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Gathering Wombs: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Decolonizing the Female Body in the Works of Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Bessie Head

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GATHERING WOMBS: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO DECOLONIZING
THE FEMALE BODY IN THE WORKS OF MAHASWETA DEVI, MARGARET
RANDALL, AND BESSIE HEAD

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Gathering Wombs: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Decolonizing the Female Body in the Works of Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Bessie Head

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This dissertation uses the resistance literature of Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Bessie Head along with my own research amongst the Barabaig of Eastern Tanzania and Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico to interrogate gendered politics in different geographic locations. By examining gendered politics in the borderlands of India, Nicaragua, Botswana, South Africa, Eastern Tanzania, and the Lacandon Jungle of Southeast Mexico, I demonstrate more fully how capital shapes the reproductive lives of women living in different historical realities and in different regional locations. I apply an interdisciplinary approach to examine how patriarchal impositions and globalizing forces have made the indigenous and subaltern female body and female livelihood a space of hegemonic and political contestation. In so doing, I show how women's bodies have become increasingly vulnerable to the pressures of patriarchal politics and commercial economies both in the eras of colonization and neoliberal globalization.

Throughout the globe, the subaltern reproductive body has become an ideological battlefield of patriarchal control and reification in which women's bodies fall prey to a host of gendered, racialized and economic forces. In this research I reveal how women engage, negotiate, and resist politicization. I argue that these cultural discourses, situated as they are at the cusp of neoliberalism and the demise of social protections, provide socio-political and historical insight

into the struggles and resistance surrounding gender and reproductive politics under both traditional patriarchal structures and global capitalism.

In the world of gendered politics and resistance literature, what is missing is the examination of the socio-economic and political impact of reproductive politics on women's private and public lives; therefore, the central framework employs a materialist feminist theoretical framework to analyze how these discourses draw attention to reproductive politics and offer valuable models for ethnographic listening and ethico-political engagement.

Synthesizing literary criticism, anthropology, and legal and social activism, I contribute to the literature about the exploitation of women's reproductive bodies and livelihoods. I argue inquiries into the global, national, and regional politics of stratified reproduction must be central to any materialist feminist theory on women's socio-economic and political lives.

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As a mother of five grown daughters, none of this would have been possible without their unending support and the support of my husband, Bill Rosenthal. I embarked on this process because of an impending empty nest syndrome when my fourth daughter left to the University of Pennsylvania. Used to a big, loud, noisy household I was confronted with a new phase of being something other than "mom." My five strong opinionated daughters encouraged me to rediscover my passion. I am thankful to Melissa for her words of encouragement; to Kristen who grounded me in not taking any of it too seriously; to Heather who brought me back to my anthropological

academic roots and opened ethnographic spaces to explore; to Mandy who sat with me while we both studied—her for the MCAT and me for the onslaught of exams; to Hailey for her time sitting in bed with me while we both wrote; to Bill for his countless words of encouragement and for picking up the pieces of domestic life while I was away doing research and completing this program. To my family who said: “Get it Done!”

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Finally, to my daughters, granddaughters and great granddaughters, you must know this: Across time, history, and different ethnic and geographic locations, women have struggled and resisted and continue to struggle and resist inequitable conditions that privilege male desires and interests over reproductive justice and sustainable livelihoods. You must make a special effort to know your personal “her”story and pass it on from generation to generation.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: “¿CÓMO VOY A ALIMENTAR A MIS HIJOS?”

HOW WILL I FEED MY CHILDREN?

We began to understand that our collective as well as our individual memories have been invaded, raped, erased.

Margaret Randall, *Walking to the Edge*

We are dying, our numbers are decreasing. There are enough Khajra trees for so few, and it is you who have taught us to eat seeds of the acacia fruit, and look also! Not so many are being born, and even when they are born they are sold.

Mahasweta Devi, *Imaginary Maps*

We want to open our minds to being haunted by the aboriginal. We want the spectral to haunt the calculus.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*

“¿Cómo voy a alimentar a mis hijos? ¿Cómo vamos a sobrevivir?” “How will I feed my children?” “How will we survive?” These questions haunt my dissertation. They are questions posed by Rosa Morena a maquiladora worker who lost both hands while operating a large stamping press while working at HD Electronics in the Mexican borderlands of Reynosa (del Bosque 2013). Sadly, these are the same concerns my own mother asked while struggling to meet the demands of a low paying full-time job and motherhood responsibilities. They are the same concerns that have driven mothers with children from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras across miles of treacherous terrain choked by neoliberal policies that have stimulated the rise of drug cartels and layers of political corruption. Questions of food, water, and physical security are shared across the globe in diverse geographic, political, ethnic, and cultural regions.

I have specifically chosen the literature and ethnically diverse perspectives of Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Bessie Head to engage the critical project of understanding the

violent assault on subaltern women's reproductive bodies and subsistence livelihoods. Their works, situated as they are at the cusp of neoliberalism, demonstrate how violence against women has been a crucial strategy for maintaining patriarchal dominance, exploitative systems of labor and the vivisection and subsequent commodification of the female reproductive body. By examining gendered politics in the borderlands of Nicaragua, India, Botswana, Tanzania, and Chiapas, Mexico, I demonstrate more fully how capital shapes the reproductive lives of women living in different socio-historical realities and in different regional locations.

I develop an argument on reproductive politics under traditional patriarchal structures and global capitalism by posing three questions: 1) What are the historical realities that shape reproductive politics and women's reproductive decisions and productive livelihoods? 2) How do women survive these impositions and resist cultural domination, destruction, and erasure? 3) How does ethnographic literature provide a discursive space for the re-visioning of gendered politics? By researching fictional narratives and oral histories linked to socio-economic security, biopolitics, and the gendered politics of reproduction and production, this dissertation offers a sensitive interdisciplinary approach to criticism to reveal how women negotiate between myriad conflicting global and local socio-economic and patriarchal forces.

Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Bessie Head specifically write from a socio-political conscience and are (or were as in the case of Bessie Head) actively engaged in human rights activism. In addition, all three of these writers use oral history as a key component of their research and writing. I consider these narrative case studies similar to field research to explore what Gayatri Spivak refers to as the "mode of production narrative, as participants, resisters, victims" exploring how women's reproductive systems have been exploited and displaced by patriarchal ideologies and capital forces and how in many instances women resisted and formed

strategic alliances of resistance and survival (*Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 245). I argue that critical literary ethnography produces an interdisciplinary methodology of knowledge production and models of “ethnographic listening” in which political representation and epistemic change can successfully produce a cross-disciplinary ethical commitment to social and gender justice.

What is absent in many discussions of Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall and Bessie Head’s literature is an analysis of reproductive and gender politics and the sensitive and controversial topic of reproductive governance and population control policies that target indigenous women of the Global South. Fears that an interrogation of reproductive “rights” might interfere with Western feminist rhetoric of “choice,” and instead promote a “right wing” moral agenda, have deterred many Western scholars from a critical examination of the gendered politics of reproductive governance. It is my argument that it is precisely this policing of subaltern reproductive systems in which women become objects of reproductive surveillance that has led to an oppressive form of gendered politics. I contend that an examination of the literature of this dissertation positioned at the historical juncture of early global capitalism reveals how reproductive governance subverts urgent policy discussions of redistributive social justice. By examining reproductive governance and gendered politics, I contribute to an understanding of how women resist and survive patriarchal impositions in four ways: bio-politics, patriarchal projects, gendered politics, and agency. How do women and their children coexist in a global world that renders them disposable inhuman beings?

In this examination, I introduce Rosemary Hennessy’s materialist feminist theoretical framework to develop my main argument of the imposition of gender and reproductive politics under global capitalism in the cultural production of postcolonial women writers, Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Bessie Head. I organize this chapter into five sections: “Theoretical

and Historical Framework,” “Taking ‘Cargo’ and the Epistemology of Bearing Witness,” “Feminist Standpoint Theory/PAR and Ethnographic Listening,” “Rosemary Hennessy and Borderlands of Second Skins” and “Gender Adjustments and Affect Culture.”

Theoretical Framework

Informed by Rosemary Hennessy’s materialist feminist theoretical framework, I develop my main argument that throughout the globe, the subaltern reproductive body has become an ideological battlefield of patriarchal control and reification in which women’s bodies fall prey to a host of gendered, racialized and economic forces rendering them and their families vulnerable to food, water, and physical insecurity. I employ this theoretical approach to historicize the works and the “complex interconnections between the various axes along which exploitation and oppression takes place,” recognizing the importance of women’s lived indigenous experiences and “local narratives” as paramount to understanding historical connections (*Materialist Feminism* 187). I proffer that patriarchal capitalist violence against women has contributed to reproductive collapse in which women have removed their wombs as propertied sites of procreation and surplus value in order to save themselves and future generations from violent systematic subjugation. In developing this argument, I examine how traditional patriarchal structures, patriarchal capitalism, and patriarchal scientific imperialism have made the female reproductive body, and traditional female subsistence livelihoods dynamic spaces of hegemonic and political contestation. These works offer a discourse for “reading otherwise” in different geographic locations to examine the questions of power and patterns of resistance and female agency and what Anne McClintock calls the “politics of organization and strategy, which takes into account the myriad differences and loyalties that crisscross women’s lives with conflicting passions” (312). Based on my analysis of the cultural production of these postcolonial women

writers, I contend that reproductive control and the gynocolonization of woman's bodies must be central to feminist social theories. I substantiate my argument by focusing on the "imposition of identities," and the manipulation and displacement of the womb as a women space of identity formation. It is my hope that this dissertation will contribute to scholarship on how Western development and empowerment rhetoric for rural and indigenous women of the Global South interrupts and displaces traditional coding systems and subsistence livelihoods in the interest of capital, pharmaceutical commercial interests, and geopolitical population control.

I begin with Karl Marx and Frederick Engels' *German Ideology* on production and reproduction demonstrating that in establishing their historicity, they exclude female reproduction and production from their discourse. According to Marx and Engels: "The family, which to begin with is the only social relationship, becomes later, when increased needs create new social relations and the increased population new needs, a subordinate..." (31). The male/female aspect of the social relationship is later omitted from their discussion on production when they continue their argument:

It follows from this that a certain mode of production, or industrial stage is always combined with a certain mode of cooperation, or social state, and this mode of cooperation is always a 'productive force'. Further that the multitude of productive forces accessible to men determines the nature of society, that the history of humanity, must always be studied and treated in relation to the history of industry and exchange. (Marx and Engels 31)

Marx, however, fails to acknowledge the multiple contributions of women's reproductive work because he focuses on labor value and commodity production rendering invisible the reproductive labor essential for capital accumulation. Because Marx considers commodities as

things, that “lack the power to resist man,” they “cannot themselves go to market and perform exchanges in their own right” (*Capital* 178). He further argues, “We must, therefore, have recourse to their guardians, who are the possessors of commodities. If they are unwilling, he can use force, in other words, he can take possession of them” (*Capital* 178). In this context, commodities are passive things that an owner can take to market by compulsion. In a footnote, Marx offers an example of a prostitute who can carry herself to market for purposes of bargain for exchange: “In the twelfth century, so renowned for its piety, very delicate things often appear among these commodities. Thus, a French poet of the period enumerates among the commodities to be found in the fair of Lendit, alongside clothing, shoes, leather, implements of cultivation, skins, etc., also ‘femmes folles de leur corps’”(*Capital* 178). In this instance, Marx suggests that the possessor of the commoditized female body “can use force” and “take possession of them” if the prostitute refuses to abide by the original agreement (*Capital* 178). This idea of forceful dispossession underpins the main argument of this dissertation in which subaltern women have been rendered disposable commodities, their reproductive systems drained by capital’s demand for cheap goods and lower prices. Hennessy’s work with *maquillas* on the North/South Mexican border corroborates this discussion, to argue that “Free market exchange relies on and takes advantage of the political and cultural dispossession of certain subjects, a dispossession that registers in the body” (*Fires* 142).

The establishment of asymmetrical gender relations is key evidence of how traditional patriarchy has colluded with capitalist patriarchy to exploit women’s bodies and their labor productivity. In *Patriarchy & Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, Maria Mies observes Marx’s historical processes emphasizing that “the development of the means of production and labor is essentially responsible for the fact that with

Marxist theory, a historical materialist conception of women and their labor is not possible”(51). Mies further argues that, “Patriarchy constitutes the most invisible ground of the visible capitalist system,” and, more importantly, the system can only function “unless patriarchal man woman relations are maintained or newly created” (*Patriarchy* 38). Through childbirth, breastfeeding, and childrearing, women appropriate their own bodies as reproductive and social production. Feminists are quick to point out that women’s production and reproduction have been decisive to the cohesive solidarity of socio-economic structures. Mies argues, “The fact that women have the capacity to bring forth children, that they can become mothers, is totally devalued, de-historicized and dematerialized. It is considered to be a mere biological accident which nowadays can be changed by biotechnology” (Mies xvi). One of the concerns of her argument is that “it is so close to ‘essentialism’,” which *she* admits is “the original sin for postmodern feminists” (Mies xvi). Whereas, Mies argues against biological determinism, I contend that for some feminists her argument may still flounder on a dangerous slippery slope as some of her propositions are tinged with similar essentialist notions— notions she strategically employs to combat patriarchal impositions. Spivak clarifies the tactical use of essentialism must include the “acknowledgement of the dangerousness of what one must use” (Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism* 98). I will argue later in this chapter that the “strategic use of essentialism” is paramount for the security of all global mothers who are daily threatened with the “social engineering” and manipulation of their reproductive beings.

Helpful to the development of my argument on gender and reproductive politics is the examination of Marx’s labor theory of value against Gayatri Spivak’s deconstructive re-visioning of Marxism in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* and *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. Synthesizing these discourses, I show how his labor theory continues to

provide a theoretical framework to understand globalization and how the subaltern woman has been foreclosed from Marx's mode of production narrative. In tracing the breaches in Marx's logic, Spivak rearticulates the spectral presence of labor value necessary to produce the commodity, which compels an examination of the appropriation and super-exploitation of the subaltern women of the Global South.

