someone else. Moreover, if we include self-censoring into the mix, then the issue of informal representation gets further complicated. As we mentioned previously, self-censorship is the act of limiting one's discourse. This happens for different reasons. Most often, self-censoring occurs out of fear of exclusion and prosecution. Additionally, there is the racialized component of self-censoring. In other words, many women of color, and particularly, Asian/American women self-censor due to history's writing of them being docile. Self-censoring complicates informal representation because we must consider if it

is truly an act made from choice. However, while self-censoring is typically done out of fear, the same cannot be said about silence. For instance, is the act of self-censoring a demonstration of agency? Moreover, is self-censoring the same as silence? Silence, as many feminist rhetoricians have pointed out, is a discursive practice. In "Silence: A Rhetorical Art for Resisting Discipline(s)," Cheryl Glenn argues that "silence can be a specifically feminist rhetorical art, often one of resistance" (262). In other words, silence is a discursive mode that can happen both in the private and public spheres. Glenn continues to say, "silence is not, in itself, necessarily a sign of powerlessness or emptiness; it is not the same as absence; and silencing for that matter, is not the same as erasing…silence is an absence with a function," (263). However, is this the same as self-censorship?

At the heart of these conversations surrounding forms of representation is literacy. Literacy is the ability to understand the world through a critical lens. A big supporter of literacy is bell hooks. In the essay, "bell hooks and the Politics of Literacy: A Conversation," Gary Olson details an interview with bell hooks in which she argues that literacy must be a feminist cause. In particular, she writes, "if we truly want to empower women and men to engage in feminist thinking, we must empower them to read and write, but I really don't see any large group of committed feminists making that central agenda" (hooks qtd. in Olson 2). Olson also states that many feminists often ignore the BIPOC communities within their agenda as he writes, "This concern that mainstream feminists have not promoted literacy is in keeping with hooks' oft-repeated charge that white, liberal, middle-class feminists have traditionally set an agenda for feminism that fails to reflect the concerns of feminists who are also women (or men) of color," (2). Olson continues to state that illiteracy is often viewed as a class issue and therefore, not something that many middle-class feminists feel the need to engage with. It is no surprise then

hooks is a supporter of Paulo Freire (Olson 2). hooks, like Freire, both believe in praxis. In other words, praxis is a reflection and an action. For hooks, this translates into her theory that is always supported by personal anecdotes from her life as she states, "when you tell a story about how you use an abstract idea or a bit of a theory in a concrete situation, it just feels more real to people," (hooks qtd. in Olson 3). Therefore, for hooks, a literacy that is effective must consider the experiences of those who are not granted literacy in traditional settings. Moreover, the way literacy shapes pedagogy is that it must consider how not to have a formulaic pedagogy.

In "Choosing the Margin: A Space of Radical Openness," (1989), bell hooks talks about the importance of identifying the place of reaction in the process of critically reading, responding, and writing materials or as hooks states, "the 'politics of location' necessarily calls those of us who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces we begin the process of revision," (15). In other words, hooks talks about how the space and place we are responding from is often one that is personal. In particular, these reactions are determined by our relationship to identity, gender, race, sex/uality, and class. hooks states that oppression is the language one most operates from. At the same time, the oppressor is the one we usually write to even if it is not for them. She writes, "often, when the radical voice speaks about domination we are speaking to those who dominate" (16). Ultimately, hooks talks about how that language is a point of tension. In particular, hooks writes,

> Language is also a place of struggle. We are wedded in language, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle. Dare I speak to oppressed and oppressor in the same voice? Dare I speak to you in a language that will move beyond the boundaries of domination - a language that will not bind you, fence you in, or hold you. Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves, to

> reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle. (16)

hooks is stating that discursive practices are points of communication that are often flooded with tension. In other words, whether we are speaking, we are silent, we are responding, we are reading, and/or we are writing, the location we are performing these discursive acts is always going to be tense.

Informal representation is tied to the rituals of speaking. This describes not only the speaker but also the social context in which the discursive practice is communicated. Alcoff describes this concept as, "rituals of speaking are constitutive of meaning, the meaning of the words spoken as well as the meaning of the event," (7). When Alcoff suggests that rituals of speaking are also dependent on the "meaning of the event" (7) what she means is that there is never a singular sign of a discursive event. The means of the discursive event is always dependent on the context of when it was spoken and by who it was spoken by. Alcoff defines this further when she writes,

> And an important implication of this claim is that meaning must be understood as plural and shifting, since a single text can engender diverse meanings given diverse contexts. Not only what is emphasized, noticed, and how it is understood will be affected by the location of both speaker and hearer, but the truth-value or epistemic status will also be affected. (7)

Alcoff goes on to say that this is most evident when we consider what a man says versus what a woman says. In other words, Alcoff argues that women must fight to have their words taken seriously, however, what men say are typically always taken seriously. In a more specified

example, Alcoff talks about how the effects of rituals of speaking can also be witnessed in a racialized way. Alcoff writes,

> When writers from oppressed races and nationalities have insisted that all writing is political the claim has been dismissed as foolish or grounded in resentment or it is simply ignored; when prestigious European philosophers say that all writing is political it is taken up as a new and original "truth" (7).

These rituals of speaking are maintained and perpetuated by white supremacy.

Alcoff reminds us that writing is always a political act (8). More often than not, it is not about whether the statement is "true." Rather, it is about who said the statement that makes it more believable. As mentioned before, the rituals of speaking is something that is an effect if white supremacy. As a system of power, white supremacy situates who is legible and who is not. For example, Alcoff writes,

> The discursive style in which some European post-structuralists have made the claim that all writing is political marks it as important and likely to be true for a certain (powerful) milieu; whereas the style in which African-American writers made the same claim marked their speech as dismissible in the eyes of the same milieu. (8)

From this example we can see how whiteness is always taken as truth. Whereas, anything that remains outside whiteness, must fight to be seen as capable of truth. In other words, truth is always dependent on social location. The question remains if truth can be determined outside of social location or as Alcoff argues, "the question of whether location bears simply on what is taken to be true or what is really true, and whether such a distinction can be upheld, involves the very difficult problem of the meaning of truth." (8) Alcoff states that what truth is has taken up different forms in history. For example, Alcoff writes that the current iteration of truth states that

it is independent of humans or as she writes, “ truth is about a realm completely independent of human action and expresses things "as they are in themselves," that is, free of human interpretation,” (8). However, I would argue this is still always dependent on social location. I do not believe it is possible to validate a truth outside of human interaction.

However, even though our current understanding of truth is that it lies outside human involvement, it makes truth almost inaccessible. In tracing how the genealogy of truth has evolved, Alcoff states,

> Arguably since Kant, more obviously since Hegel, it has been widely accepted that an understanding of truth which requires it to be free of human interpretation leads inexorably to skepticism, since it makes truth inaccessible by definition. (8)

Alcoff writes that these frustrations have people rethinking how they perceive truth. In particular, Alcoff states that instead of looking for a truth outside human involvement, we now look for a truth located *within* human interpretation (8). What the conversation around truth’s relationship to representation brings up is how we are actually defining truth. The reason truth is so difficult to make objectifiable is because unlike facts that are observed or proven, truth is assumed. In her study of what philosophers have to say about truth, Alcoff writes,

> On a coherentist account of truth, which is held by such philosophers as Rorty, Donald Davidson, Quine, and (I would argue) Gadamer and Foucault, truth is defined as an emergent property of converging discursive and non-discursive elements, when there exists a specific form of integration among these elements in a particular event. Such a view has no necessary relationship to idealism, but it allows us to understand how the social location of the speaker can be said to bear on truth. The speaker's location is one of

> the elements which converge to produce meaning and thus to determine epistemic validity. (9)

In this particular statement, the non-discursive element, as I understand, is something like social location. In other words, truth is a combination of what is said and who says it. Therefore, when we consider informal representation, we need to consider in what ways it is harmful and in what ways it is beneficial. As Alcoff reminded us in the opening pages of her essay, it is more obvious to see the harmful effects of speaking for others. However, we understand that truth is tied up to social location. Therefore, we need to figure out how informal representation can help those who are struggling to represent themselves.

Another reason why truth is difficult to ascertain is because people already have assumptions of what the truth is based on the speaker's social location. These assumptions are also more overwhelming for marginalized and minoritized groups and individuals. In particular, many white people have a predetermined assumption of what discursive acts they can expect from marginalized and minoritized people because that is what white supremacy has provided. This is something that many literary writers of color have been talking about. For example, in her highly acclaimed *Ted Talk* "The Danger of a Single Story," Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, talks about the problematic single story. Adichie defines the single story as follows,

> Create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become…The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. (Adichie)

Similarly, in *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, Cathy Park Hong talks about her heartbreaking experiences as a Korean American woman in an MFA program and her early

career as a poet based in the U.S. Hong talks at length that when she would incorporate her identity within her writing, choosing to self-represent her experiences, she was received with backlash by white colleagues. Specifically, these white colleagues did not welcome identitarianism in writing or if they did, it needed to be a story that white ears have already become accustomed to. Adichie's concept of the single story and Hong's experience with identity driven writing, ties into our ongoing conversation about informal representation and its relationship to truth and social location. In other words, the truth we come to believe about those in fraught social locations are often created from single stories that the dominant group applies to the oppressed group. Therefore, in thinking through informal representation, we must consider the factors already in place that already set up a political structure when it comes to representing others.

A single story is also a form of informal representation. A single story is how someone represents a person, culture, and/or group through *their* perspective. However, it can be considered more of a passive form of representation than an active one. In particular, Adichie conceptualizes the single story as a singular narrative of a group or persons. Moreover, a single story is a manipulative discursive act as Adichie writes,

> It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power…Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali. How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person

In other words, these singular stories are often directed towards a person, culture, or group who occupy a marginalized space. In particular, we need to seriously consider who makes these single

stories of those marginalized people and what was the purpose. For example, Adichie states that stories should not be disregarded because they carry a weight with them that is tied to power. Furthermore, as Adichie reminds us, we need to think about the person who is creating this story. The reason being is because they occupy a certain modicum of power that not only allows them to represent someone else through *their* perspective but for others to *accept* that story is representative of truth. Single stories are all around us. Similar to the power of white discursive acts, a single story is also perpetuated and supported by white supremacy. Single stories are hegemonic forms of essentialism. In other words, they suggest that all individuals who cannot speak for themselves are able to be made singular.

In our conversation surrounding forms of representation, what we must take a minute to ask is, who is this for? The question of audience is something that grounds our scholarship. I think it would be unfair to presume a singular audience for my work. Instead, I want to spend time talking through three different audiences. The first audience are women of color. While my work is mainly about Asian/American women, I think the stories I share are also experiences shared by other women of color. The second audience are scholars in the field of rhetoric/composition. The third audience are writing students. I want to focus on the third audience for now. Writing students are an audience for this work because it is our responsibility as writing teachers to help promote ways for students to become better participants of this world (Banks, Director's Message). In other words, writing teachers through the concept of critical literacy, must provide students with the tools needed to not only understand the world around them but to also be able to make an intervention in the world. This is an ongoing pedagogical principle for many writing instructors to help students be critical thinkers. For instance, in an

interview called “bell hooks: Cultural Criticism and Transformation,” hooks tells the interviewer the following,

> My own sense is that the most enabling resource that I can offer as a critic or an intellectual professor is the capacity to think critically about our lives. I think thinking critically is at the heart of anybody transforming their life and I really believe that a person who thinks critically, who, you know, may be extraordinarily disadvantaged, materially, can find ways to transform their lives, that can be deeply and profoundly meaningful in the same way that someone who maybe incredibly privileged materially and in crisis in their life may remain perpetually unable to resolve their life in any meaningful way if they don't think critically (hooks 3).

My work provides new insights into how Asian/American women have begun to tell their stories. My work will then provide students with ways to not only be a speaker for others but also a listener.

Within the shared quote by bell hooks, she suggests that critical literacy is an equally important pedagogical tool for marginalized students as well as privileged students. Oftentimes, we are pushed to promote and prioritize the advancements of minoritized and marginalized students. This approach is something I support and am an advocate of as well. In fact, even when we are teaching a majority white class, we still need to prioritize the celebration and advancements of minoritized and marginalized students. However, as writing instructors, we need to also ensure our pedagogical approaches help the social transformation of majority students. In other words, how can our work also help majority students to understand ways they can be better participants in the world? The one thing we know about power is that the systems that enable them are all interconnected. In order for us to promote equity, we need to also help

white students understand the material conditions in which they have been benefited from and how they can help those who have not received those same benefits. As bell hooks states, education is still a path to liberation (*Teaching to Transgress* 4). The reason we need to encourage more discussion of voices outside the majority when we are teaching students voices is because often those voices were not included in most discourses. For example, bell hooks talks about how when she was in college, it was mainly white women who were leading the Women and Gender Studies classes. However, they did not really encourage or bring voices of those who did not reflect themselves. For example, hooks writes,

> During my undergraduate and graduate school years, only white women professors were involved in developing Women's Studies programs. And even though I taught my first class as a graduate student on black women writers from a feminist perspective. It was from the context of a Black Studies program. At that time, I found, white women professors were not eager to nurture any interest in feminist thinking and scholarship on the part of black female students if that interest included critical challenges. (6)

We need to only incorporate more voices in the classroom if we really want to provide students, both privileged and not, with the tools needed for social transformation.

Chapter Previews

In each of the following three chapters, I explore examples of how Asian and Asian/American feminists have used rhetorical storytelling, a type of speech act, in silent and intimate ways to revisit the racial and gendered subjectivities placed on them. As it is pertinent to my research, I ground my intervention through the theoretical contributions on forms of representations and speech made by scholars working in cultural rhetorics, Asian/American studies, women of color feminisms, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism. This project aims at

undermining how the discipline of rhetoric has traditionally viewed what is speech and who can access speech. I chose to closely read Hong's *Minor Feelings*, Miller's *Know My Name*, and Thiranagama's *In My Mother's House* because each text shows how rhetorical storytelling looks differently for each respective work. These texts show that while there might a sense of a "shared" Asian and Asian/American identity, ultimately the Asian and Asian/American experience cannot be essentialized. Moreover, by considering the ideological discourses surrounding rhetorical silence, listening, and speaking, my project brings new insights into how informally represented communities do access speech, but in ways that might not be legible in dominant discourses.

My dissertation also contributes to poststructuralist and rhetorical discourses that seek to interrogate how binary oppositions reduce othered or minoritized bodies to Western hegemonic classifications. Through my chapter analyses, we see how the Asian and Asian/American experience is complex, beautiful, different, collective, and untranslatable. Specifically, this is why I choose to write Asian/American with the slash between "Asian" and "American" as opposed to the more commonly seen Asian-American or Asian American. As a scholar working on Asian/American rhetorics and as an Asian woman myself in the diaspora, I find the grammatical slash "/" to be the most welcoming to the multitude of experiences of Asians in America that also captures the complex ebbs and flows of experiences many Asian people have to their existence as an Asian in America . Moreover, the hyphenated classification, "Asian-American," assumes that there is an equal or equitable relationship between two nationalistic identities. Similarly, the absence of a separation between Asian and American, seen as "Asian American," erases any relationship between the two national identities. My chapters show the

ways Asian and Asian/American women use rhetorical storytelling as a discursive transgression against the racial and gender subjectivities placed on them.

In chapter two, "The Story of Anger told through Silence," I closely read Cathy Park Hong's memoir on race and identity, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (2020). Hong's memoir reveals the pain and hurt faced by Asian/Americans trying to forge an identity in a nation that systemically hates them. Through her rhetorical storytelling method of minor feelings, Hong describes the negative and dysphoric feelings experienced by Asian/Americans. Hong's minor feelings act as a discursive transgression because they give center stage to the negative feelings that white American optimism told Asian/Americans they should not experience. To make this argument, I first look at I analyze the exclusionary and inclusionary practices of Asian/Americans laid out by American politics and I explore how COVID19 led to an increase in Asian/American hate crimes. The historiographical foundations help trace what Hong uses minor feelings to resist. I read three chapters from Hong's memoir to analyze how minor feelings are a discursive transgression against white language supremacy, white nostalgia, and against the erasure of Asian/American women.

In chapter three, "'Were You Silent or Were You Silenced?'" I closely read Chanel Miller's *Know My Name* (2019).[1]Miller's memoir is a poignant exploration of her experiences prior to and following her sexual assault by Brock Turner at Stanford University in 2015. Within this chapter I engage with the following insights: how cases of gender and sexual experienced by Asian/American women often go under-documented and are often, informally represented

[1] The title of chapter three "Were you Silent or Were You Silenced?" is drawn from Oprah Winfrey's interview with the Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle. In the interview, Winfrey asks Markle whether she was silent or silenced during her time living with the British Royal Family following her marriage to Prince Harry. The tension and word play between choosing to be silent versus being silenced is a recurring theme within discourses on the quality of language use.

through other voices in more dominant social standings; how Miller's use of the racially anonymous pseudonym "Emily Doe" actually allowed her case to take central focus in public discourses; how colonialism and Orientalist frames Asian women as sexually docile and deviant; and how Miller uses the rhetorical storytelling methods of nonlinear writing, humor, and a victim-impact statement to revisit the gender and racial experiences placed on her as an Asian/American woman.

In chapter four, "The Story of Kinship Amongst Genocide," I closely read Sharika Thiranagama's autoethnographic work, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka* (2013). Thiranagama's work explores themes of home and displacement amongst the Tamil genocide. In particular, I focus on how Sri Lankan Tamil women use silent and intimate ways to talk about kinship. This storytelling about kinship during and following the Tamil genocide. By talking about kinship, Sri Lankan Tamil women are able to further the preservation of kinship—something that goes against the Sri Lankan Sinhalese government that tried to erase Tamil presence in Sri Lanka. To explain the importance of this storytelling, I analyze the following in my discussion of Thiranagama's work: the history of the Tamil genocide; theoretical contributions to representational epistemologies; and forms of kinship.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STORY OF ANGER TOLD THROUGH SILENCE: DECONSTRUCTING ASIAN/AMERICAN ANGER AND SILENCE IN CATHY PARK HONG'S *MINOR FEELINGS*

*"*Speaking, writing, and discoursing are not mere acts of communication; they are above all acts of compulsion. Please follow me. Trust me, for deep feeling and understanding require total commitment."
— Trinh T. Minh-ha

"Sometimes I wonder if the Asian American experience is when you're thinking about everyone else but no one is thinking about you."
-Steven Yeun

"It was once a form of shame, but now I say it: bad English is my heritage."
-Cathy Park Hong

"Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization."
-Gayatri Spivak

Introduction: "*Whom Shall We Welcome?*" U.S. Inclusion and Exclusion Practices on Asian/Americans Post-1965

Cathy Park Hong's 2020 memoir, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* offers new perspectives on the political state of Asian/Americans and Asian/American consciousness in an increasingly anti-Asian society through the storytelling lens of "minor feelings." However, in order to analyze minor feelings as a discursive transgression that gives new perspectives to Asian/American consciousness, we need to understand how being Asian/American means to be political first, and then human second. This section of the chapter traces various political events in the United States that specifically impacted Asian/Americans. In particular, this section will

help in showing how as a political and cultural group, Asian/Americans have always been informally represented in American public discourses and private imaginaries. Asian/Americans exist in a double bind within the condition of being informally represented. Asian/Americans and particularly, Asian/American women are marginalized due to their social location within the public discourses and private imaginaries of U.S. history and therefore, dominant groups often speak on behalf of them. However, we need to reckon with how Asian/Americans are doubly silenced because the model minority myth expects them to be silent with the false myth that their silence will lead to success in the model of white supremacy. Minor feelings as a discursive transgression is an important way to consider how speech acts have been accessed by historically, informally represented communities. Minor feelings give language to consider the positionality of being a racialized subject within a white America that speaks for you. Asian/American is a visible other that is expected to be silent. This is in contrast to the invisible hegemony of whiteness in America. Whiteness has become so commonplace in America which is what makes it so powerful as Richard Dyer puts it, "white power secures its dominance in seeming to not be anything at all," ("White")

Asian/American identity is one that is always in flux, always in movement, and one that is always debated. Hong writes,

> Most Americans know nothing about Asian Americans. They think Chinese is synecdoche for Asians the way *Kleenex* is for *tissues*. They don't understand that we're this tenuous alliance of many nationalities. There are so many qualifications weighing the "we" in Asian American. Do I mean Southeast Asian, South Asian, Muslim *and* non-Muslim, rich *and* poor? Are *all* Asians self-hating? What if my cannibalizing ego is not a

> racial phenomenon but my own damn problem. 'Koreans are self-hating, a Filipino friend corrected me over drinks. Filipinos, not so much,'" (18).

However, a common factor that informs the way discourses on Asian/American identity takes shape in American consciousness are the social movements and immigration policies of 1960s America as well as the increased attention to identity politics in the 1980s and 1990s. One example of this is the Hart-Celler Act of 1965. The Hart-Celler Act of 1965 which is more commonly known as the 1965 Immigration Act, is a federal law signed into the Constitution by President Lyndon B. Johnson and served the purpose of abolishing the National Origins Formula that preceded it. The National Origins Formula was a national-origin quota used in the United States from 1921-1965. The National Origins Formula was intended to promote and preserve American demographics as one rooted in non-ethnic whiteness. Specifically, the National Origins Formula promoted immigration from Northern and Western Europe while implementing quotas on immigration from Eastern Europe, Southern Europe, and Africa. The National Origins Formula was racially discriminatory as it was concerned with maintaining America as a white, Protestant America. The Hart-Celler Act then was introduced by Senator Phillip Hart and Congressman Emanuel Celler to combat the racially-discriminatory law. The Hart-Celler Act, which was informed by the 1953 presidential report *Whom We Shall Welcome*, laid the foundations for a new influx of diverse immigration, ending the preference of white immigrants that dates back to the eighteenth-century.

The Hart-Celler Act of 1965 brought an increase of Asian immigrants in America which contributed to an increase in Asian/American diasporic communities throughout the U.S. It is then no surprise then that Asian Americans Studies became a popular field of intellectual inquiry

within universities beginning in the 1960s, around the same time the United States saw an increase in immigration from Asia.

What Does It Mean to be an Asian in America?

What does it mean to be an Asian in America? Many try to pinpoint Asian Americans within a singular identity group. While there are many collectively shared racial and socioeconomic experiences, there is nothing singular about the Asian/Americans. For example, one of the most popular debates regarding Asian/Americans is who gets to be defined as Asian? Often, the Asian/Americans we think about tend to reflect people of East Asian descent from China, Korea, and Japan. This narrow projection of Asian/Americans excludes South Asians from India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan and excludes Southeast Asians from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Laos. The rendering of Asian/Americans through a strictly East Asian lens is a byproduct of Chinese laborers in America that formed the huge population of Asians in the 1800s. This is in contrast to the United Kingdom in which British Asians are often first associated with Indians and Pakistanis.