Integral to this discourse is Spivak's assertion, "That history deals with real events and literature with imagined ones may now be seen as a difference in degree rather than kind" ("A Literary Representation" 106). Spivak argues that Devi's writing provides a personal space for the individual to have a voice and a "history imagined in fiction" (106). She further notes Devi's reading of "Stanadayini" represents a militant nationalist slogan: "Sat koti santanere he mudgha janani, rekhechho bangali kore manush karoni" (Fond mother, you have kept your seven million children Bengalis but haven't made them human—Tagore) (109). Spivak's focus on the "subaltern as gendered" is important in my exploration of how adivasi women's reproductive and productive systems have been doubly marginalized and exploited in post independence India. Spivak warns readers of "distancing ourselves from the identity of Woman with the female copulative and reproductive body" (125). She argues, "When the woman's body is used only as a metaphor for a nation (or anything else) feminists correctly object to the effacement of the materiality of that body" (124). Whereas Spivak declarations emphatically suggest "the central importance to establish women's right to practice or withhold reproduction," I elaborate on the historical and political forces that rendered women's bodies subject to reproductive policing (124). I proffer that an in-depth analysis of the historical, socio-economic and political objectives of population control in the literature of Mahasweta Devi is a necessary step to stop individual gendered rape and violence against adivasi women.

In developing an argument on the gender and reproductive politics, I examine Devi's literary sexual reportage in *Of Women, Outcasts, Peasants, and Rebels*, *Imaginary Maps*, and *Breast Stories* to show how women's tortured bodies become the historical battleground of deeper socio-economic and political issues, their reproductive systems a discursive site for the examination of insurrection, resistance, and decolonization. Valuable to this analysis is Jennifer Wenzel's "Epic Struggles over India's Forests in Mahasweta Devi's Short Fiction," in which, "ancient conflicts over the cultural significance of forests" inform her stories "Draupadi" and "Douloti the Bountiful," as well as "India's contemporary crisis" (128). She confirms Mahasweta Devi's observation that the forests are rich with cultural myths and folklore.

More importantly, in the discussion of how "the feminist body politic is defined by the struggle for reproductive rights," I read the works of Mahasweta Devi to examine how capitalist patriarchal technologies have spread across cultural and geographical boundaries in an attempt to control women's reproductive systems—their wombs and their breasts (Spivak, *Other Worlds* 355). In these works, I confirm Carolyn Merchant's theory in *Radical Ecology* that in many instances the "development of science as a methodology" has resulted in the manipulation of nature for capital interests (46). In addition, I bring into this interdisciplinary conversation Faye D. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp's *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction* to examine stratified reproduction at the local level in India and Botswana in the works of Mahasweta Devi and Bessie Head. In this analysis, I examine the collision of local pro-natalist values and the international political influence of Neo-Malthusian ethics that focus on controlling women's reproductive systems instead of examining the causes of ecological devastation. More specifically, I argue how programs aimed at population control ignore the real economic disparities that exist within the social structures under discussion. In these works, I

demonstrate that patriarchal authority, political programs and the development of thanato-technologies aimed at the regulation and control of women's bodies and livelihoods are directly related to periods of socio-economic and political instability.¹ Veena Das aptly describes patriarchal impositions on women's bodies in her essay, "National Honor and Practical Kinship: Unwanted Women and Children," in which she declares, "The woman's body, I argued became the sign through which men communicated with each other. Now it is the intersection in which nations communicate with each other (212). During periods of political transition, women's reproductive systems have become the new commercial frontier to be enclosed, controlled and put at the service of capitalist accumulation. The motives of transnational commercial communication become quite apparent in Carmen Barroso and Sonia Corrêa's "Public Servants, Professional, and Feminists: The Politics of Contraceptive Research in Brazil" in which in 1986, they correctly charge collusion of American universities, such as John Hopkins University and USAID in promoting a population control agenda in Brazil. They note that:

The political controversy linking contraceptive research to sexual morality had geopolitical implications: in a country consumed with the idea that a large population was needed in order to face the threat of imperialism, contraceptives were seen as technological tools for population control and therefore were subject to a special scrutiny that went beyond their effects on individual users. (Barroso and Corrêa 295)

Moreover, unlike other readings of Mahasweta Devi's work, I argue that "both domestic and international population control policy targeted people of color as surplus populations," an argument posited by Jennifer Nelson in *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement*. To further substantiate this argument, I join in conversation Jael Silliman and Ynestra King's

Dangerous Intersections: Feminist Perspectives on Population, Environment, and Development to show how the Neo-Malthusianism policies as described in Devi's *Imaginary Maps* place "women as objects of control and violate the basic feminist tenets of reproductive choice and bodily integrity for women" (xi). Silliman and King argue that, "Subsumed into the analytic framework of 'population pressure,' women implicitly become the breeders of both environmental destruction and violence" (8). The works by Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Bessie Head demonstrate how reproductive control masks deeper inequities of governments' unwillingness to create a social justice agenda of equitable distribution of resources, including, education, health care and food and water security for rural populations.

I carry this analysis of the patriarchal rhetoric and politicization of women's reproductive systems and productive livelihoods to Botswana, Africa to examine South African writer Bessie Head's *The Collector of Treasures and other Botswana Village Tale* and *When Rain Clouds Gather*. Although much of Bessie's Head's writing explores personal journeys and interpersonal relationships within a changing socio-political schema, Head's inward interrogations of the female psyche during moments of transitions within an external changing landscape reveal deep layers within the political structures of indigenous peoples adapting to independence in the borderlands of Botswana and South Africa. Within this space of ideological contestation, female identities are described, inscribed, and re-inscribed in a dialectical pattern of power, struggle, and resistance.

Historical Framework

I will commence an analysis of these works by first positioning the literature within its contextualized and historical framework. Similar to Rosemary Hennessy, prolific Bengali writer and social advocate Mahasweta Devi has also witnessed decades of political change beginning

with British Colonialism, to post independence India, and extending to India's pivotal presence on the global stage. Inspiring young and old with her strong position in support of India's tribal populations, Devi has been a tireless advocate for the socio-economic protection, security, and political well being of the adivasis.

In my examination of Mahasweta Devi's narratives, I first establish a historical mapping of the adivasis in India in order to understand the myriad socio-economic and political forces that have shaped their traditional and contemporary livelihoods. Thomas D. Hall, James V. Fenelon, and Duane Champagne provide valuable historical demographic information in *Indigenous Peoples and Globalization: Resistance and Revitalization* showing how the eight percent of tribals living in India have suffered "for over 3,000 years with tributary states, with British colonialism and neocolonialism, and now with India over forestlands and autonomous governance" (47). Valuable to the premise of this discourse is their observation that many academics see tribals only as objects of study "in relation to their discovery of them" (Hall and Fenelon 49). Crispin Bates extends this discussion in "Lost Innocents and the Loss of Innocence: Interpreting Adivasi Movements In South Asia," proffering that the naming of the tribals as adivasis is an act of "paternalism" and "might be seen as an invention rather than a victim of modernity" and "even depend on such prejudices for their survival" (109).

I specifically read Devi's documentary narratives to understand the detailed violations of human rights and how the rural poor and adivasis have begun to assert their rights against the many layers of corruption and continuous oppressions. To this end, in *Repression and Resistance in India: Violation of Democratic Rights of the Working Class Rural Poor, Adivasis and Dalits*, A. R. Desai establishes that the result of adivasi oppression is the rise of communism in the 1970s. Inspired by the Naxalite movement the revolutionaries began "politically rousing the

people and organizing them for struggles for the recovery of the lands illegally occupied by the landlords, for the occupation of the forest lands, against illegal payments to the forest officials, for increased wages in the forest” (Desai 24).

The clash between police and adivasi revolutionaries resulted in the establishment of police camps for violent surveillance and torture tactics to maintain social obedience, with most of the brutal harassment targeted at women and children to terrorize the peoples and maintain control. According to Archana Prasad, in his article “Adivasis and the Communists as Political Allies,” adivasis align with communist parties today for similar reasons that formed in the 1970s—land grabbing and resource exploitation. Devi notes post-independence India has “unleashed a barrage of new forces masked as development projects in the form of mining, deforestation, construction of high dams, steel plants, and townships” (*Dust on the Road* xii). Through Devi’s works, I show how these forces continue to accelerate the dispossession and marginalization of tribal women’s reproductive identities.

In Margaret Randall’s works, I specifically focus on her work in Central America during the Nicaraguan Revolution to examine how the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) struggled for two decades before ousting Dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle. Helpful to this discussion is Ricardo Santiago’s *The Nicaraguan Revolution: From Liberation to Betrayal* and his exploration of the revolutionary processes involved in the movement. Likewise, Jack Barnes and Larry Siegle in *New International no. 9: The Rise and Fall of the Nicaraguan Revolution* detail the impact of the workers and farmers involved in the Nicaraguan revolution based on “ten years of working-class journalism,” and follow the decline of the Sandinista National Liberation Front leadership that marked the end of the revolution. Important to my understanding of the revolution, is Maltilde Zimmermann’s *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the*

Nicaraguan Revolution, which provides a detailed biography of FSLN strategic leader Carlos Fonseca Amador. Similar to Randall, Zimmerman reveals the internal conflicts and ideological schisms within the revolution. Zimmerman interviews individuals directly involved in the revolutionary process and reveals how appeals to Nicaragua's indigenous peoples and rural peasants were paramount to the development of the FSLN platform. Yet, unlike the other discourses, Randall's literature provides valuable insight into how the failure of the revolution to include a feminist agenda resulted in its short-lived victory and ultimate demise.

In my discussion of the formation of female involvement in the revolution, I am informed by Tomas Borge's *Women and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, which traces the early efforts of the Nicaraguan revolution to fight for gender equality. Victoria Gonzalez-Rivera's *Before the Revolution: Women's Rights and Right-Wing Politics in Nicaragua, 1821-1979* in a more detailed discourse recounts how through appealing to maternal identity, the *Sandanistas* were able to rally female support. Gonzalez-Rivera's provides an understanding for women's political participation in Nicaragua between 1821 and 1979, as it addresses the accomplishment of first-wave feminists and *Somocistas*.

Whereas these writers contextualize both the revolution and the actors involved therein, I argue that it is Margaret Randall's literature that focuses on the remembering of individual stories and the testimonies of women who have experienced unimaginable suffering that provide important historicization of lived experiences. For Randall, it is the memory of suffering in which the power lies to "disentangle" political memory from deceitful mechanisms of hegemonic control. Unlike the previous criticism, in the discussion of how patriarchy inscribes itself on women's bodies, I bring into discussion the impact of this failure of the revolution to address a feminist agenda. I point to the increasing femicide rates reported in the half of 2014 in

Nicaragua; the 2013 decision by lawmakers in Nicaragua to change landmark legislation on violence against women to offer victims mediation with their aggressors; and Nicaragua's new Penal Code, introduced in 2008, which criminalizes women seeking abortions and health professionals who provide abortion services. More importantly, in Randall's work I demonstrate how the failure of the Sandinistas to include a feminist agenda has rendered women's reproductive and productive systems doubly marginalized and exploited. This is especially apparent under the power of former leader of the *FSLN*, Daniel Ortega. I read Randall's observation of the failure to integrate a feminist agenda, against the struggle of the Zapatistas to effectively implement the *1994 Declaration of Women*. In this comparison, I integrate my own observations from my attendance at the Indian National Congress of the Sixth Declaration on Aug. 3-10, 2014, in La Realidad, Chiapas, Mexico.

In the historical contextualization of Bessie Head's works, I establish key turning points for when Bechuanaland was granted independence and became Republic of Botswana with Seretse Khama as president in 1966. I begin with referencing Sandy Grant's *Botswana: An Historical Anthology*. I include Bessie Head's *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* in order to understand Head's psychological powers to write stories of the daily suffering of indigenous women. Huma Ibrahim's *Bessie Head: Subversive Identities in Exile* is particularly helpful to examine how Head's characters merge the different facets of female identity. I will take his argument a step further to include an analysis of reproductive subjectivities.

Additionally, in understanding how women experience a changing political environment and fight back against patriarchal local and judicial forces Kenneth W. Harrow's "Bessi Head's the Collector of Treasures: Change on the Margins" assists my analysis of how the women in Head's stories "experience moments of transition, blasphemy, violence and death" (169). Harrow

argues that it is Dikeledi's "interior landscape" that is "projected onto the land," and her "need to awaken" which suggests that the oppression and exploitation is ultimately Dikeledi's fault (178). I contend, however, that the implications of this analysis are detrimental to all women of the globe.

I extend the discussion to borderland experiences and gendered relations to the land. In particular, Rob Nixon's "Border Country: Bessie Head's Frontline States" examines Head's borderland experiences and as Head recalls "peculiarly shuttling movement between two lands" (124). While Nixon's observes that Head's stories are preoccupied with "gendered relations to the land, with tensions between peasants women's agricultural authority and their subordination to patriarchy and with women's crimped sense of economic and social mobility" he does not elaborate on gender and reproductive politics under global capitalism (124). Similar to Harrow and Ibrahim, Nixon primarily focuses on how Head's psychological state of political, racial, and cultural limbo contributes to her writing (124).

In this discussion, I argue for the examination of the juxtaposition of modern capitalism and tribal social order. Central to my discussion is James Garrett's observation of the details and rhythms of traditional daily life. Although Garrett examines the daily underpinnings of traditional activities and livelihoods, he does not address how the introduction of single crop production for export interferes with these same daily rhythms and subsistence patterns. This examination is integral to establishing how scientific patriarchal projects have contributed to reproductive collapse.

In theorizing global justice in the concluding chapter, I integrate Rosemary Hennessy's ideas of "Love in the Common," Michael Hardt's "De Singularitate," Spivak's ideas on "Aesthetic Education," and Vandana Shiva's principles of "Earth Democracy," who provide

their own visions of global justice in the commons. In *Commonwealth*, in particular, Hardt and Negri argue that the “multitude” of global people is finding a common ground of available resources on the Internet with increasing access and use. While Hardt and Negri recognize that this “abundance” of resources must be safeguarded in the commons against capital appropriation, they seem to ignore the destructive path of technology’s growth—from the sulfur, hemmimorphite, zincite, smithsonite, and franklenite extracted from the Congo to the overworked, underpaid Apple sweatshop workers in China. Their idea that a “common infrastructure would counter the mechanisms of privatization” has not occurred (Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 308).

Spivak, like Shiva proposes an epistemological engagement of indigenous peoples and their knowledge in order “to learn and construct a sense of sacred nature by attending to them—which can help mobilize and drive a globe girdling ecological mindset beyond the reasonable and self interested terms of global survival” (189). Her idea of “learning the aboriginal way of living as custodian,” is similar to Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen’s argument in *The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalized Economy* (*Aesthetic Education* 343). Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen argue for “the recovery and reclaiming of autonomous subsistence” freed from capitalist free-market impositions (214).