A discursive way the Asian/American identity is contested is through how we decide and or label it. Specifically, for me, I always include a discursive slash as opposed to the more common seen, hyphen, between Asian American. From a rhetorical standpoint, I think the absence of either symbol erases the complex and often fragmented histories of Asians within America. Moreover, the hyphen between Asian American signals a balanced relationship between both cultural identities. I opt for the discursive slash. This slash indicates that the Asian American identity is always in flux due to its fluidity.

Three key ways we can further interrogate the rhetorical formation of Asian/American is through the concepts of: assimilation, Brownness, and citizenship. These three terms aid in our (de)constructing of the Asian/American identity because it conveys how racial, political, and

social formation is tied to U.S. exclusionary concepts. To preview: assimilation shows how many ethnic groups become part of mainstream culture but also shows how much of assimilation is related to how whiteness is at the center of national identity; brownness in an Asian/American context is tied not only to race as defined through the Caste system but also it is an intermediary between whiteness and blackness; and lastly, citizenship technically means equal legal rights, however, as many ethnic studies scholars point out, citizenship is false universalism that ignores the racial inequities that deny equal rights. In looking at these three keywords, we can begin to make sense of what it means to be an Asian in America.

I name those concepts as they are key ways that rattle the hegemonic Western perception and narration of Asian-Americanness. For example, we can see this play out in Cathy Park Hong's *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (2020). Hong's memoir is a deeply personal, theoretical, and rhetorical analysis of her grappling with her Korean American identity. Any formative research on Asian/American rhetorics requires an attention to Hong's novel. The reason why is because it brings to the forefront many shared experiences around Asian/Americanness that showcases how Asian/Americaness is always fluid and in-flux. For example, some of these feelings and experiences include: internalized racism, language and power, and the pendulum sensation of always feeling the need to assimilate but also the desire to retain one's cultural identity. These experiences and sensations are always in conversation to what Hong refers to as "minor feelings." Hong defines minor feelings as,

> Minor feelings occur when American optimism is forced upon you, which contradicts your own racialized reality, thereby creating a static of cognitive dissonance. You are told, 'Things are so much better,' while you think, Things are the same. You are told, 'Asian Americans are so successful,' while you feel like a failure.… When minor

> feelings are finally externalized, they are interpreted as hostile, ungrateful, jealous, depressing, and belligerent, affects ascribed to racialized behavior that whites consider out of line. Our feelings are overreactions because our lived experiences of structural inequity are not commensurate with their deluded reality.

Minor feelings, then, names the sensation of frustration. In other words, Hong talks about how whiteness informs American optimism which consequently denies Asian/Americans from having agency of their feelings and experiences. valid in any feelings that departs from that optimism. Moreover, as Hong describes, any discussion or confession of those feelings are invalidated by whiteness. Asian/Americans are scolded for expressing themselves. They are told that their feelings are "out of line" (Hong). Both the denial and disciplining of natural expression double downs on hegemonic depictions and treatment of Asian/Americans as docile subjects.

Moreover, from Hong's definition of minor feelings, we can see how much of the expected experiences and feelings delineated by white American optimism also further perpetuates the model minority myth. The model minority myth, sometimes known as Asian American exceptionalism, is a violent narrative that Asians are a model ethnic and immigrant group because they are more successful than other ethnic groups in America. In her definition of minor feelings, Hong describes how many of the expectations placed on Asians by white American optimism are those that reflect model minority paradigms. For example, when she says that one of the optimistic sentiments are that "Asian American are so successful," it makes any Asian/American who may not feel that way feel like they failed at being Asian/American.

I view minor feelings as a form of successful resistance. One way to think about minor feelings in this framing is through a secondary definition Hong gives to minor feelings. Specifically, Hong states,

> Another definition of minor feelings is that so much of culture is framed around stories of the individual overcoming obstacles that are racial—or structural—in origin. The racial trauma is framed as something to overcome personally, after which the individual experiences some kind of self--affirmation and release. Minor feelings by contrast, are ongoing, stuck; they are truer to the trauma of living in a racist, capitalist society.

The reason I would call minor feelings a form of resistance is because it calls racial trauma something that is always "ongoing" in a society like that of the United States. While there are many important narratives by Asian/Americans and other racialized groups discussing their overcoming of racial trauma, minor feelings is resistance because it refuses to have its trauma absolved for the sake of white sentimentalism.

COVID19/anti-Asian Hate

One particular focus I want to apply to Hong's *Minor Feelings* is considering the stakes of the memoir in the backdrop of its 2020 publication. Originally published in February 25, 2020, Hong's memoir on Asian/American racial trauma and resistance almost seemed kismet for when the world would undoubtedly "shut down" in the next month because of the coronavirus also known as the COVID19 pandemic. Throughout the pandemic, there was an increase of Asian American hate crimes. Three such examples of hate crimes included the 2021 Atlanta Spa Shooting and the two mass shootings that occurred during the 2023 Lunar New Year celebrations in Monterey Park and Half Moon Bay. The three incidents were not only targeted towards Asian Americans but also took place during or in Asian/American spaces. Specifically, the many Asian women (often undocumented and/or recently immigrated) work at salons of different degrees. Additionally, Lunar New Year is an East Asian celebration. Moreover, Monterey Park in California is a suburban "Chinatown."

In particular, one of the most detrimental consequences of COVID19 was the rise in anti-Asian rhetoric. This violent anti-Asian rhetoric was galvanized by the former U.S. President of that time, Donald Trump. Trump would constantly refer to the pandemic as the "China virus" or the "Chinese virus" because one of the earliest known cases of COVID19 originated from Wuhan, China. For example, the first known labeling of the coronavirus as the "China virus" or "Chinese virus" by former President Trump took place on March 16, 2020 — a day after most nations "shut down" due the coronavirus pandemic. I believe that the fear of COVID19 and the ongoing frustrations and feelings of hopelessness surrounding the shutdowns, fueled the dormant anti-Asian rhetoric that was embedded in U.S. history. Trump's use of the racist and discriminatory label was first publicly witnessed through Twitter (now known as X). The tweet read,

> The United States will be powerfully supporting those industries, like Airlines and others, that were particularly affected by the Chinese virus. We will be stronger than ever before! (Trump on X).

By personifying the disease with an ethnic group, Trump catalyzed further racial violence towards Chinese communities and other Asian/American communities. Moreover, by naming American industries that were heavily impacted financially because of COVID19, and then by directing the cause of that hit to an ethnic community, Trump made it so that American nationalism meant anti-Asian.

Therefore, an anti-Asian American rhetoric fueled by American nationalism led to an increase in violence against Asian/Americans. A study conducted by *The American Journal of Public Health* found that racial violence against Chinese people and other Asian/Americans skyrocketed after Trump's tweet. In their study, they examined 700,000 tweets which included

hashtags like #coronavirus, #COVID19, and #chinesevirus, from the week before and the week after Trump's March 16th tweet. The study found that 50.4% of the tweets that included the hashtag "#chinesevirus," were accompanied by other violent rhetoric against Asians. The study found that most of those discriminatory tweets all reflected racist sentiments of distrust against Asians, promoted further restrictions against Asian immigrants, and used derogatory language against Asians.

The anti-Asian American rhetoric also affected the safety and well-being of Asian/Americans outside online platforms. The organization and advocacy group, Stop AAPI Hate, had 3,795 *reported* incidents of hate crimes from the period of March 19, 2020 - February 28, 2021. However, it is not uncommon to believe that the number of hate crimes was actually much higher than the number of *reported* hate crimes. Historically, many Asian/Americans choose to remain silent when dealt with violence due to the fear of retaliation, deportation, and further stigma. Additionally, the rise of anti-Asian hate crimes within that period is due Trump's continuous labeling of the COVID19 pandemic as the "Chinesevirus." As many scholars of American history are aware, Trump's main followers and reputation is one that flourishes in a deeply conservative, right wing, and white supremacist camp. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of his followers would use his labeling of the pandemic as the "Chinesevirus" as both motivation and justification to harm Asian/Americans.

Subverting White Language Supremacy through "Bad English"

In the chapter, "Bad English," Hong talks about her complicated relationship with English given her experiences of being a child of Korean immigrants living in a predominantly English-speaking society. Hong uses anecdotes as a way to reflect on her experiences with "bad English." Through these anecdotes, Hong critiques how her way of speaking—a speaking style

shared by many minoritized, racialized, and immigrant communities — becomes consumed in a patronizing, "cutesy" way. This chapter reveals how the agenda of white American optimism treats any form of language outside of white language supremacy as demoralizing and infantilizing. The *Conference on College Composition and Communication* defines white language supremacy as a discursive practice that assists,

> white supremacy by using language to control reality and resources by defining and evaluating people, places, things, reading, writing, rhetoric, pedagogies, and processes in multiple ways that damage our students and our democracy. It imposes a worldview that is simultaneously pro-white, cisgender, male, heteronormative, patriarchal, ableist, racist, and capitalist.

Hong uses minor feelings to express her anger with how the ways of speaking by Asian and Asian immigrants are faced with ridicule. However, instead of changing her speech, she embraces what she refers to as *bad English*. The ways in which Hong engages and embraces bad English is a discursive transgression that signals how informally represented communities have always been speaking. But because the english is not *English* or mainstream English, those in dominant groups do not view the speech acts as speaking.

Stylistically, the chapter "Bad English" also reflects Hong's embracing of bad English. The chapter is filled with disjointed anecdotes, emotions that range from anger to humor, all things which mirror the "occasionally incoherent, often unpredictable nature of 'bad English' itself," (Nanavati 5). However, the power of Hong's chapter is that the minor feelings associated with non-standard ways of speaking allow her to embrace bad English which is a discursive transgression against white language supremacy. For example, Hong begins her chapter talking about her obsession with Japanese stationery. She writes,

> I had a special, almost erotic relationship with my stationery when I was young. I collected stationery items the way other kids collected dolls or action figures…I too felt passionately about the lead pencil with a Hello Kitty bauble clasped to the tip with a delicate silver chain. And erasers too, scented raspberry or vanilla, molded into plump pastel wall-eyes Sanrio critters. I adored my erasers so much I had to repress the urge to bite their heads off. (91)

The anecdote about Hong's admiration of collecting Japanese stationery appears in the opening paragraph of the chapter and is the only place it appears. While the anecdote does not explicitly talk about language, it sets up Hong's entire engagement with language practices that the chapter explores. Specifically, the anecdote functions as a conceit to analyze the parallels between Hong's violent-like consumption of Japanese stationery and Hong's disdain towards how the English of American culture would devour her daily. Moreover, I argue that the extended metaphor sets up an additional layer to understand how in the same way Hong consumed Japanese stationery because they were aesthetically cute, the English spoken by Asian immigrants and Asian/Americans were consumed as a commodity of cuteness. Sianne Ngai talks extensively about how the cuteness aesthetic — things, people, cultures, speaking—actually aestheticizes powerlessness. In her essay, "The Cuteness of the Avant-Garde," (2005), Ngai writes,

> The value of cuteness seems to expand in tandem with this shift, from the unequivocally positive (the charming socks), to the ambiguous or potentially negative (the indecent boy). While most evidently tied to the physical appearances of humans and objects, however, it is clear that cuteness also becomes identified with a "twittering" use of or style of language, marked as feminine or culturally or nationally other. (814).

Later on in the essay, Ngai provides an example of the frog-shaped sponge. This is a mundane everyday object that would be classified as cute. However, as Ngai's analysis reveals, the frog-shaped sponge's physical properties also reveal its affective properties. Ngai states, "From here it is only a short step to see how the formal properties associated with cuteness—smallness, compactness, softness, simplicity, and pliancy—call forth specific affects: helplessness, pitifulness, and even despondency," (816). In thinking through Ngai's discourse on how cute things reflect a sense of powerlessness, it makes sense as to why as a child, Hong had an almost animalistic desire to be in control of something, *of anything*. This is especially revealing when we consider how her own subjectivity of an Asian/American female was constantly being consumed for its powerless cuteness by white American optimism and white language supremacy. In understanding the relationship between someone who occupies a dominant location and someone who occupies an informally represented location, we can return back to Ngai's critique of the cuteness aesthetic. Ngai writes,

> We can thus start to see how cuteness might provoke ugly or aggressive feelings, as well as the expected tender or maternal ones. For in its exaggerated passivity and vulnerability, the cute object is often intended to excite a consumer's sadistic desires for mastery and control as much as his or her desire to cuddle. (816)

Through Ngai's analysis of the cute aesthetic, we can understand how things or people that an aesthetic of powerlessness have become consumed as a commodity. In other words, in order to classify something or someone as "cute," the classifier must exist in a role of domination over what or who is cute. This power relation is apparent when we look at how white language supremacy treats bad English through a domineering lens. Ngai's scholarship provides nuanced ways to examine how the affective condition of cuteness applies to how white language

supremacy consumes "bad English," which is what Hong refers to as the English spoken by non-native or racialized speakers.

Postcolonial criticism also bears on new ways of analyzing how colonialist ideologies, like white language supremacy, also furthers the othering of racialized non-native English speakers. Orientalism, as Edward Said informs us, is an ideological basis that finds power in the repetition of stereotypes, narratives, and ideas that imperialist powers have of any group of people east of Europe.[2] Orientalism is not just an innocuous, mythical construct of lies established by imperialist powers.[3] Orientalism is an interconnected system of myths, narratives, and policies that lead to real-world power relations. This is understood through the interconnected behaviors and patterns of what Said classifies as *latent* Orientalism and *manifest* Orientalism as Said writes, "the distinction I am making is really between an unconscious (and certainly untouchable) positivity which I shall call *latent* orientalism, and the other various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth which I shall call, *manifest* Orientalism," (201). In other words, latent Orientalism is the unconscious ideas and beliefs about people, whereas, manifest Orientalism are the policies that are enacted upon based on those beliefs.

Orientalism is another lens to understand the treatment of bad English speakers of Asian descent by the dominant system of white language supremacy. In other words, infantilizing and

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[2] People or groups of communities who are referred to as Oriental typically come from Arab speaking or Islamic countries, East and South Asia, and Northern Africa.

[3] In *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said specifically focuses on the imperial powers of France and England and how their colonizing efforts led to the construction of the "Orient." However, we can see from current postcolonial scholarship that colonialist ideologies that also perpetuate Orientalism can be expanded outside of France and England. For example, the particular colonialist ideology I examine is white language supremacy. Formed through the West's violent history of enslavement and white supremacy, white *language* supremacy treats the speech of non-native English speakers and racialized English speakers in an orientalist way. Therefore, white language supremacy operates in a way that mimics European imperialist orientalizing of the East.

demoralizing the English spoken by Asian and Asian/Americans is a way of making the Other. For example, latent orientalism tells us that the unconscious certainty that any English that deters in structure and utterance from white language supremacy is backward and inferior. Similarly, manifest orientalism acts on those assumptions by making it part of the white nationalist agenda to ridicule those who speak bad English. The orientalizing of bad English also leads to many racialized English as first-language speakers internalizing racism when they too feel shame at how the bad English is spoken by other racialized bodies. For example, in reflecting on the experiences that Asian immigrants and Asian/Americans face when speaking English, Hong states,

> My mother's English remained rudimentary during her forty-plus years living in the United States. When she speaks Korean, my mother speaks her mind…But her English is a crush of piano keys that used to make me cringe whenever she spoke to a white person. As my mother spoke, I watched a white person, oftentimes a woman, put on a fright mask of strained tolerance: wide-eyes frozen in trapped patience, smile widened in condescension. As she began speaking in a voice reserved for toddlers, I stepped in. (98-99)

In reading this particular section of "Bad English," I am often reminded of Amy Tan's discussion of Englishes in her short essay, "Mother Tongue" (1995). In the essay, Tan, who is a second-generation Chinese American, talks candidly about the different ways she speaks English. In particular, Tan adopts a white mainstream English when she is in formalized settings like during her book talks but retreats back to her mother tongue when she is in intimate spaces like in her home or with family. Tan also talks candidly about the English her mother speaks. Similar to Hong's poignant description of observing the way other people make assumptions about her

mother's intellect when she speaks bad English, Tan also describes the ways native English speakers belittle her mother based on her English. Tan writes, "my mother has long realized the limitations of her English as well. When I was fifteen, she used to have me call people on the phone to pretend I was she. In this guise, I was forced to ask for information or even to complain and yell at people who had been rude to her, (2). Moreover, like Hong, Tan racially internalized feelings of shame regarding the way her mother would speak English. For example, Tan states, "my mother's "limited" English limited my perception of her. I was ashamed of her English. I believed that her English reflected the quality of what she had to say, that is, because she expressed them imperfectly, her thoughts were imperfect," (2). Tan eventually comes to embrace her mother's English as a valid way of speaking and acknowledges that way of speaking as one of her mother tongues. Additionally, Tan begins to critique the way native-English speakers would make harmful assumptions about her mother's intellect because her English was not representative of white mainstream English. In thinking through the theoretical lens of orientalism, we can see how racialized non-native English speakers have their speech acts treated as if it is something that is backwards.

Hong talks about the resentment she has towards how English has completely devoured her Korean American culture. This devouring for example, in reflecting on her year spent in Korea, Hong remarks,

> I was disturbed by how much globalization has led to English cannibalizing Korean. Reading a sign in Hangul characters, I slowly sounded out an unfamiliar word, only to realize that the word was *lip–suk-shen*. A friend told me that teenage couples preferred saying "I love you" in English rather than the Korean equivalent because they thought it was a truer expression of their love. (97)

However, instead of giving power to the infantilizing of bad English, Hong embraces this form of speaking and writing.

"*Looking Sideways*" - Resisting White Innocence

Minor feelings function as a discursive transgression to signal that informally represented communities, like Asian/Americans, have always looked sideways at American popular culture because the Americans represented in those productions perpetuate and preserve white innocence that ultimately harms people of color. The work of this close reading is to bring focus to how informally represented communities have used minor feelings and particularly, the lens of "looking sideways" to critique formalized representations of society that happen in seemingly innocuous modes like that of American popular culture. Moreover, while white people are expected to think of childhood through a nostalgia of innocence, Asian/Americans look sideways at their childhood through the minor feelings of shame. A In the chapter, "The End of White Innocence," Hong uses minor feelings to talk about how she "looks sideways" at her childhood as a way to narrativize her racialized experiences of growing up Asian and being raised by Asian immigrants in America. Childhood has always been formally represented through the rhetorical lens of innocence. For example, this is seen in the poetry of Williams Wordsworth as Hong remarks, "Williams Wordsworth is one of the architects of childhood as we sentimentalize it today," (70). Oftentimes, we are reminded about how we must protect children and preserve their innocence. However, this association with innocence does not apply to children of color in America and in extension, students of color. While the childhood experienced by many white children is one that is always associated with innocence and purity, the childhood of any non-white child is one that is always marked with difference, racism, violence, and grief. For informally represented children, like Asian/American children, they are not afforded innocence.

I argue that Hong uses minor feelings as a discursive transgression to antagonize childhood innocence as it only protects white children and harms children of color, and specifically for Hong, Asian/American children who are often informally represented. Specifically, Hong uses minor feelings to resist associating childhood with innocence because that was something that was never afforded to Asian/American children. Minor feelings as a discursive transgression then signals a resistance against (white) childhood innocence. This is evident in my close reading of "The End of White Innocence." In particular, my close reading pays specific attention to Hong's minor feelings of "looking sideways" as she reflects on her childhood experiences with American popular culture, political events, temporal movement, and spatial movement as a way to trouble the formalized representations that lead us to believing that childhood always signifies innocence and nostalgia.

Interrogating White Nostalgia in the Catcher in the Rye

Hong comments that she never looked back to childhood. To do so, she remarks, would be to look back in nostalgia — something she does not hold space for when she thinks of her childhood. Rather, Hong opts to look sideways. For Hong, "looking sideways" at her childhood encompasses her minor feelings, whereas, to look back with nostalgia will uphold white American optimism that Hong is actively working against. She writes,

> Rather than look back on childhood, I always looked sideways. If to look back is tinted with honeyed cinematography of nostalgia, to look sideways at childhood is tinted with the sicklier haze of envy, an envy that ate at me when I stayed for dinner at my white friend's family or watched the parade of commercials and TV shows that made it clear what a child should look like and what kind of family they should grow up in (68).

This perspective of "looking sideways" is influenced by Kathryn Bond Stockton's use of "growing sideways" to signal how a queer child grows up. In *The Queer Child, Or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth-Century* (2009), Stockton theorizes the concept of "growing sideways" as a way to trouble the conservative trajectory of growing *up*. In particular, "growing sideways" describes the nonlinear ways a child may grow. It is a lens to look at a childhood marked with wayward paths as queer upbringing almost always defies linear trajectories. This concept of "growing sideways" can also be a productive lens to think about the upbringing of children of color. For many children of color, their childhood exists outside a model of white innocence and therefore, also follows a non-linear trajectory from childhood to adulthood.

In thinking through Stockton's concept of "growing sideways," Hong's concept of "looking sideways," similarly functions as a lens to understand how Asian/American children grow up. Moreover, it functions as a way to show contempt. Hong states, "To 'look sideways' telegraphs doubt, suspicion, and even contempt ," (68). Hong talks about the contempt she had in school because she was pressured to cathect herself to the experiences of white protagonists. In particular, this can be analyzed through Hong's discussion of American popular culture that promotes white American optimism. Specifically, this is witnessed in Hong's grappling with the beloved cult classic book *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) by J.D. Salinger and the aesthetically pleasing film, *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012) directed by Wes Anderson. Separated by more than half of a decade, these two canons in American popular culture share the common factor that they both promote white nostalgia in the context of civic upheaval and racial violence.

Hong looks sideways with contempt over how many of her teachers in school would force books on her that featured "entitled white protagonists" (69) because of the belief that the students would relate to the protagonists. However, the experiences of many of these

protagonists were something that students like Hong could never relate to as they were always experiences that were about childhood innocence. In "End of White Innocence," Hong talks extensively about the novel, *Catcher in the Rye*. *Catcher in the Rye* is a canonical coming-of-age novel that deals with teen angst. The novel follows the protagonist, Holden Caulfield, as he recalls a weekend in his life from the year prior. The events reflect Caulfield's experiences with rebellion, intimacy, and alienation. Hong's minor feelings gives us a nuanced understanding to how the reflective lens of "looking sideways" operates discursively as a way to reckon with her frustrations surrounding white American optimism as well as the American education system that formally represents an American childhood and student. For example, we can see this through how Hong describes her confusion in reading through Holden Caulfield's obsession with childhood. She writes,

> I found Holden's fixation with childhood even more alien. I wanted to get my childhood over with as quickly as possible. Why didn't Holden want to grow up? Who were these pure and precocious children who wore roller skates that needed a skate key? What teenage boy had a fantasy of catching children in a field of rye lest they happened to fall off a cliff into adulthood? (69)

Hong's resentment of the *Catcher in the Rye* and more so, the treatment of the novel as an experience all teenagers should *and* can relate is due to the fact that Holden Caulfield represents the very antithesis of someone like Hong and other informally represented children. Hong writes,

> The ninth-grade teacher told us we would fall in love with *Catcher in the Rye*. The elusive maroon cover added to its mystique. I kept waiting to fall in love with Salinger's cramped, desultory writing until I was annoyed. Holden Caulfield was just some rich prep school kid who cursed like an old man, spent money like water, and took taxis

> everywhere. He was an entitled asshole who was as supercilious as the classmates he called "phony." (69).