Taking ‘Cargo’ and the Epistemology of Bearing Witness

The representation of the voices of indigenous and rural women has emerged as a dominant theme and the subject of numerous theoretical discourses. While resistance narratives and *testimonios* critically challenge dominant master narratives seeking to “expose the connection between knowledge and power,” the producers of subaltern representation often maintain their own political agendas (Harlow, *Resistance Literature* 116). Rosemary Hennessy,

Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Gayatri Spivak address this important question and what this means for first world academicians like myself engaged in third world research to speak to/with/for the subaltern. Their works suggest that subaltern studies and indigenous research is a complex systematic process that involves negotiating the tensions between commonality and distance without appropriating the voice for our own personal gains. Their discourses disrupt linear historicity of factual truth recordings and work as antagonistic expressions of contradictions to the monocultural discourses by producing subaltern heterogeneous expressions that grant historical voice to the voiceless. Subaltern voices have always existed; the privileged elite has only recently allowed these articulations to be included in the Western academic databases. They do so by categorizing subaltern literature into subdivisions of testimonies, colonial/postcolonial fiction, and global fiction to impose another colonial pattern on personal stories, livelihoods, and histories. Yet, these discourses testify in a legal, religious, and socio-political sense to the regional and individual experiences of subaltern communities.

At stake in the authority of resistance literature is the claim of bearing witness to truth. When attacked on principles of falsehood and fabrication, these discourses lose their validity and resistant urgency. In this section, I will first historically define the paradigm of resistance literature in which these discourses are categorized and then examine specific discourses that address issues of representation.

According to John Beverly, “*testimonio*-like texts” are discourses that were always present, albeit at the “margins of literature,” and did not gain their discursive power until the 1960s (31). Categorized by Barbara Harlow as “resistance literature,” these testimonies include a wide-range of narrative modes ranging from “autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral

history, memoir, confession, diary, interview” (Beverly 31). Unlike the earlier works of Oscar Lewis of the 1950s, ethnographic work, or oral history, which often times has “the intentionality of the recorder” *testimonios* register “an urgency to communicate a problem” by placing issues of oppression, poverty, and social injustice “on the agenda” (Beverly 37). In effect, *testimonios* are intrinsically linked to “international solidarity movements or struggles around human rights” (Beverly 77).

I had the opportunity to ask Margaret Randall to categorize her work in Central America on September 21, 2013 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Randall responded, “Mary, does it really matter what you call it?” According to Randall in *Narrative of Power*, the focus should instead be on “power as a political category” and “until those intent on creating a society based on justice are willing to examine the problem of power nothing will change” (200). Beverly is correct when he states that any categorization of *testimonios* is “at best provisional, and at worst repressive” (31). Instead, we must develop the interdisciplinary praxis between theory and social activism informed by Spivak’s admonishment of the importance of “unlearning one’s privilege” so that first world academics do not simply focus on commonalities at the expense of differences, as the colonized subaltern subject is “irretrievably heterogeneous” (*Can the Subaltern Speak* 284). In this way, we, as theorists and social activists can avoid “epistemic violence” and the fetishization of the “other” by unmasking hidden agendas and recognizing the complex operations involved in representation so that we do not simply construct “totalizing representations of women in the Third World” (Mohanty 335).

David Stoll’s categorization of Elizabeth Burgos-Debray’s work with Rigoberta Menchú interrogates the whole process of the recording of indigenous voices, which he condemns as a form of “postmodernist anthropology,” of “mythic inflation” (Beverly 80). Because

Menchú writes that it is not just her story, but the “testimony of my people” and the “story of all poor Guatemalans” she leans toward the metonymic act of collective representation (1). The epistemic danger of one voice writing for the collective plural and of portraying the “other” raises questions of political interests in its fabrication and “becomes hegemonic in its own right” (Beverly 75). Because of the alleged evidentiary claims of factual inconsistencies in Menchú’s testimony, Stoll argues that Menchú’s collective memory lost its authority. Stoll’s claims of course were later contradicted by the power of Menchú’s testimony to draw attention to structures of racialized stratification and Guatemalan genocide, which brought Efraín Ríos Montt into present day judicial limbo for his 1982-1983 military massacre of 1,771 Mayan Ixils. Montt’s 2013 conviction for genocide and war crimes against the Ixil Mayans was overturned because Montt argued he did not receive due process. The retrial, which was to begin January 5, 2015, was suspended after his defense objected to the partiality of one of the judges.

While the writers in this dissertation rely extensively on methodologies of oral histories, Beverly makes a clear distinction between *testimonios* and oral histories, which is important to consider in this discussion. He argues that oral history has an “intentionality of the recorder—usually a social scientist—that is dominant, and the resulting text is in some sense ‘data’” (Beverly 32). In contrast, in *testimonio*, the intentionality switches to the narrator. Hennessy attempts to clarify the relationship and fiduciary duty between narrator and recorder when she argues that, “the *bearing* and the *witnessing* open you to a new position in history as you assume responsibility to others and their message to the wider community” (*Fires* 69). For Hennessy, “bearing witness” is similar to the “Spanish word *cargo*,” which means charge and position. Taking up the cargo means “assuming responsibility in the sense of providing for others,” which she interprets as the assuming of duties that come with the position (Hennessy, *Fires* 69). It is at

this intersection between materialist feminist, a global-systems analytic, and affect-culture that I interrogate what Hennessy refers to as taking “cargo” in the epistemology of bearing witness. Former leader of Sony workers in Nuevo Laredo and past director of the Coalition for Justice in Maquiladoras, Martha A. Ojeda articulates one of the foundational premises of taking cargo: “Official history is always written so that the reality people were living is hidden. If everyone told the part they lived or knew, the truth would be in their collective word” (Ojeda and Hennessy 49).

This idea of the collective word is important because it brings together theory, ethnography, oral history, and fictional narratives in order to understand and listen to the myriad discourses that challenge the displacement of women’s bodies and livelihoods. Rosemary Hennessy, Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Bessie Head all integrate oral histories into their works in order to testify to the persistence of brutal gender inequities. These works provide valuable models of ethnographic listening that bring forth memories of local histories as valuable means of survival.

Hennessy posits that her interest lies in “the different social locations of witness, and, especially, the position of those who offer support from elsewhere, who may enter the front lines occasionally but are for the most part separated by several degrees from a campaign of actors” (*Fires* 70). This is her formal concession to the “several degrees” of separation to the *maquilla* workers she writes about in *NAFTA From Below* and *Fires on the Border*. Acknowledging this separation in her recording of *testimonios* she asks, “What subjects do we speak for? What History and what future?” (*Fires* 70). Here, Hennessy joins the political and theoretical debate of representing the subaltern and the issues “about obligation of representing on behalf of the collective and of acting to redress social injustice” (*Fires* 70). Addressing Giorgio Agamben’s

Homer Sacer and *Remnants of Auschwitz*, she observes how Agamben “represents the failure of adequate representation” that he finds “encrypted in all testimonial witnessing” (*Fires* 72). To substantiate her own participation with maquillas, she calls upon Anne Cubilé’s “broader understanding of testimony as a performative act, which acknowledges the contradictions and “disparities” in representation of the subaltern (*Fires* 72). The “failure” to truly take cargo and bear witness awakens “the affective charge of humility,” which I will later argue leads to a politics of compassion (*Fires* 72).

Central to my argument of “ethnographic listening” is Hennessy’s claim that the *testimonio* framework establishes systematic relations between myriad local, national, and global actors. Hennessy writes:

...Testimonio has an added political and collective edge because it aims to set right official history by denouncing the exploitation and oppression of a group the speaker represents. As such testimonio has developed into a powerful form for conscious raising among indigenous women leaders and in transnational political education. Grounded in the history of organized resistance in grassroots and indigenous communities, the narrative framework of testimonio weaves a chain of relations to incite affective and cognitive connections among speakers, listeners, and a collective. As Doris Somer comments, in testimonio ‘the map of possible identifications through the text spreads out laterally.’ (*Fires* 73)

Hennessy argues that testimony used as an “empathetic rhetorical strategy” produces “empathetic responses” in the reader, which can lead to advocacy, monetary contributions and other forms of political involvement “to support a campaign” (*Fires* 74).

The humility of taking cargo is most visible in the work of Margaret Randall who enacts a vigilant ethical approach to bearing witness acknowledging the interdependence and reciprocity between self and “other.” In *Testimonios: A Guide to Oral History*, Randall merges both oral history and *testimonio* as strategic methodologies to remember history and “recuperate collective identity” (3). Randall uses *testimonio* and oral history interchangeably positing that, “testimonios is “(the most frequently used term for oral history in Spanish and Latin America)” (4). She further adds that “testimonio or oral history as discipline has become a new and vital part of literacy as well as the social science scenes throughout Latin Americ[a]...” (Randall, *Testimonios* 4). In her definition of “testimonial work,” Randall includes “testimonial novels, theatre pieces that reflect a period in history and event, and poetry that speaks for the people at a particular moment in time” (*Testimonios* 7). According to this definition, all the writers in this dissertation, including Hennessy, engage in a form of testimonial work that uncovers historical truths and realities.

Memory is the political space of social activism and political resistance against a privileged patriarchal power structure that persistently subordinates women’s lives to years of injustice and gendered adjustments and impoverishment: “Feminism is about memory, about re-inserting memory into history; about making useful the painful memories that surface in our lives” (Randall *Gathering Rage* 35). Randall admonishes that in a world that “trains its people to forget,” it’s imperative to remove the layers of hegemonic interference that blinds our awareness to human injustice and suffering (*When I Look into the Mirror* 754). She urges that we construct “a new mirror” in order to “retrieve our collective memory not only by listening when others tell their stories, but by recognizing our own experience in those stories” (683). Gayatri Spivak refers to this as the ability to recognize “a simultaneous other focus,” that recognizes both the self and

the “other woman” (Beverly 63). For Randall, it is in the remembering of individual stories and testimonies in which the power lies to “disentangle” political memory from deceitful mechanisms of hegemonic control. In this sense, memory is the political space of social activism and political resistance against a privileged patriarchal power structure that persistently subordinates women’s reproductive lives to years of injustice and gendered impoverishment. Randall reports that in many Central American countries, women were bound to traditional roles of duty and obedience to their husbands and when women stepped out of these roles they became targets of violence, as demonstrated in the literature of this dissertation. In *Walking To the Edge*, Randall argues that “herstories” are integral for exposing lived experiences of women of “his”ories otherwise distorted, as “they are essential for our own health and well-being” (69). It is within this recognition that the memory of the “other” is vital that we create and enunciate third world feminine spaces of social justice.

Other forms of testimonial resistance narratives are recorded by Mahasweta Devi in *Imaginary Maps*, which conveys the anguish of indigenous tribals attempting to maintain their cultural traditions and livelihoods amidst encroaching globalizing forces that threaten its existence. My reading of Mahasweta Devi’s work is informed by Spivak’s strategy of reading, which she names as “the setting to work of deconstruction without reserve” from “the failures of establishing an alternative system” (Spivak, *Postcolonial Reason* 430). In reading “otherwise” I examine the delicate and complicated process of representing the “native informant,” a process that can never truly capture the indigenous imaginary. Yet, I find Radha Chakravarty’s “Visionary Cartography: *Imaginary Maps* by Mahasweta Devi” an important text, which analyses the uncharted territories that mainstream criticism has left behind. She posits that, “the refusal to know can itself be an exercise of power” (Chakravarty 200). While Chakravarty

admonishes of the dangers of reader displacement within a field of discourses in which Devi speaks for the tribals and Spivak speaks for Devi, she like Bose fail to understand the gathering of rage and the magnitude of all these voices merging from above, below and across these binaries to articulate and find solutions to gender violence, rape, and marginalization.

The arousal of “Spivakian anxieties” of world researchers speaking for/and/or about subaltern women, causes many First-World Intellectuals to consider and sometimes reconsider their ethnographic engagements. Brinda Bose’s “The Intimacy of Translation: The case of Mahasweta Devi’s ‘Draupadi’,” examines these “Spivakian anxieties” and a “politics inherent in all acts of translation,” specifically Spivak’s translation of Mahsweta Devi’s works (73). Bose notes that, “Spivak finds Senananyak as central as Dodpi because he aids her in her self-reflexive exercises” (73). She further notes that, “the anxiety of representation the writer herself explores is situated not at the First-World-third World intersection, but at the point at which the leftist intellectual meets the tribal worker” (Bose 77). Bose levels an even harsher decree of Spivak’s analytical interpretation when she argues: “Spivak forgets to factor in the force of Dopdi’s struggles” (79). While I agree that Spivak forgets Dodpi’s personal struggles, Bose does not seem to understand the socio-economic stability needed in order to have the space and time to explore the struggles of subaltern women. Her identification as, “The First-World-Third world intersection” and “intellectual meets the tribal worker” suggests an unnecessary privileged fog of theoretical borders that complicates the need for local, national, and global advocacy networks committed to redistributive gender justice.

In “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha,” among other ideas, Mahasweta Devi narrates the complexity of representation. In this short story, the pterodactyl creates a mytho-historical life of its own for the tribal community, which is complicated by the visit of educated journalist

Puran Sahay who visits the tribals to investigate the famine and oppression experienced by the aboriginals. Both Devi and Spivak recognize the difficulty in communicating this barbarity because no such word as “exploitation” exists in the tribal language.

In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak observes the “im”possibility of an outside informant to truly understand the position of the object of study; yet, she also cautions against simply reading subaltern literary and historical discourses because although reading is a responsible endeavor, “book learning is **not** responsibility” (142 my emphasis). The ability of Puran’s investigative reporting of the pterodactyl raises crucial questions of the complexity of representation of native informants who have been cast into subject/object relationships. Devi’s Puran realizes the inability of language to convey meaning and representation when he communicates to Bikhia the non-speaking native informant through nonverbal eye exchanges. “There are no words in (the tribals) language to explain the daily experience of the tribal in India” (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* 118). Instead, Puran must rely on his interpretation of Bikhia’s eyes and realizes that, “there is no communication between eyes. Only a dusky waiting without end” (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* 157). Exhausted by his inability to understand Bikhia’s intended meaning, Puran concedes that it is “im”possible to do so. Bikhia’s cave painting is a rhetorical and political concept metaphor that signifies a resistance of representation to be signified in India’s dominant elite formations.