In short, what we can deduct from this passage is that part of the mythos of the American education system is that it assumes that students will be in awe of *Catcher in the Rye* because *Catcher in the Rye* is formally represented as providing a coming of age story that is universal with other American students. However, as Hong's writing reveals to us, this is not the case for most children of color who are historically informally represented. American education is built on and thrives on the principles laid out by white language supremacy. Therefore, the system that is meant to further equity, actually ends up perpetuating social inequity instead. Earlier in my introduction to this chapter, I talked about Iris Marion Young's essay "Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship," (1989). As we can recall, Young's essay talks about how despite the aim of citizenship, inequality and oppression, still exists as she writes,

> During this angry, sometimes bloody, political struggle in the nine- teenth and twentieth centuries, many among the excluded and disad- vantaged thought that winning full citizenship status, that is, equal political and civil rights, would lead to their freedom and equality. Now in the late twentieth century, however, when citizenship rights have been formally extended to all groups in liberal capitalist societies, some groups still find themselves treated as second-class citizens. Social movements of oppressed and excluded groups have recently asked why extension of equal citizenship rights has not led to social justice and equality…The assumed link between citizenship for everyone, on the one hand, and the two other senses of citizenship-having a common life with and being treated in the same way as the other citizens-on the other, is itself a problem (250-1)

In thinking through Young's essay, we can see that while the intent of the American education system is to promote social mobility and a form of equity, it actually sustains white supremacy, and particularly, white language supremacy. It may seem that Holden Caulfield stands in for a universal experience of teen angst, what he actually stands in for is a particular social location that can only be described as privileged, white, and masculine. This social location is not attainable for informally represented people and in this case, children of color and particularly Asian/American children. Therefore, something as seemingly innocuous as assuming all students will relate to Holden Caulfield actually hurts students, like Hong, whose life experiences do not parallel anything like that of Holden Caulfield's. The function of Hong's minor feelings here is that it also works to show how white American optimism exists in every microcosm of daily life.

Preserving White Innocence through Wes Anderson's Moonrise Kingdom

The American obsession of seeing childhood through innocence can be seen in films as well. Film, like writing, is all about speech acts. In other words, what stories we consume, who writes the stories, and why we listen — or in the case of films, watch—relates back to who has access to formal representation. Film at its core is all about representation. What it represents is not solely independent of the film itself but the context in which it is produced and even distributed. In other words, a film represents things that are happening in society. These can be macro-level representations that reflect a specific geopolitical history; it can also be more intimate and be drawn from the director's life yet at the core, the film will still be about representation. Catherine Abell challenges this notion that all film is not only representational but must also hold aesthetic merit. Specifically, Abell in looking at cinema argues that,

> [cinema] can be a representational artwork only if it is aesthetically rewarding in virtue of the way it represents its object. It cannot be valuable merely in virtue of its formal features or the thing it represents." (8).

In other words, Abell argues that cinema must have an aesthetic that exists outside of its mere signification as a formal object. However, I would argue that if films are an entity filled with significations and chains of significations of people, groups, and spaces —then the medium of film is representational at its core. If this is the case, then we must also consider the question of what, who, and how films represent these subjects that are constituent of a specific society. Moreover, we also need to pay attention to what representations these films leave behind.

We can think of films as formal representation and as modes of rhetorical expression that traditionally do not relate the experiences of informally represented communities. This applies to *Minor Feelings* in two prominent ways. For one, Hong's minor feelings function as a discursive transgression to trouble white America's optimism that promotes the allure of arrested development, or specifically white innocence, that infiltrates much of American popular culture. We have seen this in my earlier analysis of how Hong's lens of "looking sideways" provides a more nuanced perspective into the violence that white childhood innocence brings to children of color. Secondly, Hong's minor feelings remind us to be wary of films, and other formalized representations in American popular culture, that choose to prioritize white innocence in the backdrop of racial violence.

"The End of White Innocence" illustrates this through Hong's critique of the 2012 Wes Anderson film, *Moonrise Kingdom*. However, before we begin analyzing *Moonrise Kingdom* within the context of informal representation, minor feelings, and Asian/American consciousness, it is critical to understand where director, Wes Anderson, draws his inspiration

from as it provides us with more insight into how *Moonrise Kingdom* fits in the larger discourse of white innocence. Wes Anderson is an American filmmaker known for his eccentric, visual style films that often include an ensemble cast and have a personal story motivating the plot. Wes Anderson's films are so notable in American popular culture that his film style became a viral trend on TikTok and Instagram in the Spring of 2023. Thousands of videos can be seen on the social media platforms where users film mundane activities but stylize their videos to the aesthetic of Wes Anderson films. The TikTok videos and/or Instagram Reels often feature pastel-color or filter backgrounds, Alexandre Desplat's song "Obituary" accompanying the video, and include video headings that state the activity of the individual video followed by "you better not act like you're in a Wes Anderson film."[4]

As we can see from the viral videos on TikTok and Instagram, Wes Anderson is a prominent figure in American popular culture. The pastel colors, hipster-character types, and quirky music are all part of the Wes Anderson "genre" of films. Hong notes that at one point, Wes Anderson's films, like *Moonrise Kingdom*, would be characteristic of the New Sincerity aesthetic (Hong 70). This style of aesthetic is rooted in feeling. Hong writes, "Though they prized authenticity above all else, they stylized their work in a vaguely repellent faux-naïf aesthetic that dismissed politics for shoe-grazing self-interest," (70). In considering the films of Wes Anderson, the New Sincerity aesthetic is seen through how most of his films capture a nostalgic moment when life was pure and easy. This is most prominently seen in how most of Wes Anderson films do not include modern technology like the internet or cell phones.

At what point does a film whose aesthetic can be summed up by the yearning for nostalgia cause problems? And how does this aesthetic amplify Hong's use of minor feelings to

[4] "Obituary" by Alexandre Desplat is a song that is featured in Wes Anderson's film, *French Dispatch* (2021).

signal the resistance of white American optimism? According to Hong, similar to her critique of *Catcher in the Rye*, it occurs when that nostalgia for white innocence makes us turn a blind to the racial upheaval that is happening at the same time. As all films are about representation, what is left out becomes just as important as what is presented. In particular, Hong critiques *Moonrise Kingdom* as an example of this nostalgic erasure. *Moonrise Kingdom* is set in 1965 in a fictional island called New Penzance which is loosely based on New England, Massachusetts. The basis of the movie is that two twelve-year old's, Sam and Suzy, run away to a place called Moonrise Kingdom where they act as self-sufficient adults. Their careless decision leads to a huge party looking for them. The movie ends happily with the children found and continuing their innocent relationship. Additionally, Sam, who was an orphan, gets adopted by the police officer leading the search. Sam grows up to be a junior cop himself.

Moonrise Kingdom — the pastel-colored film beaming with the nostalgia of young childhood love that ends on a happy note and leads to a young orphan taking after his guardian and becoming a cop, makes us forget that 1965 was a violent time filled with racial violence and political change. Some landmark events that showcase the violence against people of color in 1965 America include the assassination of Malcom X and "Bloody Sunday" which is the name referred to describe police brutality against black protestors as they marched from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. Other important events that signaled the moments of political change in America include the Hart Cellar Act of 1965 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Both acts passed during President Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency gave more rights, or at least the illusion of better rights, to black Americans and non-Western European immigrants.

Therefore, when we consider the events that are also happening in 1965, we have a better understanding of why Hong critiques Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom* as another example of

American popular culture that promotes white innocence. *Moonrise Kingdom* then represents not just white childhood nostalgia but also a nostalgia of a screen memory (Berlant, "Big Man") that captures an America without minorities or as Hong writes, "It's as if the Neverland of New Penzance is the last imperiled island before the incoming storm of minorities floods in," (Hong 73). Through Hong's minor feelings, we can see how formalized representations of American popular culture really harms communities who are informally represented. This is because formalized representations of American popular culture like what we see in film and literature, represent a world which strives to protect whiteness as Hong writes,

> Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom* is just one of countless contemporary films, works of literature, pieces of music and lifestyle choices where wishing for innocent times means fetishizing an era where the nation was violently hostile to anyone different. Hollywood, an industry that shapes not only our national but global memories, has been the most reactionary cultural perpetrator of white nostalgia, stuck in a time loop and refusing to acknowledge that America's racial demographic has radically changed since 1965. Movies are cast if the country were still "protected" by a white supremacist law that guarantees that the only Americans seen are the carefully curated European descendants. (73)

"Portrait of an Artist" - In Memoriam of Untranslatable Women

As we can recall, minor feelings reflect the frustrations faced by many Asian/Americans when their racialized experiences are ridiculed as something "that's all in your head" (Hong 53) within the model of white supremacy. I argue in my chapter on *Minor Feelings*, that minor feelings are a form of rhetorical storytelling that function as a discursive transgression that reveals how many informally represented communities have always been speaking. In particular,

this section will closely read the chapter, “Portrait of an Artist,” to analyze how Hong uses minor feelings as a discursive transgression to signal a (re)focus on experiences related to sexual violence faced by many Asian/American women that are often erased in the public discourses of U.S. history.

Stylistically, I also chose to place the close reading of “Portrait of an Artist " following my close reading of “The End of White Innocence " because both chapters in Hong’s memoir focuses on Hong’s relationship to literary texts and cultural productions. As my close reading for “The End of White Innocence " reveals, Hong finds an issue with the white innocence that was celebrated in works like J.D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and Wes Anderson’s *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012). Whereas, as my close reading of “Portrait of a Young Artist " shows us, Hong is enamored by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s work *Dictee* (1982) because it is a text that refuses to be legible for white readers.

We can see this occurring in “Portrait of an Artist " when she writes about the late Korean-American writer, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, most notable for her work *Dictee* (1982). In the chapter, Hong discusses the admiration she had for *Dictee*, a work she first came across during her time as a college student at Oberlin while taking a class with prominent Korean poet, Myung Mi Kim. *Dictee* is a multimodal, genre-bending work that is part poetry, part memoir, and part visual. A text once panned as formally inaccessible, it is now treated as a cult-classic darling of avant-garde aesthetic. *Dictee* is a nine-chapter work that is named after nine different Greek muses. *Dictee* examines the survival and livelihood of women in the context of extremely violent patriarchy. The main focus of *Dictee* looks at the violence in Korea due to Japanese occupation (1910-1945) and the aftermath of Japan leaving Korea (1945-1953). In particular, Cha documents this violence through the personal experiences of her mother as well as through

writing about Yu Guan Soon — a seventeen-year old martyr who was active in the protests against Japanese occupation. The stories within *Dictee* examine how the women confront exile and identity in the context of patriarchy.

Unlike J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, Cha's *Dictee* was a literary text that Hong could relate to because the characters represented what it means to exist as an informally represented woman in a patriarchal society. Moreover, *Dictee* is known for its non-linear structure and writing style and includes non-English writing as Hong describes,

> Cha doesn't ever direct your reading of *Dictee*. She refuses to translate the French or contextualize the letter by former South Korean leader Syngam Rhee to Franklin D. Roosevelt or caption the photo of French actress Renée Jeanne Falconetti in Carl Dryer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. The reader is a detective puzzling out her own connections. (154)

This is a stylistic choice by Cha that mirrored her own relationship with English. *Dictee* refuses to appease the demands of white language supremacy. In other words, the writing of *Dictee* refuses to be linear, legible, predictable, and formalized. Instead, the writing of *Dictee* is an example of the possibility of what writing can offer when it resists the demands of white language supremacy. This is an example of how many informally represented communities, like Asian/American women, have always been speaking but we as scholars trained in Western rhetorical tradition fail to listen because we cannot understand it.

It is for that reason that Hong becomes so drawn to *Dictee* when she first encounters the text in college. Hong recounts that the Asian/American literary writing she did encounter seemed inauthentic to her as if "it was staged by white actors," (155). In particular for Hong, the Korean

language was intimate and personal, whereas, English was always associated with the subjectivity of always being an immigrant or foreign as Hong writes,

> When I wrote in English, a language which I, from my childhood, associated with customs officers, hectoring teachers, and Hallmark cards. Even after all those years since I learned English, I still couldn't shake the feeling that to write anything was to fill in a blank or recite back the original. (155)

Therefore, Hong finds her own issues with English reflected in *Dictee* because Cha's non-linear writing expresses how English also failed to reflect her own consciousness as a Korean-American woman as Hong informs us, "Cha spoke my language by indicating that English was *not* her language, that English could never be a true reflection of her consciousness," (155).

Although, it's not the shared sentiments about language between Hong and Cha that are central to this Hong's chapter. Rather, it is a gruesome discovery about what happened to Cha and the loud silence around that violence which Hong writes through and about from the perspective of minor feelings that is central to Hong's focus on Cha. This close reading focusing on Hong's research on Cha allows us to think about how we are contributing to the pain faced by Asian/American women by continually choosing to silence their experiences. Rather, the focus of Hong's eulogy-esque chapter on Cha and my close reading of the chapter is related more so to Cha's rape and murder which happened a week following the publication of *Dictee*. On November 5th, 1982 in New York City, thirty-one-year-old Cha was heading to meet her husband at 5pm at the Puck Building. Cha's husband was a photographer who was documenting the building's renovations. Cha never had a chance to meet her husband. When Cha entered the building, she came across Joseph Sanza, the Puck Building security guard she met the other times she visited her husband at the building. Sanza was a wanted serial rapist who escaped to

New York City. According to Hong's research on the case, Puck Building hired him because he knew English (165). On November 5th, 1982, Joseph Sanza raped and murdered Cha. Hong writes, "After Sanza raped Cha in the sub-basement of the Puck, he beat her with a nightstick and then strangled her to death," (166). Sanza discarded Cha's body in a parking lot of Elizabeth Street, a few blocks from her home.

Hong expresses how almost no review or article wrote about the rape and homicide or if they did, they only talked about the murder and not the rape as Hong writes,

> More disturbing is that no one admits Cha was also raped, an omission so stubborn I had to consult court records to confirm she was also sexually assaulted. Did they not know? Were they skittish? *Murder* has been desensitized to a crime statistic, but combine it with the word *rape*, and it forces you to confront her body….[Hong continues to say] the length to which scholars will argue about how Cha is recovering the lives of Korean women silenced by historical atrocities while remaining silent about the atrocity that took Cha's own life," (156)

In fact, I remember coming across *Dictee* for the first-time myself in a comparative literature seminar I was taking during my first year of grad school. Our class discussion analyzed every intimate detail about Cha's work which expressed the unnamable consciousness experienced by many women in the context of patriarchal violence. However, it was only when I read Hong's chapter on Cha that I first found out about Cha's rape and homicide. While Cha's work on gendered and sexual violence takes central focus in academic discourses, her own experience of gendered and sexual violence is erased from our discourses. This is particularly jarring when we think of discourses on gendered and sexual violence experienced by white women who have the advantage of being formally represented. An example of this is how scholars flock to historicize

the tragic lives and deaths of white female writers. Their tragedy is just as part of their public discourse as is their writing. However, for Cha, an "oriental Jane Doe," (166), while *Dictee* is now inseparable from Asian/American scholarly discourses, there is almost no mention of the actual violence faced by Cha. There is only focus on the violence she talks about in *Dictee*. In discussing the erasure of Cha's own pain, Hong writes,

> I think of Sylvia Plath, the titan of tragic female poets. A cottage industry of biographies has cropped up around her. Everyone, from the casual reader to the most devoted scholar, is a sleuth, trading in gossip, poring over letters and journal entries to find that one stone left unturned about her life. Legal battles between her estate and scholars have been protracted. Casual friends have offered sniping perspectives in their own memoirs. But much of Cha's personal life has remained sealed. The length to which scholars will argue how Cha is recovering the lives of Korean women silenced by historical atrocities while remaining silent about the atrocity that took Cha's own life has been baffling. (Hong 157).

In fact, Cha has become erased from history twice. The first example of this erasure is indicated from Hong's damning critique of the irony that Cha's own rape and murder are not mentioned in discussions of *Dictee* even though Cha's magnus opus details experiences of gender and sexual violence. The other erasure is that photos of Cha that are circulated online are actually not of her at all. Figure D below is the only photo of Cha (Hong 173). The other photos that circulate online, like the photo of Figure E, when you search Cha's name is actually of her sister, Bernadette from Cha's video gallery, *Permutations* (173). The confusion of Bernadette for Cha is an example of the racial slight experienced by many Asian people where they get confused for

a different person of Asian descent. However, it is almost as if erasure and silencing is the marker of Cha's life because even in her death, she is misrepresented.



Figure 4: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha



Figure 5: Bernadette, Cha's sister

The misremembering of what Cha looked like and the violent silence around her rape and murder, reminds me of Gayatri Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) and particularly, her case study of the subaltern figure, Bhuvaneseswari Bhaduri. Spivak's groundbreaking essay in the field of postcolonial studies critiques a Western rhetorical desire to access subjectivity and produce knowledge about it. Moreover, because Western rhetoric cannot understand the subaltern without recreating colonial discourses, when these scholars of language do study subalternity, they recreate hegemonic structures. Therefore, the subaltern cannot speak and particularly, "the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read," (Spivak 104). To provide an example of this argument, Spivak talks about the case of Bhuvaneseswari, a young girl of sixteen who commits suicide in North Calcutta, India in 1926 (103). As it is later revealed, Bhuvaneseswari was part of the resistance movement fighting for Indian independence. She takes her own life because she could not go through a political assassination she was assigned to complete yet still wanted to maintain her trust during this time of political upheaval. Knowing

her suicide would be read as a result of an unwanted pregnancy, Bhuvaneseswari *waited* till she was menstruating before she acted on self-immolation. In her rewriting of the sati-suicide and particularly waiting to displace any belief of unwanted pregnancy, Bhuvaneseswari's action was misread. Spivak writes,

> She generalized the sanctioned motive for female suicide by taking immense trouble to displace (not merely deny) in the psychological inscription of her body, its imprisonment within legitimate passion by a single male. In the immediate context, her act became absurd, a case of delirium rather than sanity. (104)

While the suicide of Bhuvaneseswari and the murder of Cha are incomparable as both women occupied different temporal and spatial locations, both experiences bring me to the same point of viewing their subjectivity through the lens of untranslateableness. In particular, both women are misrepresented. For Bhuvaneseswari, the agency she sought to take in her self-immolation is read as absurdity because it does not abide by the imperialistic and patriarchal reading of female suicide. Similarly, for Cha, her rape and murder is silenced because "We have always tried to focus on Cha's amazing work and not sensationalize," (Constance M. Lewallen qtd. in Hong 164). Moreover, photos online that claim to be her are not even accurate depictions of her.

Hong's use of minor feelings as storytelling reveals to us the violent consequences of Cha being informally represented by cultural critics who continuously fail to discuss the sexual violence experienced by Asian and Asian/American women. In particular, Hong discusses that the avoidance surrounding open discussions of sexual violence targeted towards Asian and Asian/American women is due to how Asian culture views expressing pain to be something that re-traumatizes oneself but more importantly, traumatizes others.

So then, how does minor feelings, a form of storytelling that functions as discursive transgression, reveal new ways rhetoricians can think about what speech means to informally represented communities? Moreover, how do we then see this through Hong's close reading of Cha's death? Minor feelings provide informally represented communities, like Asian and Asian/American women, with a discursive lens to make sense of their fragmented, fraught, and unspeakable experiences of gender and sexual violence. To articulate this claim further, I want us to consider the publication of Hong's work alongside the backdrop of global political issues. Hong's *Minor Feelings* was published in February 2020, a month before the COVID19 pandemic wrecked our lives and one month before, former President Donald Trump went on X, formerly known as Twitter, to refer to the COVID-19 pandemic as the "#Chinavirus." By personifying the disease with an ethnic group, Trump catalyzed further racial violence towards Chinese communities and other Asian/American communities. Moreover, by naming American industries that were heavily impacted financially because of COVID19, and then by directing the cause of that hit to an ethnic community, Trump made it so that American nationalism equated to anti-Asian.

On March 16, 2021 —-almost an exact year after Trump named the pandemic as #ChinaVirus, the Atlanta Spa Shootings occurred. The Atlanta Spa Shootings was a hate crime against Asian/American women. The shootings took place at three massage parlors within the span of a few hours: Young's Asian Massage, Gold Massage Spa, and Aromatherapy Spa and six of the eight victims were Asian and Asian/American women. The spa locations had also offered illegal sexual services. While the gunman, Aaron Long, claimed his motivations were religious as a way of punishing those for the sexual services that he too participated in, it's hard to not see the connections this had to the rampant anti-Asian hate happening in the country at the time.

However, violence against Asian and Asian/Americans has always been high and has been happening for a long time but something that is either unreported or ignored from public memory. The Atlanta Spa Shootings just made the violence against Asian/Americans more legible to everyone else.

I bring up the Atlanta Spa Shootings as a way of thinking through minor feelings as a form of speech for informally represented communities because it offered Asian and Asian/American women a way to represent their feelings in a way that did not console white American optimism. Minor feelings is a form of storytelling for those impacted by the anti-Asian hate, both directly and indirectly. Minor feelings allow them to speak about the less visible experiences of trauma due to the rise of anti-Asian hate. For example, I am reminded of Pengfei Zhao's brief ethnographic- article about how she spent the first 100 hours following the Atlanta Spa Shooting. Zhao draws on Hong's minor feelings to discuss the less formalized experiences of trauma. I want to talk about one particular minor feeling that Zhao writes about. Zhao discusses her feeling of anger. Anger that the many news outlets and political leaders refused to or were hesitant to describe the Atlanta Spa Shooting as a hate crime against Asian American women. Anger that the violence against Asian/American women was being reduced to a crime against prostitution as opposed to a racial and sexual violence against Asian/American women. Zhao used her minor feelings to express an anger that refuses to be silent for a white audience.

Conclusion

Hong's rhetorical storytelling method of minor feelings revise the racial and gender subjectivities placed on Asian/Americans by those in dominant social locations that formally represent, the often informally represented, Asian/Americans. Through this chapter analysis on *Minor Feelings*, we arrive at new insights into how Asian/Americans have used minor feelings to

speak in silent and intimate ways. Minor feelings is a discursive transgression for Asian/Americans because it resists how white American optimism represents Asian/American feelings surrounding racist aggressions.

CHAPTER THREE

"WERE YOU SILENT OR WERE YOU SILENCED?": ANALYZING IN/FORMAL REPRESENTATIONS OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN ASIAN/AMERICAN SURVIVOR OF GENDER AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CHANEL MILLER'S *KNOW MY NAME*

"In not naming them, I finally name myself. My name is Chanel."

-Chanel Miller

"When you expose a problem you pose a problem. It might then be assumed that the problem would go away if you would just stop talking about it or if you went away."

-Sara Ahmed

"When language ceases, silence begins. But it does not begin because language ceases. The absence of language simply makes the presence of Silence more apparent."

Max Picard

Introduction

On November 5, 1982, thirty-one-year-old Theresa Hak Kyung Cha set out to meet her husband at the Puck Building in New York City. Her husband, Richard Barnes, was a photographer who was documenting the renovations taking place at the building. However, she never met her husband that evening. Joseph Sanza, a security guard working at the Puck Building, raped Cha. Out of the fear that Cha would be able to identify him as her rapist, he strangled her and tossed her body near the parking lot by where she lived. Her rape and murder happened a week after her genre-bending memoir, *Dictee* was published. While *Dictee* is a

canonical work in Asian/American feminist discourses and an avant-garde darling, there is almost no mention about her rape and murder.[5]

In Fall of 2007, poet Prageeta Sharma was ecstatic to begin her new faculty appointment directing the University of Montana's Creative Writing Program.[6] After years of holding an adjunct position in New York City, Sharma finally found a permanent appointment that also allowed her to showcase her skills and experiences as a writer and professor. The year she began her new role as director, Sharma hosted a party at her home as a way to help build community. Building community through food, openness, and warmth is an ethics of care practiced by many women of color. Therefore, Sharma invited faculty and graduate students from the Creative Writing Program in the hopes of creating a space of care and nurture. However, during the party, a visiting professor and two other graduate students sneaked into her bedroom and stole an undergarment of hers. The professor and the graduate students then went to a bar afterwards and posted photos wearing Sharma's undergarment on their heads and sent the photos to other people in the program (Hong 24). Sharma filed a sexual harassment complaint. The professor and two graduate students apologized to Sharma and said it was a good-natured "prank." Sharma refused to accept the apology. The defendants and other faculty and students were angry that Sharma would not let the matter go, that she "refused to assimilate to their culture," (Hong 24). Sharma

[5] In *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (2020), Cathy Park Hong dedicates a chapter to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. The eulogy-like chapter brings focus to Cha's rape and murder. Hong critiques academics who choose not to talk about what happened to Cha because they do not want her work to be overshadowed by her experiences with sexual violence. Hong argues that not talking about what happened to Cha, whose work *Dictee* explores the gender and sexual violence experienced by Asian women, takes away from the agency of her work.

[6] Knowledge of Prageeta Sharma's experiences with sexual harassment at the University of Montana in 2007 comes from Hong's *Minor Feelings*. In the chapter, "United," Hong recounts what happens to her dear friend, Sharma, to further give evidence of how misogyny triumphs racial solidarity. In particular, the visiting professor who sexually harassed Sharma was the only other professor of Asian descent at the University of Montana which is a predominantly white institution. Instead of uniting with Sharma, the visiting professor chose to distinguish himself from her by making her into the problematic *Other*.

then became iced out by her colleagues. Any attempt she made to diversify the program, change the curriculum, and/or help promote equity was rejected. She was constantly met with belittlement and "no one would validate her reality that these aggressions were happening because she was an Indian woman," (Hong 25).

On a chilly evening on November 16, 2016, Bina anxiously waited for her twenty-three-year-old cousin, Samiha to come home.[7] Bina knew her cousin was feeling upset. She recounts in her interview with the *Washington Post* that she told her cousin the same thing whenever she knew she was upset, "You live in a house full of people who love you, and we're waiting for you. So, come home," (qtd. in *Washington Post*, 2017). However, Samiha never came home that night. Samiha took her own life that evening by jumping in front of a subway. Many of Samiha's friends and family were trying to make sense of why Samiha took her own life, especially as they all grew up in the same tight-knit Bangladeshi diasporic community in Queens, New York. In other words, they all had the same experiences with their upbringing, or at least that was the case at the surface level. However, Samiha's best friend Annie reveals in the interview with the *Washington Post* that Samiha had been sexually abused by her father. Samiha's experiences with sexual abuse was something she kept hidden from others. Samiha only revealed her experiences with sexual violence to Bina and Annie once she had moved out. The sexual abuse incurred from when Samila was eight-years old to her teenage years. Bina states that although Samila's mother knew of the sexual abuse, she convinced Samila not to report the sexual abuse to the police. It was only after Samiha moved out of her parents' home that she began to confide in her close friends and cousin what she had endured. Annie states that Samiha told her, "That [her father]

[7] The actual names of the women mentioned in this story were kept hidden in the article to protect them from any negative reactions they might receive from the Bangladeshi diasporic community in New York.

would molest her, abuse her, pull her hair. And then he would threaten to kill her if she said anything to anyone," ((qtd. in *Washington Post*, 2017).

On the night of January 17, 2015, twenty-two-year-old Chanel Miller decided to go to a Kappa Alpha fraternity party taking place at Stanford University. Miller's sister was visiting her family for the weekend and invited Miller to join her and her friends. Miller was reluctant to go at first. She had just finished work for the day and it was around time she would usually head to bed. Miller eventually decided to accompany her sister as that was the last night she could hang out with her sister before she left. Later that night, two Swedish graduate students, Peter Jonsonn and Carl Arndt, were biking through Stanford University campus when they came across nineteen-year old Brock Turner raping an unconscious Miller near a dumpster.

I begin this chapter with providing four examples of gender and sexual violence that happened to Asian immigrant and Asian/American women. The four examples range from childhood sexual abuse from a family member, sexual harassment at work, sexual assault from a "familiar face," and sexual assault from a stranger while unconscious.[8] In two of the above cases, the experiences with sexual violence led to death. Was it because these four victims were of Asian descent that they experienced a form of sexual harassment and assault? It is hard to say. However, what we cannot ignore is how their racial subjectivity informs the ways in which their experiences of gender and sexual violence are discussed in public discourses.

What Cha, Sharma, Samiha, and Miller have in common outside their racial identity is that their experiences of gender and sexual violence were represented through the voices of other people who occupied a more dominant social location in relation to them. For example, Cha's

[8] When I state "sexual assault from a 'familar' face," I am referring to Joseph Sanza. Cha had frequented the Puck Building where Sanza worked security and therefore, they recognized each other. This was also a believed motivation for why Sanza also murdered Cha.

rape and murder is almost erased from the memory of academic discourses. In fact, Cathy Park Hong recalls in her memoir *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning* (2020) that she had to verify with court records to confirm that Cha was actually sexually assaulted and murdered by her rapist. In her eulogy-esque chapter to Cha in *Minor Feelings*, Hong states that even though Cha wrote extensively about the gender and sexually violent experiences marginalized women faced in the context of patriarchy and war, her own experiences with such violence was erased. With Sharma, her experiences of sexual harassment by a fellow professor and two graduate students led to other colleagues finding her to be a nuisance wrapped up in a brown woman's body. Instead of validating her experiences of sexual harassment, she was punished for not assimilating into the culture of a white, patriarchal institution. In the case of Samiha, her experiences with childhood sexual abuse were silenced in two ways. The first way was by her mother, who knew what was happening but convinced her daughter not to report the abuse. The second way was from the fear that Samiha's mother was acting on — the fear of cultural and familial stigma. This filial stigma is especially heightened in South Asian communities like the Bangladeshi community that Samiha's family was part of in Queens, New York.[9] Samiha's mother decided that silencing her child's sexual abuse experiences was worth it if it meant that her family was not publicly shamed in her new homeland. Unlike the other women, Miller's experience of sexual violence became national and global news with the headline of "Stanford Rape Case" dominating news channels from 2015-2016. Due to Miller's choice in keeping her identity private, she was referred to as Emily Doe in court proceedings and media coverage of the case. Even though Miller's case was the focus of news media coverage, everyone else was

[9] The Bangladeshi diasporic community that Samiha and her family are part of is one of the largest immigrant communities in the United States. However, it is not uncommon that Samiha's mother feared that the abuse (if reported) would circulate within the community, leading to the ostracization of their family.

speaking on behalf of Miller, without ever knowing who Miller was. While other sexual assault victim-survivors can empathize with what Miller experienced without knowing who Miller is personally or from hearing her speak, I firmly believe that people assumed that Emily Doe was a white college student and not an Asian/American college student. Much of the discourse on gender and sexual violence is reflective of the experiences of white women. However, through texts like *Know My Name*, there is a shift towards thinking about how Asian/American women talk about their experiences with gender and sexual violence. As this chapter will address, I think Miller's silence acts as a discursive transgression that dismantles how American public discourses construct their image of a sexual assault victim-survivor that is worthy of recognition.

My argument for this chapter then is to analyze how Miller, who's sexual assault has been spoken by others, uses the rhetorical storytelling form of silence to take agency in representing her experience through own voice. By doing so, Miller's *Know My Name* functions as a discursive transgression that signals that Asian/American women have used silence as a means of revising the racial and gendered subjectivities placed on them. *Know My Name* examines how Miller is both an informal and formal representative of sexual assault victim-survivors.[10] In fact, the title of her memoir plays on this relationship between the forms of representation. Miller demands that you know her name while simultaneously addressing that for too long, many have not known her name. Through her powerful memoir and victim-impact statement (for when she was still known as Emily Doe), Miller forces us to listen to her journey of healing following her assault while also giving insight into who she was before the assault.

[10] For this chapter that looks at sexual assault , I am chose to use both the term victim and survivor, as well as occasionally victim-survivor. Victim or Survivor: Terminology from Investigation Through Prosecution

Know My Name is an incredibly powerful memoir not just for survivors of sexual assault but also for the field of rhetoric and composition as Miller's memoir requires us, scholars of language, to revisit how of women of color strategically use silence. Since her assault, Miller has been trying to find and speak on behalf of her own identity. From being found half-naked by a dumpster without an ID, to learning about what happened to her through the news channel, to being the Emily Doe at the heart of every conversation surrounding rape culture on college campuses, Miller's experiences have been spoken by others. In fact, Miller's half-Chinese identity is even erased by a probation officer who misidentifies Miller as white, (220). *Know My Name* is her way of forcing us to finally listen to her through her own speech. Within this chapter, I trace the following: postcolonial insights into the colonial construction of third-world women as a way to understand the racial and sexual subjectivities placed on Asian/American women; the significance behind "Emily Doe," especially through the lens of media bias and structural violence against women of color; and lastly, how the field of rhetoric and composition have written about silence. By tracing these scholarly genealogies, we get a more nuanced lens to consider how Miller's memoir shows how silence is a discursive transgression that allows Asian/American women to revise the racial and sexual subjectivities placed on them.

Colonialist Constructions of the Third-World Women Inform First-World Representations

Formal representations of the informally represented Asian women in American public discourses often depict them as either a play thing or a subject needing saving. These representations suggest that Asian women exist to serve the needs and desires of white men. These representations can be volatile as they turn into social truths. Moreover, these representations of Asian and Asian/American women are violent because it cements them as the Orient — a colonialist figure that exists to be conquered by the West. In other words, this formal

representation of Asian women as hypersexual, especially as Asian men are continuously emasculated, exists to also show the political dominance the West has over racialized bodies. Edward Said remarks in *Orientalism* (1978), the "Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient then it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient (which is what, in its academic or scholarly form, it claims to be)," (14). The representation of Asian women as fragile also perpetuates the myth that white men must save them. For instance, in *Woman of Color and Feminism* (2009), Maythee Rojas writes, "Asian women have been typically portrayed as innocent, docile, and eager to be saved by Western armed forces," (57). The fantasy that marginalized women, like Asian and Asian/American women, need white men to save them is incredibly dangerous because it promotes a pro-colonial and imperialist relationship rhetoric.

The colonialist fantasy of white men saving marginalized women is a motif that many postcolonial scholars have analyzed in their work because it examines how women are reduced to things that need *saving* and thus, justifies Western imperialism over "third-world" countries. For example, Gayatri Spivak explores this phenomenon to an extent in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1995). In particular, Spivak considers the relationship between British imperialism and the Hindu self-immolation practice of sati as a way to engage in discourse surrounding subalternity. Sati is a practice where female widows would sacrifice themselves by sitting on top of her husband's funeral pyre. A woman who practiced sati would be memorialized as being a good wife (Spivak 101). While sati was a practice typically tolerated by British rule in India, it started to face backlash as British colonialism became ruthless and Christian Evangelism started to increase. British colonial powers *spoke for* Indian widows in deciding they needed to

intervene with Hindu law, so they could stop the self-immolation practice. The protection of third-world women becomes, as Spivak remarks,

> a signifier for the establishment of a *good* society which must, at such inaugurative moments, transgress mere legality, or equity of legal policy. In this particular case, the process also allowed the redefinition as a crime of what had been tolerated, known, or adulated as ritual. In other words, this one item in Hindu law jumped the frontier between private and the public domain. (93)

What Spivak directs us toward is how British colonialist rule speaks on behalf of the third-world women consciousnesses but by doing so, further subjugates them as subjects without agency. Moreover, the campaign by the British East India Company to illegalize sati promotes this image of white men as saviors or as Spivak writes, "It can perhaps be caught even when it is flattened out: white men, seeking to save brown women from brown men," (101). The white men are represented as the heroic archetype saving the damsel from the men of her own culture and ritual practices. However, as Spivak reminds us, these "heroic" white men are still placing the brown women in a state of fragile, powerlessness. In other words, the women never have agency to speak on behalf of their own choices because perhaps they actually wanted to die through means of self-immolation.

Why "Emily Doe" Needed to be Racially Anonymous

The colonialist construction of third-world women, and particularly Asian women, leads me to argue that Miller's decision to take on the racially, anonymous identity of Emily Doe throughout the *People vs. Brock Turner* case allowed Miller's sexual assault case to be more prominent in American public discourses. In other words, I do not believe *People vs. Brock Turner* would have received the same amount of national attention if people knew the victim-

survivor was an Asian/American woman and not a white woman. For example, Miller talks about the first time her racial identity was revealed when she entered the courtroom, "I wondered if they were surprised I was Asian, if I looked like a woman, or a girl," (110). Moreover, Miller states that when some did find out about her identity, what followed was a slew of racial attacks, "The few that had discovered my identity had taken screenshots of my old spoken words videos, leaked with the caption, *Brock Turner has yellow fever. Wouldn't put my nuts in her chink chute. Crazy gook. Asian women can't handle their alcohol. Asian glow, red faced, lightweight slut*," (252). Therefore, while it is important that Miller's identity as an Asian/American woman is revealed through her own terms, we cannot ignore the potential political power that came from the assumption that Emily Doe was white.

The assumption that Emily Doe was a white-woman does reinstate the hegemonic grip whiteness has on American society. However, I still argue that Emily Doe being racially anonymous gave more media attention to the Miller's case. The reason I make this ruthless claim is because America is built on a model of white supremacy. Through that model and the history of slavery, white women have contributed and benefited from the model of white supremacy the most. It is unsurprising then that when we think of news coverage on gender and sexual violence, there is a disproportionate amount dedicated to the cases surrounding white women than there is for women of color. This is not to say that we as a society should not care about the violence against white women. Rather, this is to say that we as a society should be uneasy with how quickly we are willing to forget about the gender and sexual violence experienced by women of color.

For example, the 2005 disappearance of Natalee Holloway in Aruba during a high-school graduation trip, is a case that people continue to talk about nearly twenty years after her

disappearance was reported. Holloway was an eighteen-year old blonde woman from an upper-middle class family. Everything about her social location fueled the public's desire in caring about what happened because she fits the role of innocence. Most recently, we saw similar media bias surrounding the murder of the twenty-two-year-old blonde white woman, Gabby Petito, in 2021. Gabby Petito was first reported missing and then her case turned into a homicide investigation. The Gabby Petito case devoured public discourses. The ubiquity of the Petito case reignited conversations about what Gwen Ifill termed the *missing white woman syndrome*. The missing white woman syndrome reflects the phenomena about how much media attention is given to cases of gender and sexual violence that is centered on an upper-middle class white person. Whereas, cases surrounding gender and sexual violence experienced by women of color barely get any coverage. For instance, a report conducted by the Urban Indian Health Institute and National Crime Information Center reported that only 116 of 5,712 cases of missing and murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) were formally logged into the Department of Justice Database.[11] We can compare this statistic to the amount of times the name, Gabby Petito, was mentioned on CNN in a week, which was 346 times.[12] The problem of the missing white woman syndrome is not just an issue of disproportionate representations of such cases amongst white women and women of color. The problem conveys how the implicit bias, which is constructed through white supremacy, is something that becomes so normalized within American society. For example, in his 2012 essay, "The Invisible Weight of Whiteness: The Racial Grammar of Everyday Life in America," Eduardo Bonilla-Silva writes about the danger of this

[11] Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report

[12] Statistic from Washington Post article, Even within the media, some question the amount of Gabby Petito coverage

normalized implicit bias in what he refers to as racial grammar (1). In analyzing the way missing or murdered white women were discussed, Bonilla-Silva found that the adjective of "beautiful" was used, whereas, as the same descriptor was absent in the morsel of media coverage surrounding missing or murdered women of color. Bonilla-Silva writes,

> TV hosts such as [Nancy] Grace seem to always describe a missing or murdered young white as "beautiful." We checked transcripts of Grace's show and other crime shows such as FOX's Greta Van Susteren to see if there was a pattern, and we found that in cases dealing with the disappearance murder of young white women, the adjective was there, but when victim is a black or Latino woman, (1) they are seldom discussed in first place (although they too are victims of violence) and (2), when discussed, the adjective is not there…The notion of racial grammar helps us understand the structure of this unsavory "racial situation." First, stories about whites become universal stories about all of us. This is how whites frame these stories symbolically but, of course, this is not the case in reality. When Laci Peterson (the woman killed by her husband in Modesto, CA) disappeared in 2002, Evelyn Hernandez, a Salvadorian woman went missing, and like Peterson, her decapitated torso was also found in the San Francisco Bay…This social fact remains despite years of symbolic and practical struggle against white supremacy. Normative whiteness is still the not-so-hidden standard. (3-4)

As white supremacy reminds us through this disproportionate media coverage, anything white was beautiful and anything non-white was ugly. In considering the cultural grip on the "damsel" white women and how much coverage you will be given as a white middle-class or upper-class woman, there is power in Miller's silence of choosing to be "Emily Doe." Specifically, when we consider Miller's sexual assault case through the lens of racial grammar or the missing white

woman syndrome, there is power behind being an Emily Doe due to its racial ambiguity in name and appearance. While the name *Chanel Miller* does not reveal any ethnicity in the ways the other four victim-survivors names did (Cha, Sharma, Samiha), Miller's identity as a Chinese-American would be outed the moment her real name was revealed.

Asian immigrant and Asian/American women experience high numbers of gender and sexual violence. Often, the number of reported cases fails to capture the actual amount of violence Asian immigrants and Asian/American women experience. Violence against Asian immigrants and Asian/American women is not just a problem of racism, but a problem that is interconnected to misogyny. The United States has a long history of sexualizing Asian women. For example, the Page Act of 1875 restricted Chinese people from immigrating to America out of the fear that they would take the jobs of American nationals. This was one of the earlier examples of how the U.S. constitutionally enacted the "yellow peril." Specifically, the Page Act of 1875 also targeted Chinese women by suggesting that Chinese women were immoral and would engage in prostitution as a form of labor. Moreover, U.S. wars in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and the Philippines also were a catalyst in how many East Asian women were depicted as socially deviant in American popular culture. Many Asian women from lower-economic backgrounds were forced into prostitution and to serve the sexual needs of American military men stationed in Asia. Following the 2021 Atlanta Spa Shooting that targeted Asian sex workers, the executive director of the Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women wrote in a tweet that, "White men have been trained, peer pressured, and hazed by the U.S. military to release their anxiety, self-loathing, and hatred of the enemy onto Asian women's bodies," (Khara Jabola-Carolus, March 2021).

American popular culture also continued to perpetuate the stereotype that Asian women only existed for the sexual pleasures of white men. For example, white male domination of Asian women can be analyzed through the archetype of the "China Doll" in films and television shows (Lee 1). The China Doll portrays an East Asian woman as diminutive, docile, and hypersexual. Even the naming of them as a China "*doll*" suggests that Asian women are classified by their fragility, smallness, and ability to be physically overwhelmed. In fact, in describing her violent assault in *Know My Name*, Chanel Miller talks about the way her body was used as a doll by Brock Turner,

> He made me his real-life ventriloquist doll, put his hands inside me and made me speak…There was nothing to suggest I was a person extracted from a full life, surrounded by people who cared about me. (172).

The repetitive nature of portraying Asian women as the China Doll archetype is dangerous because it informs the public that it is acceptable for a white man to use and abuse Asian women or as Joey Lee writes, "In the media, White male characters exploit the diminutive obedience and servile desire of the China Doll archetype repetitively, normalizing the use of Asian women for selfish gain," (2). Promoting the image of white male dominance over Asian women as something that is "commonplace" ties back to Bonne-Silva's concept of racial grammar that normalizes white supremacy in social interactions.

Furthermore, the continued stereotyping of Asian women as hypersexual and diminutive can also be analyzed through Sianne Ngai's concept of cute. In particular, Ngai talks about how the aesthetic of cuteness reinscribes marginality for what and who is experiencing "cutification," (Ngai 816). That is because being socially constructed through the aesthetic of cuteness demonstrates a relationship of power in which the object of cuteness often already exists in a

marginalized position. Women of color are held to higher standards that often reflect white supremacist ideas of womanhood (a coded way of saying white femininity). An example of this problematic standard is how Asian women are treated as just cute and not beautiful or hot. Sengputa Rhea analyzes how this depiction of Asian women appears in modern magazines as she writes, "Western women were featured more as sexy or sensual beauty types, whereas Asian women were more likely to be portrayed as cute and girlish," (801).