The pterodactyl is a voiceless unrepresented sign characterizing the customs, traditions, and systems of the tribal community and their collective connection to the land, resources and ancestral heritage. As much as the media and academia would like to capture it as its subject/object/ object/subject discourse, the repudiation of representation of knowledge marks an indigenous resistance positionality and contestation to dominant postcolonial homogenizing

forces and capitalist hegemony. Devi ponders these complex issues of representation and ethical responsibility of how the world has helped and can help. Devi further points out capturing images for mass-media exploitation may only undermine what little the tribals have left, as it is “an invasion of the media of the inquisitive world” (*Imaginary Maps* 162). Their language, culture, and traditions can NEVER be understood. So what is the answer? Cottage industries, NGO sponsored agro-training, “rich export boutiques”—I’ve participated in all of them. I too sigh with Puran—“Forgive me, forgive me” (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* 154). How do we NOT become complicit in “this man-made poverty and famine” this “widespread thirst” that have left our “forest dwelling peoples naked and endangered”? Perhaps “it is much safer to know life by reading books, reading theory,” but I, like Puran, like Hennessy, Devi, Randall, Spivak and Head have visited the womb of the earth where mothers struggle to exist and feed their children. I have seen in their “eyes” the urgent message of despair; yet, I know I will never truly understand the indigenous imaginary. “One person eats well by keeping five hundred starving, one graduates college while six hundred remain illiterate” (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* 161). In the end, everything in this interconnected world involves the negotiation of contested spaces, “everything finally becomes a deal, even giving food to the hungry” (Devi, *Imaginary Maps*, 169).

While theorists, activists, and writers contemplate their categories of discourses, the tribals construct their own mythohistories “to bind the past to the present” and to explain, to understand “their nearly extinct sense of ethnic being” (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* 178). Like Puran, Devi, picks up the pen to write in rhetoric of “war footing” to fight against the exploitation of the tribals by proposing didactic stratagems for alleviating famine, the first of which is to apply the “law ruthlessly” creating “forests, giving them poultry and goats and giving them work and food during starvation months” (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* 190). In one of her most poignant

admonitions, Devi argues, “Our responsibility was (is) to protect them. That’s what their eyes spoke. Only love a tremendous excruciating, explosive love can still dedicate us to this work when the century’s sun is in the Western sky, otherwise this aggressive civilization will have to pay a terrible price” (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* 169). Devi’s love is an active love involving the collective construction of what Spivak refers to as an “animist liberation theology” that “constructs a sense of sacred Nature” based on sustainable global ecosystems and “ethical responsibility in singularity” (*Imaginary Maps* 201).

However the resistance literature of oral histories and *testimonios* is academically categorized—Rosemary Hennessy, Margaret Randall, and Mahasweta Devi, and Bessie Head provide engaged interdisciplinary praxis between scholarship and activism. Spivak perceives this arduous undertaking as “the relationship between the silent gift of the subaltern and the thunderous imperative of the Enlightenment to the ‘public use of Reason’” (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* 201). Within the “European Theater of Responsibility,” there has been no rhetorical venue from which the subaltern can voice their socio-economic and political concerns (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* 201). The invocation of an “ethical singularity” establishes ethical reciprocity and responsibility between the subject/object other and the observer informant. For Spivak this is “impossible for all leaders (subaltern or otherwise) to engage every subaltern in this way [i.e. via a singular ethical encounter], especially across the gender divide. This is why ethics is the experience of the impossible” (Devi, *Imaginary Maps* xxv). Political representation and epistemic change can only be successfully produced through ethical commitment by engaging subaltern groups in a dialectic of collective participatory action in which accessible and inclusive spaces are available for meaningful dialogue. Devi cautions “to look at the history, the aggressive civilizations has destroyed itself in the name of progress each time” (169). In

attending to and engaging with the subaltern voice, Spivak suggests the importance of recognizing our own role as oppressors in positions of hierarchical power structures.

As Mahasweta Devi asserts in discussing the limited objective of *Mother of 1084*, “I believe in the value of documentation” (xxii). As an ethnographer, so do I. For as Spivak so eloquently points out, “we want to open our minds to being haunted by the aboriginal” and “to learn and construct a sense of sacred nature by attending to them” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 189).

Feminist Standpoint Theory, PAR, and Ethnographic Listening

Important to the discussion of bridging scholarship and activism is an understanding of feminist standpoint theory, which has provided a vantage position in which theorists can formulate ideas about the socio-economic, political, and gendered forces that shape women’s lived experiences. Influenced by tradition of Marx, Engels, and Lucács, socialist feminists argue that our epistemologies shape how we experience life. Feminist standpoint theory arises when an individual distinguishes her position in society and challenges the socio-political forces that created her subjected positionality. Feminism in this respect becomes a position in which to make sense of the world and the “complex material forces that structure the relations between social positioning and ways of knowing” (Hennessy, “Feminist Standpoint as Ideology Critique” 14).

Feminist standpoint theory, however, does not imply that being a woman automatically provides a “feminist understanding of the world” (Hennessy, “Feminist Standpoint as Ideology Critique” 14). Sandra Harding argues that simply being a woman does not necessarily confer a position in which to identify with all women’s experiences, as women live and experience life differently depending on the distinct socio-historical and economic position in which they live.

According to Harding, there is “no typical woman’s life” and experience and knowledge are not necessarily the same and to theorize a universal similarity “tends to homogenize women’ as a universal and obvious category” (Hennessy, “Feminist Standpoint as Ideology Critique” 15). As there is no ideal categorical position to begin, Sandra Harding’s conception of strong objectivity suggests a “starting off thought” from the stratified perspective of marginalized peoples.

Marginality, according to bell hooks, “is the site of resistance—a location of radical openness and possibility” (hooks 157). It is in this “objective location” that the authority of positionality lies. Harding warns, however, it is not in “women’s authentic renditions of their lives but in ‘subsequently articulated observations and theory about the rest of nature and social relations—observations and theory that start out from, that look at the world from the perspective, of women’s lives’” (Hennessy, “Feminist Standpoint as Ideology Critique” 16). The articulation of a feminist standpoint in a given socio-historical location can bear witness to the myriad ways in which women live, struggle, and triumph against global capitalism and patriarchal forces in different geographic and political regions.

Starting thought from women’s lives can expose the ways in which women are oppressed and exploited, how they resist and often consent to both, and how they sometimes oppress and exploit one another; it can explain the contradictions in the distribution of resources and the ways prevailing knowledges shore up the structures of exploitation that bind women and men in suburb and ghetto, metropole and periphery. *But only if this project issues from a perspective that understands social relations in these systematic terms.* (Hennessy, “Feminist Standpoint as Ideology Critique” 16)

Patricia Hill Collins demonstrates how black women can never be separated from their unique positionality as “Black feminist thought” furthers a “collective identity among African-American women about the dimensions of a Black women’s standpoint” (32). Collins tackles the “concrete experience” of black women faced with racism and sexism in order to make visible the intellectual and historical engagement of black women. Collins argues that “the epistemological significance, and connections to domestic and translational black feminist practice—is fundamentally embedded in a political context that has challenged its very right to exist” (4). A black feminist standpoint facilitates the repositioning of “power and empowerment,” by stressing a “paradigm of intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation, as well as Black women’s individual and collective agency within them” (Collins 273).

Feminist standpoint politics have also been proven an effective political strategy by Puerto Rican feminists in the late sixties early seventies. Known as the Young Lords, Puerto Ricans of color fought for a reproductive rights agenda that would include: “access to voluntary birth control, safe and legal abortion, a quality public health care system, free day care, and an end to poverty among Puerto Ricans and other people of color” (Nelson 114). Their “standpoint as Puerto Rican feminists,” advocated a position that recognized the specific needs of women of color and their opposing “version of reproductive politics,” which included an attack on first sterilization and the right to birth children—a much different discourse than that voiced by Second Wave White Feminists (Nelson 115).

Feminist standpoint based on a “materialist feminist critique” is essential for interrogating the exploitation of women’s reproductive livelihoods by traditional patriarchy and global capitalism. Moreover, this critique must include what Ariel Salleh refers to as “an embodied materialist analysis,” which recognizes how women’s reproductive labor contributes

to economic livelihoods.² An interrogating “critique” of reproductive politics “understands consciousness as ideologically produced subjectivity” and is “bound to crisis and to ideology in a definitive way” (Hennessy 27). Hennessy explains:

The dominant ideology continually works to seal over the cracks in the social imaginary generated by the contradictions of patriarchal and capitalist socialist arrangements, it is continually engaged in crisis management. As an ideological practice, critique issues from these cracks, historicizes them, and claims them as the basis for an alternative narrative. Together the operations of critique ‘work on’ the subject-form of discourse by continually historicizing the contradictions in which it is inscribed. (“Feminist Standpoint as Ideology Critique” 27)

In this sense, “critique” becomes a political space of activism. Gayatri Spivak introduces the concept of “strategic essentialism” as a way to achieve what she refers to as “ethical singularity” with subaltern women. Essentialism is made up of the essences and attributes that define and express human distinctiveness. Freud argues that “anatomy is destiny,” therefore, anatomy determines behavior (189). The idea that biological essences determine behavior has been challenged by many feminists who argue that gender differences are socially and culturally constructed by the political (mostly) patriarchal institutions that create them.

Most feminists would agree, however, that dominant discourses within a society shape and mold gender identity. Understanding this, Spivak employs this idea of “essentialism” as a political strategy to subvert the subaltern “othered” and disenfranchised. As a form of agency, Spivak argues: “If one is considering strategy, one has to look at where the group –the persons, or the movement –is situated when one makes claims for or against essentialism. A strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory” (Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* 4). Strategic

essentialism is capable of mobilizing indigenous, subaltern and women from different geographic and socio-economic sectors of the globe to rally behind gender and reproductive politics: “The strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” has driven collective global campaigns on many women’s reproductive issues, as witnessed by the global efforts to retrieve 200 school girls from Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, northeastern Nigeria who were abducted by Boko Harum on April 14-15, 2014 (Spivak, *In Other Worlds* 205). We have witnessed the mobilization of women for common concerns of reproductive protections across the globe.

Whereas Margaret Randall documents how women initiated campaigns of resistance in Central America, Mahasweta Devi’s fiction articulates how Dalit and Adivasi women resist collusive intersectional patriarchal powers as witnessed at the 2013 National Dalit and Adivasi Women’s Congress. The Congress examined “community and society at large, with reference to women’s identity and location within a community. Examining the categories of caste and gender from a Dalit and Adivasi women’s perspective was one of the crucial aspects of this congress” (Jadhav 39). Similarly, Bessie Head narrates how indigenous women of Botswana joined together against patriarchal violence in a common struggle for dignity.

I position the works of Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Bessie Head as strategic political spaces, “without reducing the heterogeneity of Third World woman into a monolithic subject, a habit that is conceived of as a discursive colonization” (Saunders 14). I agree with Beverly that what is needed is the truthful acknowledgement of the “premise that all politics, including our own, is identity politics, so that the issue is not so much identity politics as such, but rather what identity politics?” (Beverly 22). As Spivak declares, “a strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 4). These writers strategically listen,

write and make visible the realities, histories, and *political* standpoints of indigenous and subaltern women, and in so doing, create an advocacy space of dialogue and possibility, which is crucial for critical engagement and emancipatory politics.

As Beverly noted, all politics is identity politics and as Angela Davis observes, research and knowledge production “involves a dual commitment... to use knowledge in a transformative way, and to use knowledge to remake the world so that it is better for its inhabitants” (qtd. in Shayne 20). Joyce McCarl Nielsen goes a step further in acknowledging the interplay of politics in conducting research arguing that “all researchers carry their particular worldviews, histories, and biographies with them into their research projects (Shayne xxix). This is certainly true in the literature of Devi, Randall, and Head who carry a sense of their commitment to social justice to unite their writing with their personal experiences and research. Randall in particular integrates her personal experiences into her work, which as Julie Shayne points out “shifts the terrain of what is knowable by fusing researcher and research subject” (xxix).

In all these writings we witness a shared passion and praxis for social reproductive justice. Praxis, according to Paulo Friere, is an activity which “consists of action and reflection” (125), which “occurs simultaneously” (128). These narratives are precisely “directed at the structures to be transformed” (126), creating a dialogue within their historical and geographical location in which “critical reflection is also action” (128). I develop an interdisciplinary praxis synthesizing Friere’s definition of praxis with the definition of activist scholarship of critically engaged knowledge production. Julie Shayne develops the idea that activist scholarship provides a theoretical pedagogy of politically engaged research that creates intersecting alliances between the myriad circulating knowledges produced within different societal sectors.³ These works allow readers to witness the cultural production of these knowledges and how they are embedded

within the people, their lived experiences and their relation to power as expressed in the literature.

As a non-indigenous political action ethnographer, I am deeply influenced by the work of Orlando Fals-Borda's theory of participatory action research and his concept of *vivencia* (lived experience): At his 1995 Plenary Address to the Southern Sociological Society Meeting he states:

Participatory researchers in the Third World contributed to this merger with a version of 'commitment' which combined praxis and phronesis, that is, horizontal participation with peoples and wise judgment and prudence for the good life. In my particular case, this sociopolitical combination was placed in the service of peasants' and workers' struggles, which meant a clear break with the Establishment plus an active, sometimes dangerous search for social justice there.⁴ But I could not consider myself a scientist, even less a human being, if I did not exercise the 'commitment' and felt it in my heart and in my head as a life experience, *Erfahrung* or *Vivencia*. This methodology became an alternative philosophy of life for me and for many others. There is no need to make any apology for this type of committed research. Nearly everyone knows that PAR combines qualitative and quantitative techniques. It utilizes hermeneutics, literature, and art according to needs. And it joins with action simultaneously. There appears to be now some ample agreement that PAR can serve to correct prevailing practices in our disciplines, which have not been altogether satisfactory or useful for society at large.⁴ (Fals-Borda 1995)

Influenced by my interdisciplinary background in anthropology and law, this dissertation focuses its critical lens on the knowledges and *vivencias* produced in the testimonial literature of indigenous and subaltern women from the Global South to understand the historical and legal processes that rendered women's reproductive bodies and livelihoods colonized, "disposable" and "vulnerable." Influenced by the work of anthropologists Shirley Fiske and Ann Kingsolver, I argue that Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Bessie Head provide models of ethnographic listening, offering valuable insight into how power shapes women's reproductive *vivencias*.⁵

I, moreover, affirm Ruth Behar's assertion that "We need other forms of criticism, which are rigorous yet not disinterested; forms of criticisms which are not immune to catharsis, forms of criticism which can respond vulnerably, in ways we must begin to try to imagine" (175). I therefore *imagine* the fictional works as powerful case studies to demonstrate how the woman's body has become a political theater in which men communicate their power plays with each other. I employ a materialist feminist theoretical framework to analyze the ways these works provide insights into gender and reproductive politics as well as models for ethnographic listening. At the same time, I explore the issues of gender and reproductive politics themselves as I situate them in historical, economic and cultural contexts.

I posit that "ethnographic listening" is a political participatory action methodology in which researchers engage in the praxis of critical engagement of organic knowledge production by listening to the subjectivities produced, and engaging in reflection and action based research. By ethnographic listening and observing how *vivencias* are shaped by power relations, Devi, Randall, and Head engage in a form of social justice scholarship. In these works, we are privy to the histories, contexts, and *vivencias* in divergent geographic regions to read women's dispossession and resistance. These writers "listen" and uncover the voices, the wombs, and the

scars that have been inscribed on women's bodies and in so doing provide valuable insights into gender and reproductive politics as well as models for ethnographic listening and ethico-political engagement.

I use the literature as a form of ethnography that recognizes the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge, practices, oral histories, lived experiences, and sustainable systems into our scholarship practice. Vito Laterza in "The Ethnographic Novel Another Skeleton in the Anthropological Closet," recognizes the analysis of literature as a form of ethnography and a "sophisticated approach to the description of context-specific subjectivities" (124). Laterza recognizes "popular fiction could be studied as a form of ethnography," but recognizes the "difficulties in the development of a systematic theory to bridge the two disciplines of literature and anthropology" (124). He argues that although there are inherent problems to the merging of these two disciplines in what he refers to as "the ethnographic enterprise," he argues that "properly formulated research questions and clearly spelt out theoretical conclusions are not marginal to the narration, but constitute its structural core" (Laterza 132).

It is my purpose to engage in Laterza's "ethnographic enterprise" and theorize models of "ethnographic listening" in the works of Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Bessie Head in order to examine the truth-value of patriarchal and capital's exploitation of female bodies and livelihood spaces. Through the development of my argument, I demonstrate that Laterza's "ethnographic enterprise" is a valuable model that can be used effectively to offer new interdisciplinary materialist feminist paradigms for analysis and social activism. The works provide a discursive space to interrogate women's subordinated positions in what Laterza refers to as "theoretical statements in a form that allows them to be examined and evaluated" (132).

Helpful to my argument is Geert Lovink's 1997 Interview with Gayatri Spivak. Spivak discusses her methodology stating: "What I am interested in doing is learning to learn from below." Learning from below and listening to the voices from below is the qualitative approach of my materialist feminist methodology; I argue it offers a crucial model of ethnographic listening. In the evaluation of Devi and Head's "tribal" stories, I integrate their models of ethnographic listening to provide evidence of my own research with the Barabaig Mothers of Eastern Tanzania demonstrating how in their lived experiences and mythohistories, they address similar concerns as those expressed by Devi and Head.⁶ In addition, we need to connect materialist feminism to a world systems analysis similar to that proposed by Torry D. Dickinson and Robert Schaeffer in *Transformations, Feminist Pathways to Global Change*. They caution that with a failure of materialist feminism to take a global systems approach "feminist theories remain abstract and disconnected without global theories and intersectional understandings" (Dickinson and Schaeffer 276).

The Borderlands of Second Skins

I commence the discussion of how structures of power and sexual identities functions across local, regional, national and global formations by integrating Hennessy's *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*. In this text, Hennessy examines the "emergence of a full-blown commodity culture, conditions made possible and supported by over-determined adjustments in the international sexual division of labor" (*Profit and Pleasure* 98). I read the literature to examine individual experiences and responses, in order to more fully observe how global capitalism has persistently colonized, commodified, and sexualized the female body by turning into a contested "site of reproduction in the first world and of production in the third world" (Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse* xiii).

Global capitalism thrives on oppressive and exploitative gender divisions of labor as witnessed in Hennessy's work on the Mexican North-South Borderlands. Hennessy delineates an inequitable gap between those "who own and profit and those whose surplus labor makes that profit possible" (*Profit and Pleasure* 177). These texts focus on a distinct range of manifestations revealing how capital has interpenetrated reproduction and production directly influencing child birth and childrearing practices (Russel 341). Traditional patriarchal systems and global capitalism have forever altered women's reproductive systems and *vivencias*.

I call upon Hennessy's ideas that to "be feminized is to bear on your embodied second skin the mark of devaluation, which is quite valuable to capital" (*Fires* 131). In developing my theoretical foundation I aim to demonstrate that disposable women of the South are indispensable for capital's growth. Her "embodied second skin" is what fuels past and present-day global systems transforming her body "into instruments of accumulation of surplus labor" (Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism* 37). According to Hennessy, women's subjected skins are sites of historical struggle to read and map. "Through the social processes of abjection, cultural value produces subjects that can be exploited not only because they are able to sell their capacities as labor power (i.e., become superadequate themselves) but also because they bear second skins that command a low price" (*Fires* 129). Therefore, I use the literature to map this struggle on women's bodies and livelihoods as a methodology to foster a witnessing practice, which includes my own research.

Hennessy notes how "surplus value depends upon cultural value"; cultural value is assigned by the dominating socio-political structure in which value is enacted and gets "folded into the labor power workers exchange" (*Fires* 125). The "ideological articulation" of these assigned cultural values constructs "the cultural material" of what she refers to as "second skin, a

lucrative site where culture and economy meet” to appropriate and exploit women’s’ bodies (*Fires* 126). Hennessy elaborates on this “ideological articulation” by defining it as:

...[a] tissue of values that organizes sensations and affective intensities and integrates them into the representations and lived experience of who we are. These values circulate in signs that plot normative body maps along a differential grid of negative and positive categories that often conform to ideological norms. They are the fabric of meaning making and experience and are laden with affect, conveyed through discourse, image, gesture, tone, and touch. Second skins are also open to history, which means they are sites of struggle. The values inscribed in them are contested and therefore can change and be adjusted, even though they may be represented in the common sense as natural and universal. (*Fires* 126)

Hence, I read the literature to examine how capital has invaded female reproductive spaces disposing them to sexualized and commodified sites of exploitive fluctuating ideological values. In “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value,” Spivak asserts: “It is a well-known fact that the worst victims of the recent exacerbation of the international division of labor are women. They are the true surplus army of labor in the current conjuncture. In their case, patriarchal social relations contribute to their production as the new focus of super-exploitation” (84). Spivak proceeds to argue that “to consider the place of sexual reproduction and the family within those social relations should show the pure (or free) ‘materialist’ predication of the subject to be gender exclusive” (84).

Here, I concur with Spivak and Hennessy and build on this premise extending to Melissa Wright’s insights in *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* to further show

“how the disposable third world woman's body is a spatial entity that is always being produced along with the commodities that flow through circuits of capital” (14).

Wright addresses “the meaning of human disposability” to show how women across the globe have been rendered disposable by capital’s international reach (147). In so doing, she attempts to expose the myth in which “its central protagonist—a young woman from a third world locale—who, through the passage of time, comes to personify the meaning of human disposability: someone who eventually evolves into a living state of worthlessness” (Wright 2). In this myth, women of the Global South are dispossessed, displaced, and destined to misery as a form of “human waste”; sadly, a myth narrated and played out in the many works of this dissertation.

In developing my argument on the gender and reproductive politics, I relate this discussion of “second skins” to the cultural production of Mahasweta Devi. In Devi’s literary sexual reportage in *Of Women, Outcastes, Peasants, Imaginary Maps*, and *Rebels and Breast Stories*, I show how persistent layers of patriarchal oppression and exploitation doubly marginalize her female characters. Here, I explore women’s acquiescence and resistance to often-violent sexual inscriptions on the productive and reproductive copulating body in order to expand the thematics of women’s body politic. Devi locates these gender violations in the rural areas where adivasi women struggle daily to ward off physical thirst and hunger and male predatory advances against them and their children. As Devi points out, “Decolonization has not reached the poor. That is why these things happen. Women are just merchandise, commodities” (*Imaginary Maps* xx). In this patriarchal insurgency, women are bought and sold, desecrated, raped, impregnated, and disposed of when their reproductive bodies are no longer fruitful.

Devi's works documents how adivasi women's tortured "second skins" become the historical battleground of deeper socio-economic and political issues, their reproductive systems a discursive site for the examination of insurrection, resistance, and decolonization. Hence, I build on Hennessy's observation on how disposability and devaluation acts as a powerful mechanism for sustaining the connection between hyper-exploitation and hyper-vulnerability of women of the Global South (*Fires* 137). To this end, I examine the marginalized female reproductive body within the overlapping socio-political systems to demonstrate how its devaluation is critical for the penetration of capital accumulation throughout the world.

I extend the discussion to Margaret Randall's oral histories to show how women's bodies are also a site of struggle and contestation during revolutionary periods. In Randall's work, I reveal the gendered politics of resistance and agency in which she witnesses the female body and particularly the womb as a place of physical and hegemonic contestation against patriarchal dominion and ideology. *Sandino's Daughters* specifically testifies to personal histories of imprisonment, torture, rape, abortion, and birth. Many of Randall's women carry the memory of terror and pain in their wombs; it is here that they cradle the memory of their pain, their suffering, and their survival, illustrating how "women's histories are registered in their scars" and how each scar represents a historical marker in the body's memory of lived experience (*When I Look into the Mirror and See You* 663).

In this analysis of women's body's as "social factories," I examine disposable women and questions of power arguing Randall's declaration that, "A reexamination of power is key" in addressing sociopolitical and economic inequities (*Narrative of Power* 22). Moreover, in examining questions of power, I call upon Randall's work in which she correlates "the imposition of power to the invasion of a child's body," insisting "on making this metaphorical

connection, as a way patriarchy usurps and denies female identity” (*Coming Up For Air* 25). According to Randall, this is about “power as a political category” and “until those intent on creating a society based on justice are willing to examine the problem of power, nothing will change” (*Narrative of Power* 200).

I expand this analysis to the devaluation of bodies in Bessie Head’s literature to show how the theme of the devalued second skin is twined and twisted into capital’s narrative of western progress. The subordination of female body is a persistent theme in many of Head’s stories. I argue that Head suggests that dehumanization of the female reproductive system was in part due to Africa’s independence, which hoisted on the men “one more affliction on top of affliction[s]... (*Collector of Treasures* 90). Africa’s independence ushered in a new world order, directly impacting and breaking “the old, traditional form of family life” and forever altering the dynamics of male and female regenerative power (Head, *Collector of Treasures* 92). Head invokes the “second scramble for Africa” and is meticulous to point out the conflicting ideologies in which “sons of chiefs,” and “sons of slaves” compete amidst attacks of “imperialists and neo-colonists who were still skillfully manipulating the affairs of an oppressed people” (*When Rain Clouds Gather* 58). Gathering missionaries, NGOs, and political dung slinging from above and below, I will show how Head’s female characters are caught within this violent dialectical struggle. The brutality of these discourses in Head’s literature sweeps the subaltern women into the tragedy of apartheid politics in to what Gloria Anzaldua refers to as the borderlands where “the prohibited and the forbidden are its inhabitants” (3). I argue that within the tragic borderland of existence, Head’s vulnerable female characters are caught within a vulnerable space of redoubled contestation and violence between the polarities of “other” and nonwhite “other,” colonized and colonizer, male and female, and life and death. Within these

hyper-exploitative spaces, they fight against the myth of disposability perpetrated by patriarchal capitalism.

Materiality of Affect

Central to this dissertation is the recognition of the “affective turn” in scholarship, which began in the late 1960s and extended into the early 1980s. The “affective turn” is a response to capital’s invasion of almost every aspect of human relations in its attempt to yoke the productive and reproductive powers of humanity. Hennessy notes that the “affective turn” is also a symptom “to this invasion” (*Fires* 37). Feminist and Marxist inquiries into how affective labor has been exploited by patriarchal systems and global capitalism is a crucial element of the literature under discussion. Devi, Randall, and Head provide fictional accounts and subjectivities based on extensive oral histories as to how women’s reproductive labor have become sites of exploitation, appropriation, and resistance in different geographic and ethnic locations. Social feminist scholarship, in particular, focused on unpaid work activities within the domestic space and the ways in which domestic reproduction contribute to capitalist production. According to Kathi Weeks, “This recognition of the household as a site of social reproduction entailed the important struggle to expand existing notions of work” (235).

Socialist feminist standpoint theory of the late 70s early 80s commenced an examination of affective labor and the myriad ways that women raise families, establish domestic households, communicate, love, work, organize and resist. Social feminists believed that these relational systems needed to be interrogated in order to understand the impact of patriarchal systems and global capitalism on women’s bodies and livelihoods and conversely the circuit of contributions of women’s affective labor to these systems. It was from this critical juncture and standpoint that political and revolutionary activism could materialize. The socialist feminists debates of the

1970s questioned Marx's exemption of unpaid reproductive labor in his discussion of productive labor. This scholarship opened up the inquiry as to whether affect labor exists "inside or outside" the domain of capitalist production, leaning towards a "dual systems logic predicated on a model of separate spheres" (Weeks 236).

In the late 80s in *Blood at the Root*, Ann Ferguson posits, "It is in part through these systems that different forms of domination are produced" (77). Ferguson refers to these systems as "sex affective production," which Deleuze and Guatari identify as "desiring production" and Gayle Rubin as "sex/gender systems" (77). Ferguson employs the term sex/affective production to argue that "economic priorities" do not necessarily "determine the specific form of sex/affective production in that economy" (78). She concedes, however, that there exists some "minimal functional connections" between desiring and gendered relations (78). Ferguson's examination of sex/affective production provides an evaluative space for understanding how patriarchal capitalism has manufactured gendered divisions of labor (81). For Ferguson, these pockets of affective resistance "created by common work" agitate patriarchal dominance as "subcultures" acting within the structure. The subcultures created by "childbirth and rearing" and informal community, work, and kinship networks produce powerful affective ties between women (Ferguson 81).