The Uses and Abuses of Silence in Feminist Discourses

Rhetoric is a field that examines the quality of language use, most prominently through the mode of speech, as a prism to examine how we structure community. So what then does silence offer? Through the incredible contributions by feminist and women of color feminist scholars in rhetorical studies, such as Cheryl Glenn, Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks, we have arrived at new insights when we consider the discursive possibilities of silence. Prior to these contributions, silence was not treated as a productive rhetorical lens that can offer nuanced ways of examining speech. For example, the rhetorical tradition has historically looked at silence as a signifier of powerlessness — something that directly opposes speech which signifies power-knowledge. This essentialist treatment of silence makes sense for scholars who work through the rhetorical tradition. This is because the rhetorical tradition can be described as a male-oriented, Eurocentric approach to perceiving the quality of language use.

This approach denies the generative ways we can think about what silence tells us about how a society is structured as Glenn states, "the rhetorical tradition, long preoccupied with written and spoken rhetorics has for too long ignored the rhetorical powers of silence," (2004, 2). Oftentimes, the rhetorical tradition is grounded in binaries. As poststructuralist studies have shown us, binaries are harmful because they do not allow for layered and complicated

discussions related to speech acts, silence, and representations. For example, the binary of speech signifies power and silence signifying powerlessness forecloses on any generative discussions of these discursive acts. What I am concerned with then is what feminists and women of color feminist have written about silence. In particular, feminist and women of color feminists scholars in rhetoric tell us through their work, many informally represented communities use silence as a way to revisit the racial and gendered subjectivities placed on them. Through this understanding of the discursive power behind silence, we can productively look at silence as part of Chanel Miller's rhetorical storytelling in *Know My Name*.

Feminist thinkers and rhetoricians owe much of the public discourses on silence, and particularly *women's silence*, to Tillie Olsen's *Silences* (1978). *Silences* is a foundational text that numerous contemporary feminists reference when considering the discursive possibilities of women's writing. Olsen laments on the silences from "those whose voices have been drowned out and forgotten in the course of literary history, and with "others whose circumstances had prevented them from coming to voice at all," (1). In particular, Olsen states that the voices of women do have relevance in literature. While Olsen's writing particularly examined the way literary studies and production have perpetuated the silences of women, her work changed the public perception of how we come to imagine the impact of women's voices.

One of the most pivotal contributions to rhetorical silence is Cheryl Glenn's *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (2004). Glenn's groundbreaking work on the rhetorical nature of silence reflects the scholarship on silence taken up by feminists in the twentieth-century. Glenn argues that scholars of language need to focus on silence because it is just as important as speech as she writes, "silence reveals speech at the same time it enacts its own sometimes complimentary rhetoric," (3). Glenn reminds us that silence functions as a representation of silence, violence,

oppression, and is oftentimes gendered. The treatment of silence reflects a Eurocentric rhetorical tradition as Glenn argues,

> The ratio between silence and language reconfirms a Western notion of language as positive and silence as negative; silence as foreground, silence as background; language as melody; silence as harmony. Thus speaking and silence remain tied to our civilizing tendencies, which play out expressively in conversation. (5)

We can see from Glenn's discourse that silence has historically been documented as something that signifies weakness.

Writing about the tradition of silence for Chicanx women, Gloria Anzaldúa talks about how silence is multifaceted in that it simultaneously mobilizes and immobilizes the decolonial efforts of marginalized groups. On the one hand, silence is a form of resistance for those who have been dealt with linguistic violence as Anzaldúa writes in *Borderlands/La Frontera*,

> Ethnic identity is twin to linguistic identity—I am my language…Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having to always translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. (1987)

We can see how silence then is productive because it prevents the assimilation into a colonized tongue. On the other hand, Anzaldúa also remarks that silence becomes weaponized by other dominant forces. In other words, to be silent in the context of colonial violence can provide a false assumption of weakness. In those moments, silence immobilizes the decolonial efforts of subverting language assimilation as Anzaldúa writes, "I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice. Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue—my

woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence," (1987.) Moreover, the other main claim Anzaldúa gets at is the two shared passages above is that whiteness refuses to listen to the language of the Other. For example, in the essay "Speaking in Tongues," (1979, 1981) Anzaldúa pens a poignant letter to women of color writers that encourages them to continue to write and theorize about their lives even if, "white eyes do not want to know us, they do not bother to learn our language, the language which reflects us, our culture, our spirit," (165). Anzaldúa encourages women of color to use their voices even out of fear of being reduced to an essentialist Other figure. From Anzaldúa's writings on linguistic violence, we can see how silence is not just a signifier of powerlessness that the rhetorical tradition has often framed it as. Instead, silence is a multidimensional lens for scholars of language to consider how society is structured from this discursive lens.

For black feminist scholars like bell hooks and Audre Lorde, they view silence as a linguistic weapon that further imprisons their subjectivities as queer black women. They confront systems of oppression that normalize a tradition of silence for marginalized people and instead, urge those most affected by silence to speak. For example, Lorde's *Your Silence Will Not Protect You* (2017) is a collection of previously published poems and essays which include Lorde's commentary on silence and speech within a white supremacist context. For example, in her poem "A Litany for Survival," Lorde states that we should not let the fear of being misunderstood or not welcomed prevent us from speaking when she states, "and when we speak we are afraid/our words will not be heard/nor welcomed/but when we are silent/we are still afraid." Similarly, in "The Transformation of Silence Into Action and Language," Lorde talks about how systems of power have used silence to further subjugate oppressed communities and silence is also a self-destructive force when she reflects on how she herself fell into the allure of silence, which

ultimately hurt her more. “The Transformation of Silence Into Action and Language” was originally a speech delivered at the “Lesbian and Literature Panel” which was part of the 1977 Modern Language Association Conference after she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Following her cancer diagnoses, Lorde was reminded about how miniscule the threat of pain when speaking when considering how certain death was when she states,

> In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality, and of what I wished and wanted for my life, however short it might be, priorities and omissions became strongly etched in a merciless light, and what I regretted most were my silences. Of what had I *ever* been afraid? To question or to speak as I believed could have meant pain, or death. But we all hurt in so many different ways, and pain will either change or end. Death, on the other hand, is the final silence. And that might be coming quickly, now, without regard for whether I had ever spoken what needed to be said, or had only betrayed myself into small silences, while I planned to speak, or waited for someone else’s words…My silences had not protected me. Your silences will not protect you. (41).

Throughout “The Transformation of Silence Into Action and Language,” Lorde talks about how silence was seen as a tool of protection for those who have been systematically oppressed. However, as Lorde tells us through her mediations of silence following her cancer diagnosis, silence is actually a tool of the oppressor that further subjugates those who are informally represented. Choosing silence is an act of self-betrayal. In particular, choosing silence of the fear violence or punishment actually hurt those who were oppressed instead of protecting them.

Similarly, in hooks’ *talking back: thinking feminist, thinking black* (1989), hooks urges those who are oppressed to transform their silence into speech because not only is speech the biggest act of defiance against the structure that exploits them but speech also is a form of

healing as hooks writes, “Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible,” (9). In order to understand how speech heals and silence hurts, we need to consider what hooks regards as the social condition of silence. In particular, hooks writes that silence, especially for privileged white girls and women, was a common narrative placed on them to help socialize them into subjugation (ix). She also regards that when less-privileged black girls would speak up, their voice was deemed as defiant (ix). The issue here is that silence and speech acts receive different treatment depending on the person’s race and/or ethnicity and what they are saying. For example, instead of treating the black girls who use their voice as powerful, they are seen as uncooperative and disobedient (ix). Regardless of the fear of mistreatment for speaking, hooks argues that speech is a critical part of “feminist self-actualization,” (xi).

In *talking back*, hooks reminds us that within speech, silence still exists. In particular, the tradition of silence was a rite of passage into womanhood and was a discursive weapon that normalized (white) women into a patriarchal society. According to hooks, for black women, it was not their silence but *how* they spoke that became oppressed. Therefore, when women and particularly, black women spoke, they were, “Taught to speak in a way but to talk a talk that was in itself a silence. Taught to speak and yet beware of the betrayal of too much hears speech,” (7). This rhetorical coding of black women's speech as defiant, gossip-orientated, and emasculating to black men further subjugates them as individuals who are not valuable in society. This is because speech takes on not only a racial subjectivity but also a gendered subjectivity as hooks writes, “Unlike the black male preacher whose speech was meant to be heard, the voices of black women—giving orders, making threats, fussing—could be tuned out, could become a kind of

background music, audible but not acknowledged as significant speech," (6). Therefore, for hooks, she decided to engage in writing as a way to capture her speech, as a way to heal.

Silent or Unheard?: Asian/American Feminists on Silence

As we can see from above, feminists and women of color feminists have made important contributions to the study of silence. Glenn reminds us that silence is a productive form of study within the discipline of rhetoric. Whereas, women of color feminist scholars like Anzaldúa, Lorde, and hooks talk about silence further imprisons the oppressed into oppression. However, what does silence mean or represent for Asian/American feminists? Specifically, Western colonialist efforts and American exclusionary practices have narrativized a myth of Asian/Americans, and particularly Asian women, of only knowing silence. Trinh T. Minh-ha explores the role of silence within Asian/American feminist discourses. For example, in her essay "Not You/Like You:Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference," (1988) Minh-ha writes about the function of *difference* within non-Western cultural productions. In considering the role of silence, Minh-ha writes,

> Within the context of women's speech, silence has many faces…Silence can only be subversive when it frees itself from the male-defined context of absence, lack, and fear as feminine territories…Silence is commonly set in opposition to speech. Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay and as a language of its own has barely been explored. (3)

From this perspective, we can understand how silence is a form of women's speech when it strips itself from a patriarchal coding of silence as powerlessness. Moreover, silence is a prism of seeing and relating. Similarly, in her book, *Women, Native, Other: Writing, Postcoloniality, and Feminism* (1989), Trinh T. Minh-ha explores the interconnected relationships between ethnicity, race, gender, and writing by examining the experiences non-Western women writers

are subjugated to. In thinking about the power of silence, Minh-ha states, "Silence as a refusal to partake in the story does sometimes provide us with a means to gain hearing. It is a voice, a mode of uttering, and a response in its own right. Without other silences, however, my silence goes unheard, unnoticed," (83). Minh-ha reminds us that silence takes on multiple means in the context of cultural difference.

In *Tell This Silence* (2004), Patti Duncan explores the many "faces" of silence within the Asian/American feminist discourses. Specifically, Duncan argues that silence is a prism to understand the relationship subjectivity has to hegemonic structures as she writes,

> There seem to be multiple silences at work in relation to race, gender, sexuality, and national identity. Such silences are suggestive of the various social and political possibilities and processes inherent to discussions of the critical intersections of categories of identities…I look to the silences within the writings by Asian American women in order to interrogate their meanings to contemporary discourse about the relationships among race, gender, sexuality, and national identity. (2)

From Duncan, we understand that silence is not a homogenized form of discourse. In particular, Duncan writes that silence for Asian American women is often misunderstood. In other words, to be silent is not the same as being *silenced* (13). Moreover, sometimes it is not that Asian/American women are silent as much as they are unheard.

Similarly, Maxine Hong Kingston's, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976), centers around the narrator's experiences with silence and speaking as a Chinese American woman trying to make sense of her identity within American society. Kingston's work explores the varying forms of silence particularly looking at how knowledge is both produced from speech but also the knowledge that exists in silence. For example, in the

opening chapter "No Name Woman," Kingston talks about the narrator's aunt that took her own life after learning she was pregnant. The aunt is shamed by her family and ends up drowning herself in the family well. The siblings of this aunt deny her existence. The paradox of how silence as indicative of knowledge shows up within Kingston's "No Name Woman" in two pivotal ways which further shows how silence takes shape in forms of discourse in Asian/American feminist texts. One way is that while the aunt's family completely writes the memory of her out of their family legacy, the narrator chooses to name (No Name Woman) and thus, give knowledge of her life. The second way is that even though the No Name Woman is remembered through anonymity and archival erasure, the villagers all observed the actions of the No Name Woman. Specifically, they took note of when her husband left and when she got pregnant. The silence of the living family members reveals knowledge in the same way there is knowledge from absence.

Existing Without a Name

To be a victim-survivor of gender and/or sexual violence is to exist without a name. When the assault occurs, the victim-survivor is treated as an object as a "ventriloquist doll" (Miller 172) that is used and prodded by the assailant. The victim-survivor then becomes an object, once again, if they are examined by a medical team that determines the extent of the assault. If the assault goes to trial, then the defense team will do everything to humanize the *assailant*, while simultaneously distancing the victim-survivor from being personified as a person. For example, we can see this when Miller details some of the news articles she came across that were following the Stanford Rape Case as she writes, "*'Throughout the night, TURNER hooked up with a few girls.'* In the report, all the people he'd kissed were named *girls*, but because he'd assaulted me, I was never called *girl*, only *victim*," (45). From this statement

Miller shares about how the other people Turner hooked up with were girls, but how Miller would only ever be a "victim," we can see there was no effort to relate Miller to anything resembling a person with a full-life.

I am reminded here of Kingston's "No Name Woman" in which the family decided to silence any knowledge of the aunt who took her own life because they did not want to confront the complexities surrounding what happened to her. In other words, it was easier to eradicate her from their lives than to deal with the consequences of her suicide. Like the No Name Woman of Kingston's memoir, Miller also became a person who people wanted to erase from their public discourses because her existence wrecked brought to the surface the issue of gender and sexual violence that is especially perpetrated by upper-middle class, white men. However, unlike the No Name Woman, Miller forces us to know her name.

Miller's *Know My Name* is an incredible insight into how Asian/American women use storytelling to speak in silent and intimate ways that subverts the racial and gender subjugation placed upon her as a victim-survivor because she names herself into public discourses that worked to silence her identity and experiences. For example, in the opening pages of her memoir, Miller forces the reader to know her name, her voice, and her experiences because ever since her assault, she has been silenced and spoken on behalf of. Miller writes to fill in the gaps of her life that court documents and media narratives failed to capture. Moreover, she writes about how there was a life outside of Emily Doe – the pseudonym that only captured the Miller who experienced assault. Miller writes,

> I introduce myself here, because in the story I am about to tell, I begin with no name or identity. No character traits or behaviors assigned to me. I was found as a half-naked body, alone and unconscious. No wallet. No ID. Policemen were summoned, a Stanford

> dean was awakened to see if he could recognize me, witnesses asked around; nobody knew who I belonged to, where I'd come from, who I was. (2)

The rhetorical impact of Miller stating, "I introduce myself here, because in the story I am about to tell, I begin with no name or identity," cannot be ignored. Resembling hooks' concept of "talking back," Miller demands that we get to know who she is through her own voice, an act that objects to the practices of domination that cement victim-survivors into silence.

It is incredibly important that Miller's *Know My Name* is not treated as an essentialist guide to understanding the pre/post sexual assault experiences of Asian/American women. While *Know My Name* does inspire more collective discussions into rape culture and inspires other survivors to speak up, Miller's memoir is careful to not make her experiences universal of every victim-survivor. In other words, Miller is cautious to not be a formal representation of all victim-survivors of sexual assault and to not speak on behalf of others who experienced assault as well because it leads to further subjugation for them. For example, in "The Problem of Speaking for Others," Linda Martín Alcoff suggests, "the effect of the practice of speaking for others, is often, though not always, the erasure and a re-inscription of sexual, national, and other kinds of hierarchies," (29). Therefore, while Miller's memoir speaks about the ways sexual assault impacts the victim-survivor's life, her experiences that speaks of are her own.

Victim-survivors of sexual violence are informally represented in various ways. The first way is when the assailant enters the body of the victim-survivor without consent, but forces "consent" to come through from their body. A way this "consent" (or what the assailant names as consent) occurs is through "moans" or how Brock Turner's legal defense team states, "there were moans in my [Miller] mouth," (42). Moans, in a patriarchal society that exists to protect men accused of sexual violence, rhetorically functions to say that the victim-survivor actually *enjoyed*

the experience. Another way victim-survivors are informally represented is through the court, media, and public narrativizations of the assault. For example, instead of talking about how Brock Turner permanently affected Miller's life, Miller became anonymously known as the person who ruined the life of a Stanford swimmer or as Turner's father, Dan Turner, stated in his testimony, "*This is a steep price to pay for twenty minutes of action out of his twenty-plus years of life*," (232). Whereas, for Miller, she became memorialized as a nameless victim, "the victim [who] remained stagnant, living forever in that twenty-minute time frame," (241). Instead of punishing the assailant for their crime, victim-survivors are instead made to feel guilty for a violence that was committed on their body. We can see this from how the public tried to place the blame on Miller as a deluge of articles and online comments said things like, "*He was only nineteen! She hooked up with a freshman? Doesn't that make her the predator? Haven't you heard of gang rape in India. There are women out there suffering real abuse and you want to call this assault…Not trying to blame the victim but something is wrong if you drink yourself to unconsciousness…*" (47). We can see from this brief snapshot that public discourses on sexual assault rather blame the choices made by the victim than actually critiquing the person who committed the heinous crime. Miller writes, "They seemed angry that I'd made myself vulnerable, more than the fact that he'd acted on my vulnerability. Drinking is not inherently immoral….But being drunk and raped seemed to call for condemnation. People were confounded that I had failed to protect myself," (47). What Miller exposes in these recollections of how public discourses treated her versus Brock, was that he was afforded empathy, while Miller was not (241).

I mentioned earlier that it is important that Emily Doe is known not only as Chanel Miller, but also as a biracial Asian/American woman. While I argued that Emily Doe needed to

be believed as white for the necessary media coverage of the case, it is imperative that we now know that Miller is half-Chinese and half-white. From our understandings of the missing white woman syndrome and colonialist constructions of Asian women, it is crucial that this case of sexual assault is understood as a violence experienced by a biracial woman. However, Miller's Chinese identity is constantly erased. For example, when reviewing the reports conducted by various officers and medical practitioners, Miller came across a report that labeled her as white. She writes,

> There was another form filled out by the officer I had spoken to. Under the victim's race, she had checked *White*. Never in my life have I checked only *White* You cannot note my whiteness without acknowledging I am equal parts Chinese. This single check mark was a testament to how little time she had taken to know me, making the assumption I was white over the phone without bothering to ask…*I'M CHINESE*. I screamed, slamming the table with my fists, throwing back my chair. *I'M CHINESE*. (220)

To ignore Miller's Chinese identity is to treat this case as something happening between two people bonded by their whiteness. However, as scholarship on Asian/American feminist discourses have shown us, we need to take account of how this was a violence experienced by a Chinese woman. Furthermore, Miller's half Asian identity is not only crucial when we consider her experiences with gender and sexual violence, but also when we consider the court room. Specifically, we cannot deny that racial microaggressions against Miller were happening in a courtroom made up of entirely white people.

Moments of Transgression

One-way Miller uses rhetorical storytelling as a discursive transgression is through form. Structurally, *Know My Name* is written in non-linear fashion where Miller jumps from past to

present. This form of storytelling captures how trauma does not accommodate linear living or memory as she writes, “Trauma was refusing to adhere to any schedule, didn’t seem to align itself with time. Some days it was distant as a star and other days it could wholly engulf me,” (126). In other words, Miller uses that type of storytelling to present how she will always be living in a pre-assault/post-assault life. This non-linear storytelling is a discursive transgression because it resists against the court demands of linear order of events, which is never feasible to any victim-survivor of gender and sexual violence. Memory lapses, however, are something that was afforded to Turner, “To explain Brock’s inconsistencies, he said, *"So it's not uncommon for people to not remember details of incidents, especially things that happened so fast and with emotional tension.* Brock was allowed a messy mind. Victims often have inconsistencies due to traumatic blockage, alcoholic gaps. His inconsistencies came from what he said before he had a lawyer versus what he said after he hired one,” (199). Therefore, Miller discursively chooses to have her writing be reflective of those gaps and blockages. This is an act of transgression because Miller refuses to uphold the demands that victim-survivors must be able to recollect their experience truthfully and consistently. The non-linear storytelling, which captures how trauma slips in and out of whom it affects, also occurs when Miller talks about her younger sister, Tiffany, and her wish to protect her. While Tiffany is giving her testimony at the hearing, Miller's thoughts drift away and she thinks about the time when they were ten and eight, respectively, and visiting an indoor pool in China. Miller and Tiffany get stuck in the shower room as she writes, “My eyes burned as I watched her, stuck on the other side of the door,” (185). It was only when Miller was able to take planks of wood off and run to get her dad to help, her sister was freed. This example of how Miller’s thoughts are nonlinear show the effects of what trauma does to the psyche.

Another aspect of Miller's rhetorical storytelling that is a discursive transgression against the subjectivities placed on her is how she intertwines humor throughout her memoir. It is not common to see memoirs that deal with such intense experiences to include humor. However, Miller refuses to let her experience that night on January 17 be the experience she would be remembered by. Miller writes that while she was treated as someone whose existence ceased to exist in the twenty-minute time frame of the crime, Brock got to live and grow. She writes, "She [Miller] remained frozen, while Brock grew more and more multifaceted, his stories unfolding, a spectrum of life and memories opening up around him. He got to be a person…Nobody talked about the things she might go on to do," (241). I find that Miller's intertwining of humor is a way to show that she is more than just a victim. While the humor does not take away from Miller's painful and poignant experiences, it does highlight that she is also a multifaceted person with a "spectrum of life," (241). Moments of humor are at the start and end of the memoir. For example, in the opening page of her memoir, Miller writes, "the fact that I spelled subpoena, *suhpeena*, may suggest I am not qualified to tell this story," (v). In the concluding chapter of *Know My Name* as Miller states, "Writing is the way I process the world. When I was given the opportunity to write this book, whatever God is up there said, *You got your dream*. I said, *Actually I was hoping for a lighter topic,* and God was like, *Ha ha! You thought you got to choose*," (315). These brief humorous clips weave its way in and out of Miller's memoir. While it may seem like a microscopic occurrence, I think we need to view as an aspect of Miller's storytelling, a form of talking back (hooks), that works to resist the dominant narratives placed on how victim-survivors of sexual assault must act.

I want to end my analysis of Miller's *Know My Name* with the way she ends her memoir—by rhetorically analyzing her victim impact statement to underscore how her voice

forced us to finally *listen to her*. A victim-impact statement is a voluntary statement made by the victim or next to kin that helps determine the sentencing or severity of the offender. The United States Department of Justice defines a victim-impact statement as "statements [that] describes the emotional, physical, and financial impact you and others have suffered as a direct result of the crime," (https://www.justice.gov/criminal/criminal-vns/victim-impact-statements). The statement is either a written or oral, and sometimes a combination of both.