Feminists began to question the devaluation of women's reproductive labor and its necessary importance to capital growth. This reexamination of sites of socio-economic and cultural spheres of influence prompted a reevaluation of Marxist theory and more importantly a reevaluation of the contributions of affective labor to the cohesive functioning of the social structure. An interdisciplinary approach to theorizing the emotional interplay of affect in both the private and public sphere can be seen in the work of Arlie Hochschild, Michelle Rosado, Ruth

Behar, Margaret Randall, Hester Eisenstein, and Silvia Federici among others. The terms “affect” and “sex/affective production,” “affective labor,” and “reproductive labor” have varied and contested interpretations of meaning among these writers. Arlie Russel Hochschild theorized the commercialization of feeling amongst flight attendants and bill collectors positing that “emotional labor” requires “the coordination of mind and feeling” (7). Hochschild warns of the “social engineering” of women’s “emotional labor” and the “loss of control over her labor” (8). In *Global Woman* (2002), Hochschild joined with Barbara Ehrenreich to examine how “feelings are distributable resources, but they behave somewhat differently from either scarce or renewable material resources” (23). They cite Freud’s displacement theory extending it to relationships beyond the nuclear family to theorize how First World working mothers commodify the love and care imported from the Third World.

Helpful to this interdisciplinary analysis is Ruth Behar’s *Vulnerable Observer*, in which she contributes an anthropological perspective on the significance of emotions to ethnographic work. Behar questions the delicate balance of how ethnographers can write “emotions into the personal material without draining it all from the ethnography” (18). Randall, moreover, integrates emotion and “collective memory” as important resources without which “we cannot move upon this earth. Nor can we envision, create, or change the statements of our lives” (*Narrative of Power* 70). For Randall, the retrieval and sharing of our memories create solidarity and pathways for social justice. Randall’s extensive gathering of women’s oral histories from Nicaragua to Cuba enables readers “to descend with these women into memory and emerge with them as they reclaim their experience and its meaning for all of us” (*When I Look Into the Mirror* 125).

In developing an argument that “corporate globalization” has co-opted these energies of affective labor and women’s productive and reproductive behavior, I demonstrate how the insertion of affective labor, which requires nurturance and care-giving had widened the economic gap along gender, racial, and class lines. Silvia Federici takes up this argument in *Revolution at Point Zero* to argue that “The theory of ‘affective labor’ ignores this problematic and the complexity involved in the reproduction of life. It also suggests that all forms of work in ‘postindustrial’ capitalism are increasingly homogenized” (Federici 123). She charges those like Negri and Hardt only pay “lip service” to the “gendered character of much reproductive work” (Federici 95). For Federici, affective labor “describes only a limited part of the work that the reproduction of human beings requires and erases the subversive potential of the feminist concept of reproductive work” (100). She claims that if “Marxist theory is to speak to twenty-first-century anti-capitalist movements, it must rethink the question of “reproduction” from a planetary perspective” (Federici 93) in order to “recognize the possibility of crucial alliances” (100).

While many women have been able to harness the positive aspects of affective labor, it is precisely the emotional attributes that have been exploited by global capitalism as affect culture can operate as ideology and counter-discourse (Hennessy, *Fires* 64). Hennessy defines Affect Culture as:

Affect Culture is the transmission of sensation and cognitive emotion through cultural practices. One of the ways this inflection takes place is in the circulation of cultural narratives that are themselves sites of struggle as they encode the mythologies that reproduce dominant power relations and alternative narratives that question or reinvent them. (*Fires* 50)

Albeit, these writers provide a different analysis on women's reproductive and productive labor, materialist feminists such as Hennessy, attempts to connect these divisions to argue that we need a more comprehensive examination of affect in relation "to material history" (*Fires* 37). For Hennessy, affect is a feature of the struggle for justice, as the individual and environment interact as emotions and are bound by social forces that enable people to survive (*Fires* 47). She uses the term "affect culture" to preserve the conception of affect's semi-autonomy and its adhesion to culture forms, including emotions, objects, and practices" (*Fires* 46). Hennessy addresses the critical value of the affective dimension of social and cultural life by a process she borrows from Jonathan Flatley and Walter Benjamin called "affective mapping" in which women collectively embrace their disruptions and displacements to remap and transform their lives (46). Affective mapping establishes a terrain for understanding individual historical processes and the affective emotions that register to the changing conditions. According to Flatley, it "enacts critical vigilance" as it "traces the paths, resting places, dead ends, and detours we share with others, including those who came before us" (qtd in Hennessy, *Fires* 79). Both Hennessy and Flatley "remind us that stories are valuable and powerful not for the knowledge one finds in them but 'because of the affectations they allow to be transferred and the relationships they thereby create'" (Hennessy, *Fires* 79). As evidenced in this cultural production, mapping the collective experiences is a powerful affective strategy enabling readers to listen and bear witness to the junctures and dis-junctures of women's lives.

I argue that affect matters because it has solidified the oppression, subjugation, and exploitation of women's reproductive systems, their breasts, their wombs, their livelihoods. Beneficial to this argument is Sara Ahmed observation that "perception, emotion, and judgment," shapes the surfaces of the body as "the doing of emotions" is "bound up with the

sticky relations between signs and bodies: emotions work by working through signs on bodies to materialize the surfaces and boundaries that are lived as worlds” (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 191).

Specifically, I examine how the emotions produced by affect culture in different geographic locations shapes stories of reproductive injustice and justice. In these works, we co-witness different forms of affective labor in terms of how each social structure develops human systems and relations to meet, and in many cases deny the needs of its most vulnerable members. Each social structure produces “one or more historically developed modes of sex/affective production to meet the key human needs—sexuality, nurturance, children—whose satisfaction is just as basic of the functioning of human society as is the satisfaction of the material needs of hunger and physical security” (Ferguson 83). When these needs are not met, we see mass migrations, suicides, starvation, and the inhumane effects of peoples struggling to survive.

Affects also mold the ways we make epistemological sense of our human existence in terms of how we define our belief systems and moral justifications for our actions. The affective and material needs are equally vital to human sustenance, yet they are dependent on the social systems, which construct them and are hierarchal in nature. Affective labor has been fundamental to grassroots activism against neoliberal policies throughout Central America, Latin America, and Africa. I demonstrate how through processes of ethnographic listening to the lives and stories of other indigenous subaltern women, Devi, Randall, and Head narrate a reproductive politics of compassion to the suffering of others.

Reproductive Collapse

We have witnessed a history of patriarchal devaluation of sex/affective production. Until recently with the growing surrogacy trade, international adoptions, sale of embryos, kidneys,

lungs, and other human organs, human beings were not considered commodities for exchange. The insertion of human body parts and wombs for rent on the global market demands a discussion of how female reproduction and production have merged “into feminized, racialized, and globalized forms of waged labor in the service sector”(Weeks 233). Hennessy theorizes that these impositions on women’s spaces of identity are “gendered adjustments,” which are “small changes that are enacted in specific, local gendered situations. These adjustments are practices that transgress or revise gender norms in the particular everyday situations in which men and women live” (“Gender Adjustments” 183). Based on her research with *maquiladoras* on Mexico’s Northern Border, Hennessy argues that gender adjustments are strategic responses to the socio-political systems that produce them, as women “adjust” to the patriarchal stranglehold on their bodies and livelihoods. Hennessy’s North-South Encuentros demonstrate how women’s bodies have been deregulated and subsumed under neoliberalism to such an extent that their bodies have become exploitable sites of “bio-deregulation,” a term Hennessy borrows from Teresa Brennan (“Gender Adjustments” 194). Bio-deregulation disrupts bodily rhythms and processes affecting how “people live and work as they are made to labor longer and harder, as interaction and personal contact are restricted, and migration becomes a matter of course either by commuting longer distances or relocating from homelands in order to work for wages and survive” (Hennessy, “Gender Adjustments” 194). Under global capitalism, the deregulation of the female body leads to “hyper-deregulation” and “hyper-exploitation” impacting every aspect of a human life.

I proffer that the heart-wrenching effects of these disruptive and often obliterating processes can hardly be called “adjustments.” Such a euphemistic summation of the violent havoc and forceful displacement of women’s reproductive bodies and livelihoods suggests a

misguided theoretical summation to the unforgiving reality of global capital's encroachment. Are women merely adjusting to the destruction of their "subsistence economies," the separation of "producers from the means of subsistence," and the feminized devaluation of their disposable skins? (Federici 101). It is problematic to share in Hennessy's theorization of "gender adjustments" that seems more apt to be construed as gendered violence and reproductive collapse:

At the intersection of capital's spatial expansion and its abandonment of the generational and daily reproduction-time needed for survival stand those whose personhood is devalued as feminine. Feminization is one tag for the negative personhood built into the liberal notion of citizenship and the symbolic scaffolding of modernity. Historically, it has served to thrust workers and indigenous peoples into bare life. Feminized bodies in the marketplace, home, or prison help guarantee a cheap and disposable source of value, and feminized indigeneity is an ideological pretext for extracting lands and natural resources. Profits accumulated through free market exchange capitalize on the political and cultural dispossession of certain subjects, a dispossession that registers in the body and femininity is one form this dispossession takes (Hennessy, "Gender Adjustments" 195).

While Hennessy acknowledges the unevenness of the changes that are "enacted" or "provoked," a recurring thread of her argument is the positive nature of these "gender adjustments" as women join alliances to rally against "widespread violations of women's well-being" ("Gender Adjustments" 183). In describing the Zapatista Movement of Chiapas, Mexico in which rural and indigenous men and women joined forces to create *El Ejército Zapatista de*

Liberación Nacional (EZLN) Hennessy observes a combat state coupled with neoliberal incursions and increasing military and paramilitary control. On a visit to the *caracol*, Blanca Navidad, Hennessy discusses the testimonies she recorded from Myriam and Eucaria who testified to the “heavy price women have continued to pay in the years after the uprising as targets of military and paramilitary intimidation and sexual violence, and they also pointed to the challenge of women’s continued subordination within the Zapatista communities” (“Gender Adjustments 196). She then extends her definition of gendered adjustments, which previously included sexual violence, to the adjustments of pronouns when the women from Chiapas refer to themselves as “nosotras” instead of masculine gendered “nosotros.” She argues that the feminization of the plural we, is a positive adjustment, an assertion of collective feminine presence (Hennessy, “Gender Adjustments 196).

In her description of husbands’ newly acquired child care duties she connects it to the growth of women now working as *maquillas* in the maquiladoras in hazardous borderland export processing zones (EPZs). She writes: “Earning wages outside the home puts them in a situation that to some degree adjusts the gender norm of women’s economic dependence on husbands and fathers. The situation of the eviction also thrust women into the position of being the community’s strength” (Hennessy, “Gender Adjustments 196). Here, Hennessy seems to affirm a liberal feminist perspective that argues working outside the home and leaving the children in the hands of non-working husbands, or care-givers to join the exploited *proletariado de maquillas* is somehow a step forward for humanity and the women’s movement. I contend otherwise by developing an argument that examines the interrelationship between global capitalism and feminism, which rigorously interrogates whether free market capitalism and exploitation of women’s productive and reproductive labor can sincerely aid the interests of

mothers of the Global South. In *Feminism Seduced*, Hester Eisenstein observes that the experience of white middle class women is significantly different from that experienced by “women of color, as well as working-class women, the option *not* (my emphasis) to work was not on the table, nor had it been since before the founding of the republic” (87). The idea that paid work outside the home was a form of liberatory emancipation for women of color was and is met with skepticism. While globalization may arguably provide “opportunities” for women to develop strategies to resist patriarchal impositions, it has produced a stranglehold of patriarchal and capitalist restraints on women.

We have witnessed how neoliberal policies have displaced and dispossessed many mothers and children from the Global South. Since October 2014, an influx of 37,600 migrants from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador fled the socio-economic and political collapse of their communities. In these present day *viviencias*, we see the disfigured face of globalization on the faces of mothers and children who have taken the dramatic struggle to find work because “they cannot reproduce themselves, not at least under adequate living conditions” (Federici 104). Federici notes: “Thus, when hundreds of thousands leave their homes to face years of humiliation and isolation, living with the anguish of not being able to give to the people they love the same care they give to strangers across the world, we know that something quite dramatic is happening in the organization of world reproduction” (104). The presence of mother and child refugees is a direct result of neoliberal expansion and its aggressive depreciation of women’s reproductive systems and labor. It is imperative that we recognize women’s brutal struggle over reproductive control of their bodies and livelihoods and develop interdisciplinary strategies for reproductive justice at the local, regional, national, and global levels.

Notes:

¹ I synthesize Ewa Charkiewicz theory of how military strategies of thanato-economics, “wages war not only on distant others, but also, as Foucault and Brennant point out, war against its own populations” (Charkiewicz 80).

² See Salleh, Ariel. “Ecological Debt: Embodied Debt” *Eco-Sufficiency & Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology*. Ed. Ariel Salleh. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press. 2009.

³ Shayne develops a definition of activist scholarship based on the work of Julia Sudbury and Margo Okazawa-Rey in *Activist Scholarship: Antiracism, Feminisms, and Social Change* and Jennifer Bichman Mendez’s *Globalizing Scholar Activism: Opportunities and Dilemmas through a Feminist Lens*.

⁴ This is a portion taken from Orlando Fals-Borda’s Plenary Address at the Southern Sociological Meeting in Atlanta, April 8, 1995 entitled: “Research for Social Justice: North-South Convergences.”

⁵ I had the privilege of working as a researcher for Shirley Fiske in the late 70s conducting research on migration patterns in Ecatepec de Morelos, Mexico. At this time, I was introduced to the importance of recording “vivencias” as valuable information for evoking socio-economic change.

⁶ In addition, we need to connect materialist feminism to a world systems analysis similar to that proposed by Torry D. Dickinson and Robert Schaeffer in *Transformations, Feminist Pathways to Global Change*. They caution that with a failure of materialist feminism to take a global systems approach “feminist theories remain abstract and disconnected without global theories and intersectional understandings” (276).

CHAPTER TWO

BIOPOLITICS AND THE POLICING OF WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIORS IN THE WORKS OF MAHASWETA DEVI

The Shakas, the Huns, the Mughals, the Pathaans have all merged into the corpus that is India. And the tribals have remained deprived under every dispensation.

Devi, *Bashai Tudu*

After thirty-one years of Independence, I find my people still groaning under hunger, landlessness, indebtedness, and bonded labour. An anger, luminous, burning and passionate, directed against a system that has failed to liberate my people from these horrible constraints, is the only source of inspiration for all my writings.

Devi, *Wombs of Fire*¹

From British Colonialism to post independence India, Bengali writer and social advocate Mahasweta Devi has witnessed decades of political change that have culminated in India's pivotal presence on the global stage. Inspiring young and old with her strong position in support of India's tribal populations, Devi has been a tireless advocate for the socio-economic protection, security, and political well being of the adivasis, also known as the Scheduled Tribes. She has garnished numerous literary awards for her work and tribal advocacy, including the Jnanpith Award lifetime literary achievement award in 1996, awarded to her by Nelson Mandela. In delivering the award, Mandela said, Devi "holds a mirror to the conditions of the world as we enter the new millennium" (Mojares).

Referring to her visit as a "mirror of tribal India," Devi, like Randall and Head, dedicated her writing to the human struggles of marginalized peoples in an effort to bring them into political and historical memory. Her myriad discourses show how ecological marginalization, reproductive rape and unequal resource access have pushed the tribals to seek protection deep within the womb of the earth. Described as a political anthropologist for her keen ethnographic

observation, Devi captures an ethnographic realism in her writing and a social conscience that have influenced all phases of her prolific career. Nivedita Sen and Nikhil Yadav describe her stories as “openly confrontational in opposing the official history disseminated by the ruling parties,” which acutely explore the complicated political realities of productive and reproductive exploitation (15).

A significant influence on Devi’s life was her association with the *Gananatya*, an affiliation of writers, and political actors who staged political plays in rural Bengal during the 1930s and 1940s. After graduation from Calcutta University, she worked as a teacher and journalist publishing her first novel *Jhansir Rani* (The Queen of Jhansi) in 1956, which features an Indian protagonist and fictional reconstruction of Laxmibai, who in 1857, leads her troops in the Rebellion against the British in the first Indian War of Independence.² *Jhansir Rani* became a literary model which framed her later work in which she includes extensive scholarship, biography, indigenous oral and local histories, contemporary events and her keen imagination to reclaim Indian historiography and its violent relationship with India’s elite classes and power structures.

In a February 2010 interview with Anosh Malekar, Devi said, “I traveled a lot for *Jhansir Rani*, my first published work. I went to all the places the young Laxmibai was associated with. Since then I have been travelling, meeting people, every time feeling the necessity of a struggle for restoring their dignity and rights as humans.” *Jhansir Rani* marked the beginning of 57 years of documentary realism, which gained a social vision in 1965 when Devi traveled to the impoverished village of Palamau in Bihar and observed the subhuman conditions the people endured as a result of oppressive exploitation and neglect. Between 1966-1975, Devi depicted the human struggle for social and physical dignity in *Kavi Bandyoghoti Gayiner Jivan* (The Life

and Death of Poet Bandyoghoti Gayin, 1966), rendering a fifteenth-century Bengal boy's efforts to achieve social justice, and *Andharmanik* ("Jewel in Darkness," 1966), exploring the turmoil in mid-eighteenth century Bengali after the Bargi (Maratha cavalry) raids. "I think a creative writer should have a social conscience. I have a duty towards society. The sense of duty is an obsession" (Malekar 2010).

The Naxalite movement, which began in 1967 also had a profound influence on Devi's work, an influence that culminated in *Hajar Churashir Ma* ("Mother of 1084"), the story of a mother who after the death of her son, tries to understand his alienation from bourgeois society and revolutionary commitment.³ Devi explored the Naxalite Movement later both in her short story collection, *Agnigarbha* ("The Fire Within," 1978), and her novel *Bish-Ekush* (1986). The 1977 publication of the novel *Aranyar Adhikar* ("Rights of the Forest"), which chronicles the ecological struggles of the Munda tribal peoples against oppressive layers of colonial, religious, and regional forces established Devi as one of India's foremost leading writers. Motivated by a sense of history, her ability to foreground her works and characters in historical processes provides a political space for the examination of human rights struggles. This is particularly true in regard to the sustained struggle over the forests. The forest is a cradle of adivasi memory holding an existential focus within their cultural and ancestral traditions and within their traditional subsistence livelihoods.

Since the 1980s, Devi has championed many grassroots human rights movements dealing with bonded labour, land-grabbing, enduring rural feudalism, lack of educational and health care services, state negligence, and local, regional, and state complicity. Traveling deep into Bihar and West Bengali, her interventionist journalism has attracted a following amongst the local tribes. "People have regard and belief in my writing; they are convinced that my writing will

include their views and ideas and hence provide them with justice” (Asokan). Devi’s works demonstrate her evolution into a writer who depicts the harsh historical realities of exploitation of the rural peasants and indigenous peoples and documents acts of resistance and agency against this exploitation of human dignity. Her conviction in the importance of distributive justice for all peoples led her to launch *Bortika*, a newspaper that represented the issues and concerns of tribals and working class peasants.

In a 1983 interview Devi confirms her dedication to her life’s purpose—the cause of the adivasis and the recording of their historical episodes: “It is my conviction that a story writer should be motivated by a sense of history that would help her readers to understand their own times. I have never had the capacity nor the urge to create art for art’s sake” (Mojares). Devi bases her writing on real life people and events, information she claims she obtained by traveling village-to-village conducting surveys. Through this ethnographic gathering of information, she has become a woman of the people. People endearingly refer to her as “a one person resource center,” and as Didi (elder sister) because of her ability to listen with an open heart to the problems that she hears from those who seek her advice. Devi’s “ethnographic listening” to the plight of people’s in distress, enables her to engage in a form of participatory action advocacy in which she actively listens and offers advice on how to file the proper grievances to the appropriate agencies. Devi argues that “A responsible writer, standing at a turning point in history, has to take a stand in defense of the exploited. Otherwise history would never forgive him” (Mojares). Because of Devi’s keen ability to listen, observe, and participate she has been referred to as a “political anthropologist” for her work in the late 1960s working with the tribals.

Devi retired from Calcutta University in 1984 to engage full-time in her writing and social advocacy. Her methodology includes speaking one on one with tribal peoples, and

listening to their indigenous stories and knowledge. This sensitive approach enables her to bring traditional folk knowledge, oral history, and songs into her writing. In so doing, she provides a discursive space for disrupting representation of decolonization to reveal how the adivasis continued to suffer under post independence India. Moreover, her works explore how women's reproductive systems have been exploited and displaced by patriarchal ideologies and capital forces and how in some instances women resisted and formed strategic alliances of resistance and survival. Similar to the works of Margaret Randall and Bessie Head, Devi's discourses capture the lived experiences of organic intellectuals, offering a space for "reading otherwise" to examine the questions of power and patterns of resistance and female agency. Devi comments:

I have always believed that the real history is made by ordinary people. I constantly come across the reappearance, various forms, of folklore, ballads, myths, and legends, carried by ordinary people across generations... The reason and the inspiration for my writing are those people who are exploited and used, and yet do not accept defeat. For me, the endless source of ingredients for writing is in these amazing noble, suffering human beings. Why should I look for my raw materials elsewhere, once I have started knowing them? Sometimes it seems to me that my writing is really their doing. (Bardhan 25)

Devi has been celebrated for her keen sense of documentary detail and precision. Her literary realism allows readers to identify the complex patterns of oppression and the overt and nuanced forms of ideological resistance and agency provoked from the oppression. Her stories confront constructions of "nationhood" and "imagined communities," which deny access to basic human resources to the perceived "other" and marginalized outside its fictitious boundaries: "Devi exposes the sham of the 'imagined community' that presupposes the common good of

those who are official within its purview” (Sen and Yadaw 16). Within this community, tribals are precluded access to basic human resources: denied access to education, health care, and food and water security in a post independence India that privileges the moneyed classes and political elite. “The commemoration of an incipient nation is ironically unable to enfold the ‘outgroup’ of six million Adivasis into the larger collectivity” (Sen and Yadaw 16).

Although reluctant to call herself a feminist, in her 1997 interview with Gabrielle Colu, Devi confirms that “Whenever I see women, I want to bring out what they do. Their strength, their determination, the exploitation of women, how they are used. All this points to the society. I want to bring it out” (225). Similar to Bessie Head’s female characters, Devi’s female characters are also doubly marginalized by persistent layers of patriarchal oppression and exploitation. In this chapter, I explore women’s acquiescence and resistance to often-violent sexual inscriptions on the productive and reproductive copulating body in order to expand the thematics of women’s body politic. Devi locates these gender violations in the rural areas where adivasi women struggle daily to ward off physical thirst and hunger and male predatory advances against them and their children. In this patriarchal insurgency, women are bought and sold, desecrated, raped, impregnated, and disposed of when their reproductive bodies are no longer fruitful. Devi’s literary sexual reportage in *Devi Imaginary Maps*, *Of Women*, *Outcastes*, *Peasants and Rebels*, and *Breast Stories* documents how women’s tortured bodies become the historical battleground of deeper socio-economic and political issues, their reproductive systems a discursive site for the examination of insurrection, resistance, and decolonization. Her works provide localized ethnographic spaces to disclose and interrogate the plethora of layers of traditional and capitalist patriarchal forces that violently collude to undermine, deplete and ultimately collapse women’s reproductive systems and well-being.

Historiography: Repression and Resistance Among the Adivasis

In order to set Mahasweta Devi's stories in political context, it is necessary to establish a historical mapping of the adivasis in India so to understand the myriad socio-economic and political forces that have shaped their traditional and contemporary livelihoods. India's original tribal populations make up approximately 8 percent of the population, of approximately 84 million people. The tribals have struggled "for over 3,000 years with tributary states, with British colonialism and neocolonialism, and now with India over forestlands and autonomous governance" (Hall and Fenelon 47). Referred to as "Scheduled Tribes," adivasis in Sanskrit translates to "original inhabitants or indigenous peoples," "adi" meaning "beginning," and "vasi" meaning "resident of" in Devanāgarī script. Like the peoples themselves striving for socio-political recognition, the term adivasi itself is burdened by dissent over its historical origin. Although it is an inclusive term similar to Native American Indians or Australian Aboriginals with ancestral ties to the land, some critics claim that the term is a colonial anthropological construct created in the Chotanapur area in the 1930s to further political motives and activism: "These scholars see Adivasis only in relation to their discovery of them" (Hall and Fenelon 49). Some Indian scholars argue that the naming of the tribals as adivasis is an act of "paternalism" and "might be seen as an invention rather than a victim of modernity" and "even depend on such prejudices for their survival" (Bates 109). Adivasis are heterogeneous peoples with over 200 diverse tribes speaking 100 distinct languages, living in the mountain and hill regions of India. 635 of the 5,653 regional communities comprise adivasis classified under the category of "Scheduled Tribes" (STs), making India home to more than a quarter of the world's 350 million plus indigenous peoples. Adivasi demographics span a wide area:

India is divided into 28 states and seven union territories (UTs). STs are found in all the states/UTs, except Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and the UTs of Pondicherry and Chandigarh. They inhabit in about 14% of the country's geographical area, mainly forests, hills [and] undulating remote terrain in plateau areas that are rich in natural resources. Numerically, these communities vary, with the Great Andamanse numbering only 18 to that of the Gonds numbering over 5,000,000. (Bijoy, qtd. in Hall and Fenelon 49)

The tribals maintained a rich historical presence flourishing prior to the early Hindu cultures and most probably driven to the hills after the incursion of the Indo-Aryan Tribes. Although the adivasis did not assimilate into Hindu Caste society, their indigenous traditions, nonetheless, reflect many Hindu features. According to Mahasweta Devi, "India belonged to these tribals long before the incursion of the Aryan speaking peoples" (*Maps* ix). These societies engaged in communal landholding and predominantly subsistence agricultural practices for their livelihoods. References of subsistence patterns of forest dwelling adivasis can be found in ancient scriptures. "They had no sense of private property. There was communal land holding because just like the Native Americans, they also believed that land and forest and river belong to everyone" (Devi, *Maps* X). They developed a communal agrarian system in which all members of the community had equal access to water, land, resources both above and below the ground. It was not until the late eighteenth century with British colonization and the legal land-grabbing mechanism of "res nullius," that the adivasis began their long battle against encroachment of their ancestral lands and resources. Res nullius, which means a thing that has no owner, disposes tribals from property rights without a legal document of ownership. Therefore land that appears abandoned by an owner can also be determined to be "res nullius." In this way

the British ignored ancient manuscripts and dispossessed the adivasis of their ancestral forest land by acting as first possessors and then delivered it to its newly developed forest department, purposely created for the purpose transferring these land titles. “As the adivasis had a communitarian oral culture there was little conception of private property in land among them and absolutely no documentation” (Banerjee 4010). The Indian Forest Acts of 1878 and 1927 acted as procedural mechanisms to enable the British to consolidate forest lands and regulate the removal and transit of resources from these lands: “Unfortunately the Indian government after independence continued with this highly unjust statute and brought large tracts of forest areas in the princely states that acceded to it under its purview and once again adivasis living on forest lands were dispossessed and denied the benefits of the ‘rule of law’” (Banerjee 4010).

Adivasi legal historiography evidences years of inequitable and unconscionable dispossession and land grabbing by powerful political structures tied to regional, national, and global commercial networks of interest.⁴ Mahasweta Devi notes that “The tribals paid the price of decolonization. They have not been part of the decolonization of India” (*Maps* xi). While the 1996 Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 attempt to enforce previous established legal protections set forth in the Fifth Schedule, the adivasis seldom benefit from these protections. Because the adivasi is not conversant in the complicated rhetoric of the judicial system, (s)he is at a legal disadvantage before the proceedings even begin. Devi notes:

—Land is often bought in the name of a non-existent tribal or a tribal who acts as a front for a non-tribal buyer. The concerned departments oblige for registering the sale-deed, once a few palms are greased. No inconvenient queries are made of course.

—In more blatant cases, a non tribal manages to procure (read buy) a certificate identifying himself as a tribal, and through further fraudulent means gets the land transferred in his own name without the knowledge of the actual tribal owner.