Miller's victim-impact statement was read during the last day of the sentencing trial of the case, "The People vs. Brock Turner" on June 2, 2016. Miller's impact statement, which she provided in full to *BuzzFeed News*, became disseminated across various media outlets and had a readership of over eleven-million views within just four days of its publication. Miller's victim-impact statement was also reprinted in the publication of *Know My Name* and concludes the memoir. The rhetorical effectiveness of victim-impact statements can sometimes influence the severity of sentencing. As we now know with the "People vs. Brock Turner," Judge Aaron Persky ultimately gave Turner a light-sentence of six months of which he only served three months. Despite the lenient sentencing, the cultural impact of Miller's victim-impact statement should not be understated. For example, Miller talks about the experience of how she received a letter from then Vice President Joe Biden in which he told her, *"I see you*," (250). Miller's talks about what it meant for her to be in the center as an Asian woman, "I had grown up in the margins; in the media Asian Americans were assigned side roles, submissive, soft-spoken secondary characters. I had grown used to being unseen, to never being fully known. It did not feel possible that I could be the protagonist," (250).

In their essay, "Understanding Genre through the Lens of Advocacy: The Rhetorical Work of the Victim-Impact Statement," (2010) Amy D. Propen and Mary Lay Schuster conduct

various interviews with judges, courtroom observers, and victim advocates to get a better understanding of what makes an *effective* victim-impact statement. Propen and Schuster argue that victim-impact statements are their own genre and consider, "how the use of such a new genre becomes a tool for advocacy," (3). Propen and Schuster state that what makes the victim-impact statement a powerful genre is because it is an interconnected relationship between the victim and the legal system that gives voice to the victim, "Based on the perceptions of the advocates we interviewed, the VIS [victim-impact statement] functions as a tool that may allow the victim to feel heard or acknowledged while also allowing the advocate to push for change on a systematic level," (8). More importantly, from Propen and Schuster's work, we can see that the rhetorical power of the victim-impact statement is how it leads to catharsis for the victim-survivor (8).

Given what Propen and Schuster's discourse on the rhetorical effectiveness of victim-impact statements, we can see how Miller's victim-impact statement shaped other testimonies from rape survivors while also providing her with catharsis. For example, Miller decides to directly address Turner and begins her statement with, "You don't know me, but you've been inside me, and that's why we're here today," (339). Moreover, we find out from the victim-impact statement how Miller learned exactly what happened to her that night in January 2015,

> One day, I was at work, scrolling through the news on my phone, and came across an article. In it, I read and learned for the first time about how I was found unconscious, with my hair disheveled, long necklace wrapped around my neck, bra pulled out of my dress, dress pulled off over my shoulders and pulled above my waist, that I was butt naked all the way down to my boots, legs spread apart, and had been penetrated by a foreign object

> by someone I did not recognize. This is how I learned what happened to me, sitting at my desk reading the news at work, (343).

Miller continues in her statement to say that even though Turner committed sexual assault on her, he would not be able to recognize her as she writes, "The night after it happened, he said he didn't know my name, said he wouldn't be able to identify my face in a lineup, didn't mention any dialogue between us," (345). By stating in her impact statement how she found out the exact details about her assault through media outlets reporting on it and how Turner did not even recognize her face once he assaulted her, Miller's rhetorically impacts the public's perception of how sexual assault cases continue to protect the assailant.

Conclusion

Just this morning on April 9th, 2024, I bore (virtual) witness to the victim-impact statements made in the historic trial of James and Jennifer Crumbley, the parents of 2021 Michigan school shooter, Ethan Crumbley. The trial is the first of its kind in the United States that prosecuted the parents of a school shooter because instead of paying attention to the signs that their son posed a threat to others, they bought him a gun. This is the same gun Ethan Crumbley would then use to execute four high-school students (Hana St. Juliana, Madisyn Baldwin, Tate Myre, and Justin Schilling) at Oxford High School in November 2021. The victim impact statements came from the victims' families and described their heartbreak and frustration of losing their loved one. I remember being particularly moved by the victim-impact statement made by Reina St. Juliana regarding the murder of her younger sister, Hana. In the victim-impact statement Reina remarks how their grandmother, who was from Japan, would be worried about the safety of her granddaughters living in America, a place where random acts of violence were rampant. I think what moved me particularly about that remark was thinking about how so many

immigrants come to America to avoid the violence of their homeland, only to experience more violence in America.

My mind then drifts to Miller's mother. Would she ever think that in leaving China and starting a family in Palo Alto, California that her daughter would experience a violent sexual assault on the campus that was just a seven-minute drive from their home? I also think of the family of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Prageeta Sharma, and Samiha and wondered if they agonized over the same regret that I was second-handly projecting onto them? Of course, gender and sexual violence is not unique or isolated to America. However, if you ask any immigrant child and particularly the child of Asian immigrants, about their experiences growing up, they will all tell you the same thing: they will relate it to you in some fashion about how the Asian immigrant parent tries to preserve their child's innocence for as long as they can from the reckless nature of America. In other words, while they want nothing more than their child to flourish in America, they want their child to be safe and protected.

Sometimes this preservation of innocence is more commonly identified by how Asian immigrant families try to retain their culture and not fully assimilate into American culture. This is not just about preserving culture as it is about maintaining an "innocence" that is not tainted by the horrors of American society. I bring attention to this because I want us to be reminded again that we cannot think of Miller, or other Asian/Americans victim-survivors of violence, without acknowledging their complex racial and cultural experiences. Through her powerful victim-impact statement and her memoir, Miller's storytelling functions as a discursive transgression against the racial and gendered subjectivities placed on her as an Asian/American victim-survivor of sexual assault because she forces us not only know her name but know who she is outside the events that happened to her on the night of January 18, 2015. I conclude this chapter

with a mural that Miller did for the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, California. The mural which is copied below represents Miller's healing process and aptly entitled, *I was, I am, I will be.*



Figure 1: Miller's *I Was* - the first panel which is part of her mural, *I was, I am, I will be.*



Figure 2: Miller's *I am* - the second panel which is part of her mural, *I was, I am, I will be.*



Figure 3: Miller stands in front of *I Will Be* - the third and last panel which is part of her mural, *I was, I am, I will be.*

CHAPTER FOUR

THE STORY OF KINSHIP AMONGST GENOCIDE: HOW SRI LANKAN TAMIL WOMEN PRESERVE KINSHIP THROUGH STORYTELLING IN SHARIKA THIRANAGAMA'S *IN MY MOTHER'S HOUSE: CIVIL WAR IN SRI LANKA*

"The practice of speaking for others is often born of a desire for mastery, to privilege oneself as the one who correctly understands the truth about another's situation."
-Linda Martín Alcoff

"For the 'figure' of woman, the relationship between woman and silence can be plotted by women themselves."
-Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

"(If) Stories create people, then storytelling is a celebration of kinship."
-Mareike Neuhaus

Introduction

My objective for this chapter is to bring new insights to how Sri Lankan Tamil women have used silent and intimate ways to talk about their experiences with kinship within the context of the Tamil genocide and its aftermath. In particular, by closely reading Sharika Thiranagama's autoethnographic work, *My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka* (2013), I argue how rhetorical storytelling allows Sri Lankan Tamil women to preserve kinship. For Sri Lankan Tamil women, speaking in silent and intimate ways about kinship functions as a discursive transgression against the Sinhalese-majority government in Sri Lanka that aimed to erase any sense of Tamilness from Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese government has informally represented the Sri Lankan Tamil fight for a Tamil Eelam as a form of terrorism in public discourses. By using silent and intimate ways to tell their story of kinship, Sri Lankan Tamil women are preserving a sense of futurity for Sri Lankan Tamils. Through this analysis, we also revisit this longstanding question about the effects of informal representation from the perspective of Sri Lankan Tamil women. By doing so, we are able to get a more complicated sense of how marginalized groups

have a say in a political world that represses them. My chapter will also bring more attention to the Sri Lankan Tamil genocide — an ethnic conflict that has been informally represented as the Sri Lankan *Civil War* and has globally labelled the Tamil resistance fighters, the Tamil Tigers, as terrorists. The Sri Lankan Tamil genocide has gone largely understudied in the discipline of rhetoric. My hope is that my research will encourage and inspire more discursive and historiographic contributions related to the Sri Lankan Tamil genocide.

Tamil cultural discourse is heterogeneous, sometimes internally conflicted, and other times fractured beyond translation because parts of the story remain obscure to scholars due to how the Tamil genocide is (mis)represented. The Sri Lankan Tamil genocide begin in 1983 and "concluded" in 2009 at the hands of the Sri Lankan Sinhalese-Buddhist government.[13] While the war may have formally "concluded" in 2009, the long-lasting consequences of the war have materialized in the political and cultural discourse in Sri Lanka.[14]

One of the causes that led to the violent ethnic conflict between the Sri Lankan Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils was because the Tamils were pursuing an independent Tamil state known as Tamil Eelam. The reason for this is because following British departure in 1948, the Sinhalese weaponized political, language, and educational tactics in the hopes to erase Tamil culture within Sri Lanka. The Sinhalese wanted to establish Sri Lanka as a nation that signified a Sinhalese-Buddhist nation. As a result, Sri Lankan Tamils started a rebellion movement to claim their access to the (home)land. This resulted in the Sinhalese carrying out violent attacks to

[13] The two major events that signify the beginning and end of the Tamil genocide are Black July that happened in 1983 and the Mullivaikkal Massacre of 2009. However, there have been numerous unnamed anti-Tamil pogroms which have occurred in Sri Lanka throughout the 1950s, 1970s, and 1980s.

[14]Beginning in April 2022, the fuel and food costs in Sri Lanka began to absurdly rise. The reason was because the Prime Minister, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and his political cabinet were mismanaging the country's emergency funds. Sri Lankan civilians began to protest Rajapaksa's rule and demanded justice from the Rajapaksa family. This connects back to the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict because the Sinhalese family have been actively oppressing Sri Lankan minorities.

eradicate the Tamils. This ethnic cleansing eventually leading to the Tamil repressive-hegemonial genocide. In their foundational essay, "Toward Empirical Theory of Genocide and Polticides: Identification and Measurement of Cases Since 1945," (1988) Barbara Harff and Ted Gurr trace various cases of genocide and politicide since World War II. Harff and Gurr classify repressive-hegemonial genocide as "mass murders targeted at ethnically or nationally distinct groups because they are engaged in some form of oppositional activity," (363). Therefore, the mass murdering of Sri Lankan Tamil resistance fighters and civilians by the Sinhalese-government is an example of repressive-hegemonial genocide. However, the Tamil genocide is misread, with many not knowing that the massacres against the Tamils are acts of *genocide*.

This is because the Tamil genocide has been informally represented by the Sri Lankan Sinhalese government which globally represented the genocide as the "Sri Lankan Civil War" and moreover, they labelled the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as a terrorist group.[15] In "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," (2001) James Fearon and David Laitin state there are three defining categories of a civil war. They follow:

> (1) They involved fighting between agents of (or claimants to) a state and organized, nonstate groups who sought to take control of a government, to take power in a region, or to use violence to change government policies. (2) The conflict killed at least 1,000 over its course, with a yearly average of at least 100. (3) At least 100 were killed on both sides (including civilians attacked by rebels. (76)

From the classification of civil war outlined by Fearon and Laitin, it makes sense to see why the naming of the ethnic conflict as a civil war is justified. However, the reason why I still urge us to

[15] The LTTE is also more commonly known as the Tamil Tigers. The Tamil Tigers have been blacklisted as a terrorist group in certain countries such the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Sri Lanka, and India.

think of the war as a repressive-hegemonial genocide against Sri Lankan Tamils is because the Sinhalese government were actively working on various forms of ethnic cleansing against Sri Lankan Tamils before the war formally started in 1983. For example, following the departure of the British, the Sinhalese weaponized language, land, education, and religion to erase the presence of the Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus before the events leading up to 1983. The rhetorical effectiveness of also not naming the ethnic conflict as a genocide is that it prevents attributing the violence to one-side. The representation of events, especially as it relates to ethnic violence, is incredibly important as it informs how these affected communities are structured. Therefore, understanding the ethical effects of informal representation on Sri Lankan Tamils will provide new perspectives on how we go about structuring community as we now have a more nuanced consideration about the power behind the stories we come to rhetorically listen to and believe are true.

The idea for this chapter emerged during the first year of my PhD program in English at the University of Oregon, when out of whim, I decided to take a Romance Language course called, "Politicide and Genocide." It was then that I decided to study the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, something my parents would only whisper about and something I wanted to know more about. The only thing I knew about why we arrived in the U.S. is that there was a growing conflict in Sri Lanka that made it unsafe for civilians. It never occurred to me to ask my parents direct questions about why the conflict was happening and why we needed to leave. Even though I was only four when I immigrated to the U.S., I innately knew our bodies signified otherness and I naively believed assimilation was salvation. Consequently, I resisted any opportunity to ask my parents about our homeland. The decision to not inquire about why my family immigrated to the U.S. is something I would deeply regret, especially following the death of my mother in June

2021. I only realized after her passing that the troubles she endured were related to the traumas experienced by many Sri Lankan Tamil women during the Tamil genocide. When I was finally able to *name* what had happened to my family, to my mother, and to countless other Sri Lankans who were caught in the middle, did I know that the work that matters to me is scholarship that engages in our responsibility in how we come to believe the stories of those whose voices are untranslatable.

Tracing the Genealogy of Representational Epistemologies

I begin this chapter with an extensive analysis of the theoretical contributions to representational epistemologies. My close reading of the Thirangama's *In My Mother's House* is aided by scholarship on forms of representation from the perspective of cultural rhetorics, poststructuralism, postcolonial theory, and women of color feminisms. As explained in my "Introduction," the discursive and historiographic analysis of representation engages with the quality of language use. Specifically, I engage with a form of representation known as informal representation.[16] My use of informal representation draws from scholars like Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Spivak, and Linda Martín Alcoff. These cross-disciplinary scholars offer different yet similar reading practices that describe the shifts in rhetoric, sovereignty, and governmentality of marginalized groups in a manner that does not reproduce Western hegemonic forms of comparison. These insights are incredibly important as I am working towards bringing new insights to how Sri Lankan Tamil women, a non-Western group, use rhetorical storytelling as a way to speak about their experiences of kinship.

In 1967, Jacques Derrida published his landmark work on deconstruction, *Of Grammatology*. This work initiated a cross-disciplinary conversation about what it meant to

[16] Informal Representation draws from Wendy Salkin's concept of Informal Political Representation.

structure a community through representation. At the heart of *Of Grammatology* is Derrida's concept of *différance*. *Différance* captures how meaning is always deferred as he writes, "*Différance* is neither a word or a concept. In it, however, we shall see the juncture—rather than the summation—of what has been most decisively inscribed in the thought of what is conveniently called our "epoch," (279). Through his concept of *différance*, Derrida argues that we should interrogate any philosophical or language systems that operate through strict binaries because there is no stable relationship between sign and signifier. For example, in describing the relationship between speech and writing, Derrida suggests that language does not privilege speech over writing because language is an interplay between the two. This approach to understanding language was monumental because it gives way to considering how both speech and writing are prisms to examine the logos of representation and one should not be privileged over the other. *Of Grammatology* paved the way for how rhetorical studies and postcolonial theory approached questions related to forms of representation.

While Derrida's work in the late 1960s had us critically interrogate our uses of logocentric binaries, scholars of writing studies similarly forced writing instructors to rethink the ways they were assessing student speech in binary oppositions. In particular, in 1974 the *Conference on College Composition and Communication* (*CCCC*) published, "Students' Right to their Own Language," was a groundbreaking essay on discursive representation. The essay confronted educators with the demand that students' have a "right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style," (1). The resonance from *Of Grammatology* flicker within the *CCCC*'s article because it denies logocentrism based on the constructed subject positions of the student.

In particular, the writers behind "Students' Right to their Own Language" asks writing instructors to reflect on how the view assessment and what standard that assessment is based off,

> We have ignored, many of us, the distinction between speech and writing and have taught the language as though the talk in any region, even the talk of speakers with prestige and power, were identical to edited written English. We have also taught, many of us, as though the "English of educated speakers," the language used by those in power in the community, had an inherent advantage over other dialects as a means of expressing thought or emotion, conveying information, or analyzing concepts. (3).

The writers of the "Students' Right to their Own Language" have brought to the forefront the ways their approaches to teaching writing through binary oppositions strip the agency and self-worth of students from social locations that disable their access to edited written English. In thinking through how Sri Lankan Tamil women use storytelling to talk about their experiences of kinship is often illegible to readers, I am reminded by the declaration set forth in "Students' Right to their Own Language." In particular, "Students' Right to their Own Language" is a pedagogical reminder that because something is represented as illegible, does not mean it did not happen.

Roughly twenty years following the publication of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak further complicated our understanding of representation through her work on deconstructive subalternity. In "Deconstructing Historiography," Spivak defined subalternity as "the absolute limit where history is narrativized into logic" (16) and by doing so, argued that subaltern representation is always the deferred representation. In particular, Spivak is critical of the Subaltern Studies Group because their approach to writing about a so-called subaltern consciousness is through informal representation, "it is the subaltern who provides the model for

a general theory of consciousness. And yet, since the "subaltern" cannot appear without the thought of the "elite," the generalization is by definition incomplete," (203); Spivak continues to talk about how in writing about the "other," what results is a Western form of anti-humanism, "the radical intellectual in the West is either caught in a deliberative choice of subalternity, granting to the oppressed either the very expressive subjectivity which s/he criticizes or, instead, total unrepresentability," (209). Spivak's commentary sets up a framework to reinstate the importance of why we need to be better rhetorical *listeners* to communities who have been informally represented, like Sri Lankan Tamils. In other words, we need to listen to what informally represented groups have been saying, otherwise, our intentions to ethically speak on behalf of a marginalized community produces anti-humanistic representations.

Linda Marie Alcoff further complicates the rituals of speaking that occur in acts of representation in her essay "The Problem of Speaking for Others" (1991). In an essay wrought with questions regarding representation, Alcoff demands of us how we can come to structure a community equitably as she asks, "how to develop strategies for a more equitable, just distribution of the ability to speak and be heard" (29). In a critique of representation within academia, bell hooks challenges the inherent white supremacist weaponization that renders what is intelligible and what is legible in "Theory as a Liberatory Practice" (1991). She writes,

> The assault on white supremacy made manifest in alliances between white women academics and white male peers seems to have been formed and nurtured around common efforts to formulate and impose standards of critical evaluation that would be used to define what is theoretical and what is not (hooks 63).

Therefore, ideas of representation are not only about making sure voices are heard, but challenging notions of what is accepted in Western modernity. Homi K. Bhabha also critiques

academia's weaponization of representation in how Western theorists capitalize on cultural diversity but fail to recognize cultural difference (*Location of Culture*, 1994). Derrida's *Of Grammatology* provides the theoretical foundations to my dissertation project, it is Alcoff's contributions on the politics of representation, Spivak's work on deconstructive subalternity, and Bhabha's formulation of cultural difference that operate as the theoretical grounding for my chapter.

Rhetorical Responses to Representation

The field of rhetoric and composition has made considerable contributions to forms of representation since Derrida's work on *différance* and on how language structures a community. For example, *Rhetoric Review*'s 1988 publication of "Octalog I, Politics of Historiography" presented a disciplinary debate on the history of the field. "Octalog I" featured perspectives from rhetoric scholars such as Richard Leo Enos, Victor Vitanza, Susan C. Jarratt, and James Berlin. These scholars critiqued how the classical rhetorical tradition misplaces and mistreats marginalized representation within Western spaces. We see this in Enos' section entitled, " Lurching Toward Mt. Olympus: The Polis and Politics of Historiography in Classical Rhetoric." Enos argues that we need to consider what we view as proof — or what I interpret as legibility; he writes, "What constitutes as "proof," or the validity of warranting historical interpretation has a direct impact on the meaning one gives to historical phenomena," (8).

Another monumental contribution to the discipline of rhetoric is through the forming of a specialty known as cultural rhetorics. cultural rhetorics arrives at the scene when scholars want to bring focus and attention to non-Western cultural practices that have been ignored or abused by the Western rhetorical tradition. Malea Powell and Phill Bratta demystify the superficial otherness that has been applied to cultural rhetorics in their collaborative work, "Entering the

Cultural Rhetorics Conversation" (2016). Powell and Bratta claim that cultural rhetorics is an intersection between rhetoric and cultural studies. What makes cultural rhetorics unique in its praxis and separate from other identity-based scholarship, is how the field aims *not* to position non-Western rhetorics in a binary opposition to Western rhetorics. They write,

> The current field of cultural rhetorics emerges, then, from a growing unease with the facility of canonical Western rhetorical theories and practices to account for the experiences of non-Western peoples and from the sense that the exigencies of Western culture itself have gone unexamined in that traditional canon. This lack of explicit examination has led the discipline to categorize scholarship as either "mainstream" or "marginal" in relation to Western traditions (Powell and Bratta 2016).

In other words, cultural rhetorics as a practice is invested in the "specificity of *all* rhetorical practices/productions" (Powell and Bratta), not just those belonging to the non-Western rhetorical tradition.

Furthermore, scholars such as Suresh Canagarajah, Jerry Won Lee, Abraham Acosta, Romeo García, and José Cortez continue to intervene in the discourse on representation by drawing on comparative and cultural rhetorics as a way to equitably represent non-Western perspectives in a manner that does not turn to logocentric thinking. Suresh Canagarajah and Jerry Won Lee use translingualism as a theoretical frame to analyze how the use of "Englishes" by non-Western and/or marginalized individuals becomes rendered in Western modernity. In *Translingual Practice: Global Relations and Cosmopolitan Relations* (Canagarajah 2012) and *Politics of Translingualism* (Lee 2019) the scholars respectively argue that one major issue within discourses of representation is the absence of translingualism as a practice of sovereignty. Abraham Acosta also discusses sovereignty as it applies to representation in the context of the

U.S./Mexico border as he writes in "Hinging on Exclusion and Exception" (2012), that "regardless of population size or history in the area, every minority group has the right to assert the right to representation anywhere—even against the most traditional and predominant group among them" (105). Most recently in their work, "The Trace of a Mark That Scatters: The Anthropoi and the Rhetoric of Decoloniality" (2020), Romeo García and José Cortez work through Latinamericanist theories of decoloniality to provide new insight into how non-Western rhetoric in a manner that is not reliant on locational thinking. Rhetorical studies have come to theorize representation through students' rights (*CCCC* and Smitherman), translingualism (Canagarajah and Lee), sovereignty (hooks and Acosta), Western modernity (Lyons, Powell, and Baratt), and locational thinking (García and Cortez). In particular, these cross-disciplinary scholarship on forms of representation frame how I think about how rhetorical storytelling functions for the informally represented Sri Lankan Tamil women.

Forms of Kinship

Within this chapter, I closely read Thiranagama's autoethnographic work, *In My Mother's House* as a way to engage in the question, "how do Sri Lankan Tamils use silent and intimate ways to talk about kinship within the context of genocide? " My interest in kinship is informed by the ideas and ties to the concept of family that are impacted by the experiences of genocide. Moreover, the question of not just what kinship looks like but how Sri Lankan Tamil women tell that story is presented through different voices and therefore, representative of informal representation. Specifically, Thiranagama's *In My Mother's House* offers a perspective into how the events and material effects of the Tamil genocide impacted Tamil kinship is represented through her conversations with Sri Lankan women who remained in Sri Lanka as well as he own reflections has a Sri Lankan woman from the diaspora.

Within the text, *In My Mother's Home*, Thiranagama informs us that part of her kinship story is that she is the daughter of prominent Sri Lankan Tamil human rights activists. However, a complex dualism presents itself when we learn that Thiranagama's mother is Tamil and her father, Sinhalese. Even though Thiranagama's parents were fighting for *Tamil* human rights, the complexities of her family's ethnicity was most probably a point of contention in the cultural climate of Sri Lanka at that time due to how both Tamil and Sinhalese nationalists wanted "purity" within their own struggle for nationalist identity. While the tension between Sinhalese-Tamil relationships have mellowed following the conclusion of the war, a sense of distrust remains when we think of how these relationships forge into intimacies. In fact, when my own cousin married a Sinhalese woman in 2022, his parents distanced themselves from the union as an act of nationalistic pride.[17] These attachments to both ethnicity, culture, and national pride and the resistance to kinship that troubles those attachments, simultaneously linger throughout Thiranagama's work. These complex feelings work towards supporting the idea that Tamil kinship, like Tamil culture, is heterogeneous and often, fragmented.

Following the assassination of her mother, Thiranagama returns to Jaffna, Sri Lanka to conduct fieldwork on the effects the Tamil genocide had on its survivors. In particular, Thiranagama focuses her study on the war's effects on Sri Lankan minorities such as women, Tamils, and Muslims. I focus on Thiranagama's study and interviews with Sri Lankan Tamil women and specifically, the relationship between Analuxmi and Malathi, a mother and daughter duo. My chapter emphasizes this particular kinship as a way to think about how kinship takes on different meanings during the war. Furthermore, to a certain extent, my work in this chapter is

[17] I mention this anecdote from my family because it represents how tension between Sinhalese-Tamil relationships and union still materialize years following the war. In my specific example, while my Uncle and Aunt eventually set aside their feelings of distrust towards their Sinhalese daughter-in-law, it was a distance that could not go unnoticed.

about and for Tamil mothers. Thiranagama's relationship to her diasporic experience would not exist in the same way without the death of her mother, in a similar manner that Malathi's story would not exist without the absence of her mother during a pivotal event, and finally, in the same way my own understanding of myself as a Sri Lankan Tamil woman in the diaspora would not be possible without the death of my mother.

As stated previously, this chapter analyzes the question, "how do Sri Lankan Tamil women use silent and intimate ways to rhetorically tell the story of kinship?" by closely reading Thiranagama's work. In particular, I frame my analysis in four ways: Kinship Under Militancy, Death and Displacement, Silence as Futurity, and The Intimacy of Commonplaces. The first section, "Kinship Under Militancy," sets up the context of the larger close reading while also presenting the fraught relationships Tamil civilians have with Tamil militant groups. While my main focus is on Sri Lankan Tamil women, it is imperative that I also analyze broadly what kinship looked like under militancy as that sets up the stakes of understanding the importance of this insight. More specifically, this section reflects on how Thiranagama's kinship permanently changed due to the events of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, and particularly, the actions carried out by the Tamil militant groups. The second section, "Death and Displacement," is a meditation on how members within the Sri Lankan diaspora have different understandings and relationships with one of the most prominent militant groups, the LTTE. The work of these two sections is to establish how kinship under the experience of war is not only shared in the private -sphere but also takes root in a collective manner. Moreover, these sections also suggest how the story of Tamil kinship cannot be divorced from the Tamil militancy groups as often, those militant groups (informally) represented Tamiliness. The third section, "Silence as Futurity," signals the shift to the close reading of Malathi, a survivor of the Tamil genocide that Thiranagama

interviews for her book. Malathi's ideas of kinship take root in the search for home and how that manifests into relationships with land, trauma, and absence. Moreover, this section examines how silence becomes the language that makes a future possible for Tamil kinship. Lastly, the fourth section, "The Intimacy of Commonplaces," carries similar ideas that were presented in the previous section about how kinship is rooted in the complicated experiences of (un)belonging. However, the fourth section also pays close attention to "commonplaces." In other words, commonplaces, as I use in this chapter, reflect physical places that cannot be stripped from the events that have permanently shaped that land and as a result, changed how people belong in that place. The chapter, then, ultimately aims at providing new reading practices to think about when we consider "how we tell the story of kinship" from the perspective of Sri Lankan Tamils.

Kinship under Militancy

Sharika Thiranagama's *In My Mother's House*, is a testament about war's transforming effects on the social and ecological memory of land, culture, and identity. In other words, Thiranagama describes how the current state of Sri Lankans, both in the homeland and in the diaspora, is a direct result of the war as she writes, "the war 'happened' to people and at the same time made them," (10). Thirangama's text is a deeply intimate reflection about these newly formed (and unformed) subjectivities that are both individual and collective as the Sri Lankan Civil War belonged to no one but also belonged to everyone (10).

In particular, I am interested in the different ways we remember tell the story of kinship and how much of that is a result of the informal representation surrounding the Tamil genocide. My aim in closely reading Thirangama's autoethnographic work as a way to reflect on my theoretical interest is because *In My Mother's House* presents us with fieldwork about the survivors from the Tamil genocide from the perspective of a Sri Lankan Tamil woman in the

diaspora. Oftentimes, diaspora studies tend to focus solely on the voices of those in the diaspora. However, I think there is a perspective we gain about the diaspora from those members who did not or could not leave the homeland. As much of my research is on the ways we read and tell stories and how that informs representational politics, my work also pushes the boundaries of diaspora studies to avoid what Evelyn Du-Hart refers to as the essentialist association of diaspora (49). Du-Hart is critical of how the popularization of the word "diaspora" is "reduced to a simple and simplistic essentialism denoting any kind of human mobility and scattering, or any kind of yearning by upper-class exiles" (49); the danger with this reduction of diaspora that Du-Hart refers to is that it does not make space to understand the consequences of each distinct diaspora.

In particular, how do we remember the precarious relationship(s) between Sri Lankan Tamils in the homeland *and* Sri Lankan Tamils in the distant land, and what does that tell us about we come to tell stories of kinship in the Tamil genocide/diaspora? *In My Mother's House* is a medium in which I can uncover these relationships while also learning more about how these relationships were negotiated due to the effects of how the Tamil genocide was informally represented.

Thirangama's work begins with death. The death of her mother, and the simultaneous death of her childhood. Thiranagama poignantly reflects on how the ongoing war had been preparing her and her sister for the events that would unfold on September 21st, 1989. It was on that day that Thiranagama learns that her Tamil mother had been murdered in front of their home by the Tamil militant group, the LTTE. As a result, Thiranagama and her sister left Sri Lanka with their father on December 25th, 1989 to arrive as refugees in London on December 26th, 1989. *In My Mother's House* is Thiranagama's written reflection on her return back to Sri Lanka after a decade. However, as she alerts us almost immediately, this text is not about her personal

meditations of her loss. Instead, the work is more concerned with the stories of those who remained in Sri Lanka and how those stories trouble the memory the Sri Lankan Tamils in the diaspora have of the war, and particularly the LTTE.

The basis of my interrogation and close reading of *In My Mother's House* is to uncover how we can read stories of the Tamil genocide as representative of cultural heterogeneity and not a signifier of cultural loss. While Thiranagama does not want the focus of her work to be on her individual experience, it is nearly impossible to read the text without the author's own experiences as diasporic Sri Lankan interpolating these stories. Moreover, the title of Thirangama's text also helps us better understand why the book in its true form cannot exist without Thiranagama's experiences. The title of her book, Thiranagama informs us, is in homage to Kwame Anthony Appiah's essay, "In My Father's House" (1992). Appiah's respective text reflects on his return to Ghana following his father's death and the forced community discourse that follows familial loss. Additionally, Thiranagama mentions how both her and Appiah were brought up with the Bible and how one of the most quoted lines is, "in my father's house I find many rooms," (qtd. in Thiranagama 2). In that manner, while *In My Mother's House* is a text on fieldwork, it is ultimately about Thiranagama returning to her motherland and her mother's home as a way to reflect on her ties to kinship.

It is crucial to note here the layered complexities surrounding the death of Thiranagama's mother, at the hands of the LTTE, as it reveals the fraught conditions of not only cultural identity but also violent nationalism and what this meant for how the Tamil plight was represented. As Thiranagama reminds us, the Sri Lankan Tamils did not knowingly elect the LTTE to be representative of the Tamil fight for land as she writes, "if we understand public expressions to be ones that are allusive and double-layered, then we have to consider the nature of political life

and public support for an unelected organization like the LTTE" (39). The LTTE is then an example of informal representation. In other words, the LTTE informally represents the Sri Lankan Tamils and other Sri Lankan minorities, however, none of the latter groups elected the LTTE to be such representatives. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were the militant separatist group fighting for an independent Tamil homeland within Sri Lanka. The LTTE were supposed to be the vessel in which Tamil civilians and other Sri Lankan minorities (like the Sri Lankan Muslims) had their voices heard. This might have been the case when the LTTE originally formed in May 1976 under the leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. However, as the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka worsened, the means in which the LTTE were willing to secure a Tamil Eelam included having the blood of countless innocent Sri Lankan Tamils and other Sri Lankan minorities at their hands.

Death and Displacement

One of the "stories" of kinship that took place during the Tamil genocide and the Sri Lankan Civil War is the differences in how Sri Lankan Tamils in the homeland remember the war compared to how Sri Lankan Tamils in the diaspora remember the war, and especially their differing memories of the LTTE. For instance, on the one hand, many Sri Lankan Tamils in the diaspora still view the LTTE as signifying the liberatory fight for a Tamil Eelam. In many ways, the LTTE represented a form of collective kinship for Sri Lankan Tamils because the LTTE formed with the main priority being to secure a home for Tamils in Sri Lanka. This is reflected in how many diaspora Tamils hang or fly the LTTE flag (see Figure 6 below). It is crucial to understand that for many diasporic Sri Lankan Tamils, the LTTE abroad still held a manipulative control over them as Thiranagama writes, "the LTTE abroad took over the management of those campaigns and turned them into mass displays of LTTE flags and demands for the LTTE to be

recognized and rescued by foreign governments," (3). Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain whether diasporic LTTE support was a free choice or whether it was a byproduct of LTTE manipulation abroad and the fears that would arise for diaspora Tamils if they went against LTTE support. Nevertheless, I think for many diasporic and displaced Sri Lankan Tamils, the LTTE flag was representative of the formation of their identity in their new homeland and how that tied to kinship. In particular, as a result of the war, one of the newly formed Sri Lankan Tamil identities is one that conveyed possibility.

Possibility, as I use here, suggests that hope was not lost for Sri Lankan Tamils who were still fighting to have their own national state land in Sri Lanka and especially one that was not overshadowed by the Sinhalese government. The LTTE flag represented this possibility of hope because it is a formal political proclamation that the Tamil state land is a *sovereign* land. Moreover, for diasporic Sri Lankan Tamils, the LTTE flag meant that their displacement was not for nothing. At the same time, for the numerous Sri Lankan civilians caught in the middle of the ethnic conflict, I think the possibility of hope meant that there was a chance for the LTTE and the Sinhalese government to be held accountable for the violence they caused.

[18]

[18] **Figure 6:** This is the LTTE flag that was officially published in 1990. The symbol of the tiger found both in the flag and in the LTTE name was specifically selected by LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhkaran. Prabhkaran chose the Tiger as the national symbol for Tamil Eelam as it is a cultural image that is prominent in Dravidian Civilization and

On the other hand, for many Sri Lankan Tamils not in diaspora, the LTTE no longer signified a collective fight for Tamil liberation nor did it signify possibility. Rather, for them, the LTTE now represented both fear and violence that paralleled the Sri Lankan Sinhalese government. This was reflected in the militaristic structure of the LTTE that used suicide bombs, cyanide capsules, intelligence movements (i.e. land army, artillery army, sea army known as the Sea Tigers, and suicide bomber fraction known as the Black Tigers), and would even kidnap and murder who they believed to be traitors within the Tamil community (Thiranagama 25). Moreover, for many Sri Lankans civilians in the homeland, the existence of the LTTE was a constant reminder of the consequences that emerge from non-elected representation.

This lack of agency when it comes to political representation provides insight into why many Sri Lankan Tamils, especially in the homeland, did not support the LTTE. Thirangama does not state explicitly whether she denounces or supports the LTTE's cause. However, she is direct about her disdain for the violence that the LTTE created and how that violence impacts the Sri Lankan civilians. Let us not forget that Thirangama's mother was one of those victims of LTTE violence. As we mentioned previously, Thiranagama's mother was Sri Lankan Tamil. More importantly, her mother was a university professor who undoubtedly supported Tamil human rights activism in Sri Lanka alongside Thiranagama's father, who happened to be Sri Lankan Sinhalese. Thiranagama does not get into detail if her family ever uncovered why her mother was murdered by the LTTE. However, her mother's marriage to a Sinhala man perhaps was why the LTTE was motivated to kill her. In other words, even though Thiranagama's mother

specifically that of the Chola dynasty. Moreover, one of the characteristics of the LTTE was to have a Tamil state that was deeply invested in militarism. (Source: https://tamilnation.org/tamileelam/defacto/flag.htm)

and father both championed Tamil human rights activism in Sri Lanka, the LTTE assumed that Thirangama's mother was not loyal to Tamil activism because she was married to a Sinhala man.

In other words, Thiranagama emphasizes the disconnect between how Sri Lankan Tamils in the homeland and in the displaced land remember the war, and particularly, the experiences of the LTTE. In fact, if we remember, it was the LTTE that murdered Thirangama's mother, not the Sinhalese government. There is such a disconnect between homeland Sri Lankan Tamils and diasporic Sri Lankan Tamils about their experiences and memories with the LTTE. The LTTE, as Thiranagama reminds, is ultimately a militant group that used "fear and intimidation to control Tamil politics in Sri Lanka and the diaspora," (25). This divergence in the memory of the war between the Tamils in the homeland and the Tamils in the diaspora is crucial for understanding how kinship reflects private and political struggles and hopes.

Silence as Futurity

In the chapter, "The House of Secrets: Mothers, Daughters, and Inheritance," Thiranagama has an interview with a survivor of the Tamil genocide, Malathi. Malathi is a Sri Lankan Tamil who currently resides in Colombo, Sri Lanka in a home that is adjacent to her childhood home where her father and brother were murdered by Sri Lankan militant forces. The house that Malathi currently resides in was built by her mother, Analuxmi, because the latter wanted her grandchildren to be able to inherit a home. However, as Thiranagama guides us in this chapter, what does it mean to inherit a literal home when metaphorically, one does not belong in that home? This close reading of kinship, through the story of Malathi, presents itself in the search for home, and how often, that is influenced by land, trauma, and absence.

The configuration of "home" in postcolonial contexts and diasporic communities is a multifaceted concept. Home can either be a place of belonging or unbelonging. For many

individuals, and particularly for ethnic and religious minorities in Sri Lanka, this precarious relationship to home is both an individual and collective experience. For instance, many Sri Lankan Tamils could not always view *Sri Lanka* as a national space in which they belonged because of the Tamil genocide that was actively trying to eradicate their presence in Sri Lanka. Additionally, home not only indicates the struggle to find a place to belong but also is about locating a place where one can flourish.

In other words, the desire for a home is about the possibility of having a future. Home signifies a permanent place. Home signifies an opportunity to grow. Home signifies love. These aspects that are intrinsically tied to our concept of home (and kinship) are experiences not guaranteed for the survivors of the Tamil genocide, both in Sri Lanka and abroad. Therefore, I want to consider what home looks like for Sri Lankan Tamils.

For Analuxmi, Malathi's mother, home is a counterstory. What I mean by this is that Malathi informs Thiranagama that her mother, Analuxmi, wanted a home for her grandchildren to prosper. Additionally, she constructed that home adjacent to the family's former home, where Malathi's father and brother were murdered. Through Analuxmi's perspective we can see how home is a counterstory because she demands a future legacy for her family as she assumes her granddaughters will thrive in this family home and she confronts her trauma head-on by being in proximity to the place where her family was killed.

Another aspect of home that is a common phenomenon for those affected by Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict is how home is tied to memory. Through the interview with Malathi, we come to understand how the presence of violence is now part of the social and ecological memory of Sri Lanka. In other words, we cannot provide discourse on Sri Lanka without mentioning the war as it is permanently linked to Sri Lankan land and Sri Lankan people. In the context of the Tamil

genocide, two of the most frequently discussed places in Sri Lanka are Jaffna and Colombo. On the one hand, Jaffna is a highly populated Tamil region of Sri Lanka. On the other hand, Colombo is the capital of Sri Lanka and is in many ways the "part of the southern Sinhalese heartland," (Thiranagama 79). However, Colombo is home to many Tamils as well. For instance, I am a Sri Lankan Tamil born in Colombo, Sri Lanka. While I left Sri Lanka when I was four, I still have many memories of the culture of Colombo. While I refuse to say the word "coexist," Colombo was definitely a place where Sri Lankan Sinhalese, Muslims, and Tamils existed. What this meant was that cultural diffusion amongst the various ethnic and religious groups was not uncommon.

Nevertheless, as much as memory is about recollecting, it is also about silence. What this means is that memory stored for many of these survivors will not always be linear. Moreover, memory comes and goes due to its instability. Other times, memory is about silence because the pain is too difficult to utter. For example, there is the act of recalling a memory that does not require discursive utterance. Sometimes, this memory revelation exudes through our body. In other words, our bodies betray us and reveal our memories that we cannot recall. Thiranagama recalls this "betrayal" in her interviews with Malathi. This act occurs in the most intimate place of a Sri Lankan home–the kitchen as Thiranagama writes, "Kitchens are about intimacy; they enjoin upon those within unusual and intimate positions of sitting, stooping, squatting," (79). The exchanges that happen in the space of the kitchen is an act of nurture. Therefore, it is unsurprising that in the space of intimacy and nurture, our bodies adjust to reveal its memories. For Malathi, this revelation came from her hands. Malathi informs Thiranagama how food in Sri Lankan culture is emblematic of love in the ways the gift of food nurtures relationships. In Sri Lanka, this was most commonly seen when food was offered to others during death

anniversaries. In recalling her relationship with her mother in the kitchen, Malathi describes an incident where her mother refused her food during the act of preparing food for lunch (79). However, for Thiranagama, what was exposed to her was how Malathi's hands were talking to each other as she writes, "I only recall now that her [Malathi] voice and hands talked to and against each other," (79). Thirangama's reference to Malathis's hand gestures reflects how memory is stored in the body and hints at how Analuxmi refusing Malathi food meant she refused her love. .

Moreover, silence as memory is also about storing memories someone does not want to share. As I mentioned earlier, for many survivors of the Tamil genocide, the pain of the events that unfolded are too traumatic to conjure up. Additionally, sometimes the silencing of these memories are efforts to protect other loved ones from being a part of this collective trauma. In examining the kitchen space again, Thiranagama notes how Malathi instinctively silences herself when her children come into the kitchen as she writes,

> Malathi breaks off whenever the children enter, but there is no door for the kitchen and sound echoes through the house. Do they hear her? How do they come to understand the silences that are transmitted to them?," (79).

Malathi does not want her daughters to share the burden of these memories in the same way she carries them with her everyday. Through her silence, Malathi is securing her daughters a future that is not burdened by the pain of kinship and loss.

Often, I think my parents and particularly, my mother, were trying to do the same for me. When I had an understanding of the Tamil genocide, my parents censored a lot in their response. Most of the time, they would just only mention that it was a difficult time but would share nothing more. While I wanted more in their responses, I always stopped myself from pressuring

them. I think much of that was also knowing that my parents experienced great pain and trauma from the experiences of the war.. In fact, I always remembered how it was my mother who informed me about how my father's youngest brother was murdered as a result of the Tamil genocide. I think the pain still haunted my father. I also believe the silencing of these memories was also to help me. In retrospect, these carefully selected recollections and also these carefully selected silences were ways to protect me from the experiences I cannot imagine they endured. Specifically for my mother, I think she shielded me from any experiences of sexual violence that she may have been in proximity to as a way to unburden me from those burdens. This act of memories we share and memories we hold is especially a gendered one during times of war. This was seen in how my mother also censored many of her memories of the war. It is also seen in how Malathi stops talking about her experiences in the war when her young daughters, Ovia and Rosa, walk into the kitchen. I think part of this is gendered due to the fact that women and girls were most susceptible to be victims of sexual violence during wartime.

However, I also think memory can be explored through the aspect of a mother-daughter relationship as well. In fact, in her examination of the kitchen space, notices that Malathi's mother is absent. Thiranagama writes, "Analuxmi, Malathi's mother, is not there. I realize that had she been there, much of the conversation Malathi and I have would not have been possible." (79). At one level, the silencing is about the keeping quiet that the love that she had for her father was far greater than the love Malathi has for her mother as we learn, "I was close to Appa [Father]. He didn't help out at home at all…It was Amma [Mother]who cooked and cleaned and looked after us, but I was closer with Appa," (79). As this selection from Malathi's interview reveals, this silence is about love. In particular, part of this selected silence is about keeping quiet that the love that Malathi had for her father was far greater than the love Malathi has for her

mother. The other critical part of this silence is that Malathi carries the trauma of witnessing the bodies of her murdered father and brother; it was Malathi who "found the charred bodies of her father and her elder brother in the hallway of their house," (80). The ghastly yet intimate killing of Malathi's family was sadly another continuous sight during the Sri Lankan riots. These riots were especially prominent in Colombo where Malathi's family was residing. Colombo might be a Sinhalese majority but also has the largest Tamil minority in all of Sri Lanka. In fact, Colombo's diversity was another cause for the riots that took place in Sri Lanka.

Another way home takes on a new existence in the face of war is who we consider to be kin. As previously stated, we remember the Tamil genocide through its effects on familial relationships which Thiranagama. Paradoxically, the mention of kinship in the presence of displacement suggests fear of loss as well as also suggesting familial gain. In particular, the quite physical and literal loss of kin is inevitable during a genocide. However, familial gain occurs through survivors who construct relationships over this shared collective trauma. In fact, this paradoxical phenomenon is not an uncommon experience for those who are familiar with the instability that war brings.

Moreover, in the chapter, "The House of Secrets: Mothers, Daughters, and Inheritance," Thirangama also intimately explores these newly formed kinships that are the product of death and displacement. Before we closely read this chapter, it is important to understand how "family" and "kinship" are used in a Global Asian context. For example, what do "family" and "kinship" signify? Moreover, how much of this signification is particular to distinct communities? Evelyn Nakoano Glenn explains that ideas of family and/or kinship are ultimately socially constructed as it refers to how well the person does their job within a unit (i.e. is this a "dutiful" mother? Or does this father provide economically?) or it can refer to what function this

particular person plays (i.e. does this person reproduce? Or is this a non-blood kin?) (89). Glenn also explains that when considering the ideas of kinship within Asian families, questions like the following, "what are the cultural, political, and economic factors that have influenced Asian American formation?" (90) is critical to understanding how kinships are formed in a Global Asian context. In considering those factors for the Tamil community - both abroad and at home - one cannot divorce the Tamil genocide from the factors that contributed to how ideas of kinship emerge for the Sri Lankan Tamil community. Moreover, for both Tamil communities, they are impacted by the desire to maintain traditional customs while also trying to assimilate to the majority culture as a means to survive.

Thiranagama talks about how the search for home is both a personal experience but also a collective experience (78). For instance, for Malathi and many other survivors of the Tamil genocide, home and kinship were no longer personal experiences shared within their family. Instead, home and kinship transformed to something that was now shared by the public collective. In other words, many families like Malathi's, joined makeshift camps located in temples and schools because they did not have a home to go back to (Thiranagama 80). However, within these camps, a new home was established in which each kin member told "their experiences of the riots to each other and helping each other in camp life," (80). The duties formed within these newly, constructed families were definitely a reflection of the Tamil genocide. In other words, the new roles Malathi, her brother Keeran, and other survivors took on within these camps is only something that would occur because of war. For example, Keeran's main focus became on finding resources for the displaced family members in the camp (81); and for Malathi, who was still without a mother, her focus went towards cultivating relationships with her new family in these camps.

The Intimacies of Commonplaces

The concept of home changes during and after war as it alters how we come to cope with experiences of (un)belonging. The impact of what it means to exist as someone who is not meant to be there is further complicated when we consider how many Sri Lankan Tamils in the diaspora were classified as *refugees* of the war. Refugee as a term implies otherness but also implies a Western perception of desperateness as Yen Le Espirtu writes in their definition of refugee in the Asian American context, "'refugeeness' connotes 'otherness,' summoning the image of 'people in a Third World country' who 'carried the scraps of their lives in plastic trash bags'" (208). This experience of (un)belonging as a refugee reveals how the concept of home as a place of *welcoming* does not exist for the Tamil refugee.

Refugeeness is also tied up into our concept of ecological memory of commonplaces. For instance, how is that a place that can both signal home but also signal exile? In particular, Thiranagama writes, "the violent making and unmaking of place and 'home' in Sri Lanka is also about the right to belong as minorities," (78). The Sri Lankan government made it clear that Sri Lanka was not a place for Tamilness (81). As a result, many Sri Lankan Tamils became refugees in their own nation. Many displaced Tamils were in Colombo like Malathi and Keeran. Colombo is the capital of Sri Lanka and is heavily Sinhalese but still has a huge Tamil minority. The sense of anti-Tamilness was heavily present in the nation's capital because Colombo was a, "city *of* minorities but not *for* minorities," (Thiranagama 85). For instance, Tamils residing in Colombo were required to always carry identification cards on them and Sinhalese had the privilege to report on Tamils they thought were strange (85). Therefore, when refugee ships came to transport the displaced Tamils from Colombo, they went to places with a Tamil majority like Jaffna as it was a place where a sense of Tamilness emerged and thrived (Thiranagama 84).

The riots that flooded Sri Lanka in the eighties were a reflection of the tense ethnic conflicts taking a toll in the country. Moreover, it transformed the places where Tamil public support became the most prominent. Thiranagama notes that this refugee population of Sri Lankan Tamils signaled a turning point in the resistance movement as she writes, "refugees arrived irrevocably transformed by their experience of violence, and the circulation of their stories would in turn alter the destinies of thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils," (81). The experience of anti-Tamil violence, a commonplace that troubled the memory of Sri Lanka, impacted formations of kinship and belonging in Sri Lanka.

In particular, the concept of home in war signaled something that offered a future. In other words, because war made stability a rarity, something as stable as a home signaled that a future might be possible. The possibility of having a future is the main motivation for Sri Lankan Tamils who are fighting for their Eelam. However, in the midst of this, our ideas of home and kinship are also shifting as Thiranagama writes, "the ways such movements of violence are written into experiences of place, family, and self mean that understandings of 'home' and homeliness are also constantly shifting," (89). Thiranagama also asserts how home should not also always associate itself with being in community (89). The issue with assuming that a community can also provide a sense of home is that it accepts exclusionary practices of who belongs and who does not belong. Specifically, if we believe Jaffna to be a Tamil community where one can find "home" we then accept that Colombo is a place where Tamilness should be erased.

Kinship as it takes root in land is also a commonplace. In other words, the story of kinship is defined by how a place is shaped by human interactions. In other words, the resonances of human matter cannot be erased when we consider a place. For example, the 1983

Black July riots that took place in Colombo is something that cannot be erased from the history of that place. Therefore, when we think of home as an ecological memory, and we think of home for Sri Lankan Tamils as signaling the possibility of future, we must then consider that the concept of home for Tamils is a place outside of Sri Lanka. Thiranagama highlights this when she states,

> 'Home' for Tamils as a place where one could belong was then not always synonymous with a Tamil homeland where the future was bleak and uncertain. The paradoxical effect for the fight for a Tamil homeland has been the constant stream of Tamils attempting to leave that 'homeland' (89-90).

Thiranagama's discussion of home as departure, for Sri Lankan Tamils, offers a nuanced perspective of how we envision the story of kinship for Tamils.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of kinship dramatically changed for Sri Lankan Tamil families affected by the ongoing ethnic conflict. For instance, as the ongoing 1983 riots were happening, Malathi and Keeran had a new sense of kinship following the murder of their father in the presence of their mother's absence which played a role in how "they reconstructed their sibling relationship through their new closeness after '1983' (Thiranagama 83). Another example of newly constructed kinship is reflected in the ways many survivors began to form familial relationships with other survivors as Malathi and her brother did following their father's murder. Moreover, kinship no longer only referred to blood relatives but now reflected new ideas of community formed among many survivors who now also became refugees. Even moreso, some survivors who still supported the fight for a Tamil Eelam also looked for ways to leave their 'home' in Sri Lanka. However, one particular aspect of kinship for Sri Lankan Tamils that we should pay close attention to is the newly formed relationships within fragmented families who

stayed in Sri Lanka. For Thirangama, this kinship is best examined in the mother-daughter relationship between Malathi and her mother, Analuxmi.

In order to understand the kinship between Analuxmi and Malathi, we need to understand how Tamil militant groups were a big part of Tamil youth culture in Sri Lanka. In particular, many Tamil youths joined because of the shared collective experience of the anti-Tamil riots as,"Tamils no longer felt safe in Sri Lanka, and this allowed a collective identity to coalesce and stabilize that hitherto had been divided by region, class, and caste," (82). In other words, Malathi (and many survivors like herself) were forever changed by the violent events that took place, especially that of Black July. Thiranagama notes that while Tamils experienced many anti-Tamil riots (i.e. the riots of 1956, 1958, 1977, and 1981), the riots of 1983 were the "cataclysmic event of the ethnic conflict" (81). The events of Black July collectively transformed the Tamil morale. In particular, Black July made it clear that the Sri Lankan government (which was Sinhalese controlling) had no desire to support Tamils and if anything, actively supported the ethnic cleansing of Tamils (81).

Analuxmi was abroad when Malathi's father was murdered. Until Analuxmi was able to return back to Sri Lanka, Malathi and her older brother, Keeran, were forced to join a refugee camp. It was during their stay at the refugee camp that Malathi and Keeran became devoted to the fight for a Tamil Eelam. From her interviews with the survivors of the Tamil genocide, Thiranagama reflects on how joining Tamil militancy groups was not an uncommon trend among many Sri Lankan Tamils who were refugees and/or experienced anti-Tamil violence by the hands of the Sri Lankan government. In fact, when talking about her experience with Tamil militancy groups, Malathi comments, "I was emboldened to go and join the government. Because of their racism. Because of the ethnic discrimination," (82). At thirteen years old,

Malathi joined the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) women's wing while her twenty-year old brother joined the EPRLF's male wing (Thiranagama 83).[19] Her mother, Analuxmi, vehemently discouraged her children from involving themselves with the militant groups. However, for Malathi and Keeran, the militancy groups represented a "new sense of what it meant to be Tamil," (84) and the importance of protecting it.

It was not necessarily that Analuxmi did not support the fight for a Tamil identity but rather that the militant groups became increasingly violent.[20] In particular, the violence expressed between Tamil militant groups and other Tamil militant groups was on par with the violent crimes that the Sinhalese government carried out against Tamils. Nevertheless, Analuxmi's absence of being present in Colombo when her family was murdered makes it impossible for her to understand why her surviving children would want to participate in the war. But, for Malathi and her brother, Keeran, their sense of kinship and belonging is influenced by their experience of being in Colombo when the murders took place.

However, following the death of Keeran, kinship took on a new meaning for the family as all the men have died due to the Tamil genocide. Malathi and her mother became forever changed by the memory of death in Sri Lanka that has now become a commonplace for them. Despite the uneasy memory of loss, Analuxmi became determined to ensure that the women in her lives (her daughter and granddaughters) could see Sri Lanka as a place they belonged. As stated earlier, Analuxmi does this by building a home for her family in Colombo — a

[19] The EPRLF was a Marxist-based militant separatist group formed in 1980 by K. Pathmanabha, Douglas Devananda, Suresh Premachandran, and Varatharajah Perumal. In 1986, the EPRLF were defeated by the Tamil Tigers.

[20] While many militant groups shared the same goal of securing a Tamil Eelam, by the late 1980s, many militant groups started to break as many internal feuds were occurring amongst the militant groups. Specifically, the LTTE tried to dismantle any Tamil militant group that did not join its forces.

geopolitical space that became a site of un-belonging for Tamils. Analuxmi constructing a home for her family is a way to renvision the commonplace of Colombo and what it means for kinship for Sri Lankan Tamils.

Conclusion

To rhetorically *listen* to the ways a historically *silenced* group speaks of the possibility of kinship amongst a genocide is to escape the confinements of philosophizing representation through only the means of binary significations. There are many possibilities that happen through silent and intimate ways of speaking if we begin to revisit what and who we have traditionally come to listen to. Through my close reading of the rhetorical stories of kinship in Thirangama's *In My Mother's House*, we arrive at new insights into how Sri Lankan Tamil women have spoken about the Tamil genocide. Their stories of kinship show the silent and intimate ways that Sri Lankan Tamils have engaged with death, displacement, militancy, commonplaces, and futurity.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CODA: THE PEDAGOGICAL POSSIBILITIES OF *SILENCE, INTIMACY, AND THE OTHER*

Reflections and Meditations

In each of the preceding chapters, I have explored how informally represented Asian and Asian/American feminist writers have utilized different forms of rhetorical storytelling as a discursive transgression to signal the silent and intimate ways that have been speaking that might not always be legible to scholars in rhetoric/composition. By placing forms of representation in dialogue with Asian and Asian/American feminist writings, I have strived to bring new insights and perspectives to how rhetorical studies can come to deliberate on how informally represented communities do access speech. The field of rhetoric/composition has traditionally viewed speech as something only accessible to those who are formally represented. Formal representation, as Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham indirectly discuss in *Race, Rhetoric, and the Postcolonial* (1999), is restricted to those who can engage in critical literacy or what Linda Martín Alcoff describes as, "the ability to speak and be heard," (22). However, I have argued throughout my chapters that Asian and Asian/American feminists —- who are often spoken for by others— have always been speaking through the means of rhetorical storytelling and perhaps the larger issue is that their voices continue to go unheard.

In 2020, the COVID19 pandemic globally impacted the livelihoods of everyone, and of course, impacted some worse than others. The pandemic brought out the worst in almost every American. From people refusing to follow the safety guidelines set out by the Center of Disease Control to the hoarding of toilet paper, the pandemic found people fighting to accept that their former ways of living will never be fully retrievable. One particular violence that came from the pandemic was the increased hate crimes against Asian Americans. On March 16, 2020, President

Donald Trump, ethnically rebranded the COVID19 pandemic as the "China virus," because origins of the coronavirus were first documented in Wuhan, China. Trump's decision to affiliate a global pandemic to a singular ethnic group led to violent outcomes. Trump's main fanbase is composed of people who are mainly conservative, xenophobic, and/or white supremacists. Therefore, his words directly impacted how those followers treated Asian/Americans which was typically through racial hatred and violence as evidenced in the 2021 Atlanta Spa Shootings and the 2023 Half Moon Bay Shootings. However, in 2020, we were also presented with Cathy Park Hong's confessional memoir, *Minor Feelings: An Asian-American Reckoning*. Published in February, a month before the pandemic, Hong's memoir gave Asian/Americans the possibility of healing. As my third chapter, "Asians are Next in Line to Disappear," argues, Hong's form of rhetorical storytelling is through the meditative lens of *minor feelings*. Hong defines minor feelings as those feelings that emerge when white American optimism gaslights their experiences of racial microaggressions as something that is not worth discussing. Hong uses minor feelings as a discursive transgression because she encourages Asian/Americans to sit in their feelings of anger instead of silencing those feelings the way white American optimism encourages. Through minor feelings, we arrive at news of thinking about the silent and intimate ways that Asian/Americans have been speaking of their pain.

The 2015 Stanford Rape Case took central focus in public and private discourses and laid the foundations of how rape culture on college campuses was talked about in the 2016 viral movement of #MeToo. Everyone who had any opinion of the case weighed their perspectives on the matter. However, from 2015 to 2019, while everyone spoke on behalf of the "Emily Doe" at the center of the case, no one knew who she really was. In particular, no one knew that Emily Doe was an Asian/American woman. Only after Emily Doe revealed herself to be Chanel Miller,

a half-Chinese, half-white woman, in her 2019 memoir *Know My Name*, did the public finally know that Emily Doe was not white. As I stated in my second chapter, "Were You Silent or Were You Silenced?," we cannot ignore Miller's Asian identity when we consider how publicized the "People vs. Brock Turner " case became. As my chapter detailed, women of color victim-survivors of gender and sexual violence do not receive the same amount of public attention or care that privileged, white women receive. Therefore, through the rhetorical effectiveness behind the anonymity of Emily Doe, Americans were finally forced to care about the gender and sexual violence experienced by an Asian woman. Miller, through Emily Doe, became a formal representative for other victim-survivors of sexual assault. In other ways, because no one knew Emily Doe, her experiences became informally represented through others. Miller's viral victim-impact statement and her poignant memoir, *Know My Name* allowed her to finally speak for herself. Rhetorical storytelling for Miller was the way she transformed her silence into a voice that became a conduit to her healing. Through non-linear narratives, humor, and the victim-impact statement, Miller forces us to listen to her and refuses to let her experiences go unheard.

The period between 1983-2009 in Sri Lanka saw one of the deadliest and longest genocides that occurred globally. However, because the war has been informally represented by government officials as a "civil war," the genocide went undocumented. The particular genocide I am referring to is the Tamil genocide that occurred in Sri Lanka. The ethnic conflict occurred between the majority-group, Sinhalese Buddhists, and the minority-group, Tamil Hindus. Sri Lankan Tamils were either indigenous to Sri Lanka but many of them were brought to Sri Lanka from India as indentured laborers by the British. Following British departure in 1948, Sinhalese Sri Lankans sought to make Sri Lanka a country that signified a Sinhalese-Buddhist nation.

However, Sri Lankan Tamils argued that they should have a right to their own nation-state known as Tamil Eelam. What resulted is was not a *civil war* but a repressive-hegemonic *genocide* (Harff and Gurr 1988). In my fourth chapter, "Archiving Silence," I explore the complexities of this genocide through my close reading of Sharika Thiranagama's *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka* (2014). I look at how Asian feminists, and particularly Sri Lankan Tamil women, have talked about their experiences with the genocide. These experiences often go unnoticed or undocumented in larger discourses surrounding Global Asian studies and feminisms. Through my examination of Thirangama's interviews with a female LTTE soldier, we can see how their first-hand experience with the genocide are often fraught and fragmented. However, they also depict how the silent and intimate ways Sri Lankan Tamil women think about kinship as a form of survival amongst the context of genocide.

Limitations of Methodology

As I mentioned in my "Introduction," I chose to closely read two memoirs and an autoethnographic work as a way to engage in discourse surrounding speech acts and informal representation. I am excited at the new insights my research has brought to how the field of rhetoric examines rhetorical silence and rhetorical listening, especially amongst Asian and Asian/American feminists — which is a population that is still largely understudied within rhetoric. However, I think it is critical to also consider areas where my dissertation might have been limited. My research carried throughout the dissertation is limited by my methodological framework. Since my research examines the phenomenological condition of being silenced and unheard, I would have liked to have had the chance to conduct interviews with Asian/American women on their experiences of informal representation.

The main reason I opted against ethnographic methodology in my dissertation is that I would have needed a more focused sample. In other words, interviewing Asian and Asian/American women on their experiences would be too broad for me within the confinements of this dissertation. I think the best way to incorporate ethnographic work would have been to have a focused sample. For instance, in thinking through how I would like to continue my research, I would like to consider how Asian and Asian/American women use rhetorical storytelling in the writing classroom to speak and write against the racial and gender subjectivities placed upon them in an educational context. In this particular case study, I think it is imperative that I use ethnographic methodology.

Silence in the Writing Classroom

As a woman of color scholar trained in cultural rhetorics and a writing instructor at a predominantly white institution, I would be remiss if I did not consider the pedagogical possibilities of my dissertation. In particular, my dissertation is a focused study on how informally represented communities have always been speaking in ways that might not be legible to others. While the main focus of my study looked at memoirs and an autoethnographic piece written by Asian and Asian/American feminists, I believe the questions I posed in my project surrounding silence, speaking, and forms of representation are also applicable to a writing classroom. Specifically, in thinking about the future of *Silence, Intimacy, and the Other*, I would like to expand on my project by looking at the pedagogical possibilities silence and speaking offers for BIPOC students in a writing classroom at a predominantly white institution.

Through my mapping of how silence is written about, we can see how silence is often perceived as antithetical to agency, freedom, and liberation. This signification is even more so heightened for oppressed or informally represented groups. For example, as instructors we tend

to privilege voice and view it as a marker of learning success. However, scholars like Michael Foucault and Trinh T. Minh-ha, have argued that silence is not only productive but also multifaceted. Therefore, I would eventually like to expand on my dissertation further by considering how silence is used as a form of rhetorical storytelling that signifies a discursive transgression by BIPOC students to resist and "cope" with the oppression that exists in a white-serving classroom.

Silences allow us to pay more critical attention to other embodied forms of speaking like nonverbal or physical gestures. If we recall, "Archiving Silence," examined how the former LTTE soldier, Malathi, used her hands to communicate the violence she experienced during the genocide. By using her hands, Malathi is able to conceal her trauma from her daughters. In a similar manner, I aim to consider how BIPOC students have also used similar embodied forms of speaking nonverbally and physically as a type of agency in a classroom that is not meant to support them. The pedagogical possibilities that arise from this expansion of my research is that we can gain a more nuanced understanding of how BIPOC students work against whiteness through their silence and their speech.

To conduct this research, I would lean into the scholarship I traced surrounding forms of representation and speech. This scholarship will frame how I am approaching my analysis of silence in a pedagogical context. Additionally, I would need to closely read the current scholarship that has already been produced about silence in the classroom by other rhetoric scholars like Cheryl Glenn, Andrea Lunsford, and Aja Martinez. From there, I hope to conduct interviews with writing instructors and BIPOC students at predominantly white institutions. In my interviews with BIPOC students, my suggested questions would be on their experiences of learning in a white-serving classroom and what their relationship to silence in the classroom is.

In my interviews with writing instructors, I would ask questions related to how they come to assess “voice" in the classroom. My goal with this intended expansion of my research is to arrive at new possibilities of considering the role of silence in the writing classroom.

Rhetorically Listening to Asian/American Feminist Voices

In addition to considering how BIPOC students use silence as rhetorical storytelling in a white-serving writing classroom, I am also interested in conducting a focused study on how Asian and Asian/American female students engage with silence in the classroom. This research is very similar to my other proposed research on how BIPOC students use silence. However, by focusing on the experiences of silence felt by *female Asian college students* more broadly, I am able to gain new insights into how silence affects Asian and Asian/American women at college, especially considering the historical way silence has been part of the narrative of the Asian experience.

Moreover, I am interested in furthering my research on how the Sri Lankan Tamil genocide has been informally represented in public discourses. To understand the effects of informal representation on the Tamil diaspora, I’ve looked to a number of texts from Tamil peoples around the world about how they tell the story of genocide and the violence that expelled them from their homeland of Sri Lanka. My dissertation closely analyzed Thiranagama’s *In My Mother’s House* but I would eventually want to examine other material related to the Tamil genocide. Eventually, I would plan on traveling to Colombo, Sri Lanka and visit the American Institute of Sri Lankan Studies. This provides me with enough time to add new material into my current work. The American Institute of Sri Lankan Studies is home to the Colombo Library which has the largest archive pertaining to Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict. Access to the archive will provide me with new ways of reading the effects of the Tamil genocide that my current

bibliography related to the war might not offer. The goal of deepening my work into the Sri Lankan Tamil genocide is to use informal representation as a modality of discourse to reflect on the following ethical questions surrounding the Tamil diaspora: how do we tell a story?; how do we remember the diaspora?; and how do we tell the story about women who were part of a rebellion when their voices are repressed? Ultimately, this extended work on the Sri Lankan Tamil genocide provides new ways of reading diasporic politics. This project will inform how we structure our community because it confronts who gets to tell stories, how do these stories get remembered, and for which audiences are these stories framed for?

Conclusion

My dissertation, *Silence, Intimacy, and The Other: Rhetorical Storytelling in Asian and Asian/American Feminist Writing*, is a transdisciplinary project that speaks to the lived experiences and community-building efforts of not just Asian and Asian/American feminists, but to anyone who is interested in finding ways to promote equitable forms of representation for people or communities who remain largely in the periphery. My dissertation confronts the ethics surrounding forms of representation and how our choices structure community.

Stories of violence, fragmentation, and oppression weave its way throughout my dissertation in my close readings of Asian and Asian/American feminist writings. However, I do not want those experiences of pain and hurt to be the legacy of Asian and Asian/American women. Instead, I want my dissertation to shift what we come to *listen to* as the only experiences of Asian and Asian/American women. My hope is that my dissertation, *Silence, Intimacy, and the Other*, provides us with new entry points to consider how Asian and Asian/American women have always been speaking and how we can begin to finally listen to them.

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