(Devi, *Dust on the Road* 106)

Devi reports that since 1989, 1,650,000 people have lost their land and have been evicted and uprooted by these legal processes of dispossession in the name of “development projects.” In this collusive patriarchal system of “land grabbers, local panchayats, politicians, the police the administration and crafty lawyers” all working diligently “against the poor and often illiterate tribal whose land is being taken away” there is little justice or judicial recourse (Devi, *Dust on the Road* xxxiii). Pushed to the furthest reaches of society, the adivasis have, nonetheless, survived centuries of this multi-layered political assault and legal confrontation on their tribal identities, traditions, customs, and livelihoods. Devi notes post-independence India has unleashed a barrage of new forces masked as “development projects in the form of mining, deforestation, construction of high dams, steel plants, and townships,” which continue to accelerate the dispossession and marginalization of tribal identities (Devi, *Dust on the Road* xii). While non governmental organizations and legislative acts have emerged to assist the adivasis in halting government interference into indigenous land holdings and cultural sovereignty, C. R. Bijoy argues that the terms and conditions of these efforts demonstrate little regard for the preservation of indigenous peoples and livelihoods:

Adivasis and their homelands—the forests—have been ravaged by both state and non-state actors at a great loss to the nation of its forests and its peoples. The instrument used—the colonial forest act and forest regime. The Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill, 2005 emerged at this late hour to rectify this

‘historic injustice’...that the ‘rural poor, especially tribes, had been deprived of their livelihood rights’. (qtd. in Hall and Fenelon 52)

The adivasis have deep ancestral and spiritual connection to the forests and are interconnected in such a way that their continued existence is dependent on the survival of each other. Unfortunately, post independence India has adopted an “American fiction” of unpeopled wilderness reserves in which forestry production for timber, iron smelt, and other natural resources continue to fuel the national and global economy. Devi notes that “Everywhere is the same story. They reclaimed the forest, converted it into agricultural land, yet they were dispossessed” (*Maps* Xi). The reality of governmental land-grabbing schemes empowered by corporate privatization has created a pauperized class of landless indigenous tenants who now must work for their landlords as “bonded slaves” to survive.

In *Repression and Resistance in India: Violation of Democratic Rights of the Working Class, Rural Poor, Adivasis and Dalits* A. R. Desai examines the inequitable transactions between landlord and adivasi tenants in which adivasis are granted small loans and then manipulated by high interest rates. Incapable of paying off their debts, they invariably must surrender their land and work under exploitative bonded arrangements for the landlord. In “Contract Labour or Bonded Labor,” Devi notes that the bonded labor system was abolished in 1975 and replaced by another system of bonded labor practices which continued the oppressive feudal practices of slave labor in which peoples are “lured away” with “promises of good jobs, kept in captivity and made to break stones and blast rocks,” in subhuman conditions (*Dust on the Road* 45). Devi details how “since their ex-masters would not give them work and since little was done by the state governments towards their rehabilitation, the landless ex-bonded labours”

were vulnerable to “agents of various masters” promising food and economic security (*Dust on the Road* 45). In vivid detail she further notes the impact of bonded labor on adivasi children:

The young ones are waiting for the inevitable *dalal* (*agent, tout*) to come one day and take them away. Many are going. They hear of their good fortune in the weekly *hat* (village market). The masters are good, give 2 square meals a day. Even the young ones are not against becoming a *kamia* or a *seokia* (types of bonded labour). ‘What to do? There is nothing else for the likes of us.’ The land given to the freed bonded labourers is uncultivable. The good land is held by the master, though the ownership paper is in the freed labourer’s name. There is no water for drinking or irrigation; no chance of being employed by the government agencies for road-repairing, timber-felling, etc. Though Palamau is a labour-surplus and poverty stricken district, outside labour is bought in for such work. Forsaken by the government and society, these people in order to stay alive, enter debt bonding. They do not have an alternative. (*Dust* 46)

Devi paints a fatalistic cycle of generations of indebted dispossessed and disposable peoples whose primary purpose of existence is to serve “development models” of “progress” and commercial expansion, a pattern in which 18.5 million adivasis have been displaced from their lands and livelihoods. In the place of sustainable indigenous livelihoods are large-scale infrastructure projects of hydraulic dams, transportation projects, national parks, mining projects and a multitude of other ventures designed to catapult India’s economy into the global market. Unfortunately even with the various governmental programs designed to protect the adivasis like the Integrated Tribal Development Project, the indigenous peoples seldom experience the benefits of these projects. The result of adivasi oppression is the rise of communism in the 1970s

in which revolutionaries inspired by the Naxalite movement, began “politically rousing the people and organizing them for struggles for the recovery of the lands illegally occupied by the landlords for the occupation of the forest lands, against illegal payments to the forest officials, for increased wages in the forest” (Desai 24). The clash between police and adivasi revolutionaries resulted in the establishment of police camps for violent surveillance and torture tactics to maintain social obedience—most of the brutal harassment aimed at women and children to terrorize the peoples and maintain control.

Devi notes in an interview in June 2013 with Anu T. Asokan, “My husband was also connected with IPTA (Indian People’s Theatre Association), a wing of the Communist Party.” According to Archana Prasad, in his article “Adivasis and the Communists as Political Allies,” adivasis align with communist parties today for similar reasons that formed in the 1970s—“increasing penetration of corporate capital into natural resource rich areas and therefore the large scale dispossession of the adivasis.” The historical saga of dispossession includes an alliance with the communists in the 1930s, with many of the original resistance movements led by them, including the Telengana struggle. “The Warli adivasis were emancipated from slavery by the communist movement” (Prasad 6 2014). According to Prasad, the Left has fought for progressive legislation to protect the adivasis in and outside scheduled areas by providing them basic human services.

Adivasi women have faced and continue to face difficult challenges to basic human dignity and human rights. The danger of reading Devi’s stories as allegorical and metaphorical constructions for a nation usurps the real lived experiences of sexual exploitation of adivasi women and obstructs possibilities for emancipation from this effacement. Gender violence against indigenous women as experienced by Devi’s characters is reportedly on the rise in India

as witnessed in the May 29, 2014 gang rape and hanging of two teenage girls in the Badaun District of India. Similar sexual violence occurred in the small village of Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, an impoverished state with more than 200 million people and 40% of its population living below the poverty line, when a 44-year old woman was discovered hanging from a mango tree. The reporting of abduction and gang rape of adivasi women and children show an 84 per cent increase in ten years between 2002 and 2011.

In this chapter, I examine Devi's reportage and rich documentation of "imagined communities" to discern some of the socio-political factors that generate reproductive collapse, the fight for fertility, and the feminization of survival. In these works, we witness how years of traditional and capitalist patriarchal violence against women have contributed to their decision to remove their wombs as propertied sites of procreation and surplus value in order to save themselves and future generations from merciless systematic subjugation; Devi's works, moreover, expose how Neo-Malthusian policies and scientific technology aimed at policing and controlling subaltern women's reproductive systems have undermined indigenous subsistence livelihoods contributing to the feminization of poverty, the feminization of survival, and the feminization of resistance.

Tortured Bodies, Rape, and Disposability in "Giribala," "Dhowli" and "Doulotti"

I begin my interrogation of the invasion of market capital into adivasi communities by first examining tortured bodies and reproductive collapse in Devi's *Of Women, Outcastes, Peasants, and Rebels* and *Imaginary Maps*. I specifically focus on the short narratives "Giribala," "Dhowli," and "Doulotti" to show how ecological marginalization, reproductive rape and unequal resource access have pushed the tribals to seek protection deep within the womb of the earth. Reading women's bodies as occupied territories reveals how local, regional and

national patriarchal and capital arrangements have dispossessed the tribals from their reproductive systems and livelihoods. I focus on what Devi refers to as those “forces (that) have been unleashed by the development process in the form of mining, deforestation, construction of high dams, steel plants and townships affecting tribal areas, accelerating the destitution and marginalization of the tribals” (*Dust* xix).

Similar to bee collapse disorder in which female worker bees rapidly perish until there is no longer necessary workforce to sustain the colony, women in Devi’s narratives have experienced myriad disturbing socio-economic and political influences forcing what has been referred to as “the feminization of survival” to take shape in the form of reproductive collapse (Saunders 91).⁵

In a July 2014 report in *Sudan News*, the United Nations reported that India is facing a “crisis over dwindling numbers of girls,” which claims that the reduction in female birth rates “has reached ‘emergency proportions.’” The report attributes the drop in birth rates to sex-detection technology, and the preference for sons, which according to the United Nations has fueled the increase in rape, abduction, and sex trafficking. Maria Mies points out that “Several years ago, a news item appeared in an Indian newspaper under the heading: ‘Doctor, kill it if it’s a girl.’ This sentence was quoted from pregnant women who had been used as test-persons in an Indian clinic in sex-pre-selection experiments. A fair number of the women on whom the tests were tried out told the doctors to abort the foetus if it was female” (Mies, *Patriarchy & Accumulation* 151). Devi’s reportage recognizes that these low female birth rates are directly related to the systematic exploitation of female reproductive bodies. Women have affirmatively removed their future female offspring from a patriarchal system that denigrates and exploits them. In response to this reproductive phenomenon, Lakshmi Puri, Deputy executive director of

U.N. Women, launched a “new study on sex ratios and gender-based sex selection, saying, “It is tragically ironic that the one who creates life is herself denied the right to be born” (*Sudan News* July 2014).

In particular, the complicated reproductive politics in Devi’s “Giribala” “Dhowli” and “Douloti,” dramatizes the real lived experiences of how a phallocentric economy depletes women’s reproductive systems resulting in violent reproductive collapse and the eradication of sexual procreative behaviors. These works, similar to Anjum Katyal’s observation of *Rudali*, “are not intended to be fictional. They—or their prototypes—exist outside the novella” (Sen and Yadav 62). Her characters, sadly, live “real” lives of systematic impoverishment and subjugation offering a shared witnessing practice between Devi as the ethnographer and the reader as co-witness of shared responsibility. Devi’s “Giribala” provides an ethnographic venue for examining how power relations shape reproduction and reproductive decisions and how women struggle daily to reproduce their livelihoods under local levels of political duress. In “Giribala,” we witness what Faye D. Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp argue in *Conceiving the New World Order*, that “rights’ are always historically and culturally located,” and how within this historical regional positioning, women struggle to remain control over their reproductive selves (9).

Devi’s protagonist Giri is only 14 years of age when she is married off to the abusive Aulchand and indoctrinated into the patriarchal dictum: “A daughter born. To husband or death. She’s already gone” (Bardhan 247). In this property exchange in which Giri’s father paid Aulchand “eighty rupees and a heifer before he married her,” Giri is cast into the patriarchal bargain for exchange. “After the birth of her fourth child, a daughter she named Maruni,⁶ she asked the doctor at the hospital, where she went for this birth, to sterilize her” (Bardhan 276). Her request for sterilization raises questions of reproductive control and incurs the wrath of her

husband. Aulchand terrorizes her to tell him “why?” (Bardhan 276). Furious to learn that “Giri had herself sterilized,” he assaults her and “beat[s]her up for the first time” (Bardham 276). In the examination of the question of *why*, it becomes apparent that Giri chooses to preclude her reproductive system from any further patriarchal control in a society where, “having a daughter only means having to raise a slave for others” (Bardhan 276). Giri’s uterus goes permanently on strike from further patriarchal insurrection in a country that devalues daughters as disposable second skins.

The sexual commodification of young female beings comes to full fruition when Auchland marries off his “scared 12 year old daughter,” for “four hundred rupees in cash” while Giri is away visiting her parents. Later, Giri learns: “There were five girls like Bela taken there to be married to five unknown blokes. The addresses they left are false. This kind of business is on the rise” (Bardhan 281). Here, we witness the drastic inner workings of a corrupt gendered economic structure—the selling of young girls for survival. It is a system that has been reinforced by hegemonic inculcation in order to maintain its epistemic community and its “philosophical resignation,” that nothing can change (Bardhan 281).

Giri’s “Bela had become one more victim of this new business of procuring girls on the pretext of marriage. The police were not going to do much for this single case; they would most probably say that the father did it after all. Poor Bela had this written on her forehead” (Bardhan 281). Giri’s first response is to bang her head against a patriarchal ceiling that positions men as owners and women’s as oppressed producers. It is a determining logic that sustains gendered subordination as, “A daughter, until she is married, is her father’s property. It’s useless for a mother to think she has any say” (Bardhan 281). Young girls have become alienated commodities to be bartered, bought, and sold as instruments of sexual labor.

It is not until Giri has been duped into marrying her almost ten-year old daughter Pori off in what she believed at the time was a way to protect her from the same fate of her first daughter Bela that Giri begins to find another way out of her predicament. Unfortunately, the mother and father have been swept up by the “need to see their daughters married” (Bardhan 288). Trusting Mohan to find her daughter a mate before Auchland intervenes, Giri, unknowingly, delivers her second daughter into a large-scale prostitution ring:

...[M]ohan was now in a business flung much further, procuring girls for whorehouses in the big cities, where the newly rich businessmen and contractors went to satisfy their newfound appetite for childlike, underdeveloped bodies of Bengali pubescent girls. Fed well for a few months, they bloomed so deliciously that they yielded back within a couple of years, the price to procure them.

(Bardhan 285)

Devi’s fictional reportage of the sale of young girls into prostitution testifies to an entrenched history of gendered violence aimed at young pubescent girls. Rita Banerji’s *50 Million Missing Women*’s international campaign reports that “More than 50 million women have been killed in India in 3 generations” and “more than 100,000 young women are gang-lynched by their husband and in-laws in dowry murders every year” (2011). Siddharth Kara’s *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* similarly narrates a disturbing personal account of how pubescent girls have become a fetishized commodity in India’s lucrative sex trade. In this text, Siddharth Kara interviews an owner of four brothels in Mumbai “each with approximately four hundred women,” detailing how the brothels comprise “prostitutes from various places. Sometimes *dalas* brought batches of them to Kamathipura and auctioned them; other times he frequented a market north of Mumbai where women were brought from Nepal,

Bangladesh, and other regions in India for sale” (Kara 53). The brothel owner testifies to the persistence of Mohan’s fictional entrepreneurialism that “There is a premium on young girls under fourteen years of age” (Kara 53). Kara’s ethnographic account further notes that the sexploitation of young women is a daily occurrence as “Every minute of every day, the most vulnerable of women and children in the world are raped for profit with impunity”(3).

Unfortunately, we see as in the case of *Giribala*, extreme poverty and economic severity have forced the sale of young girls like Bela and Pori. In the “The Power of Women,” Selma James points out, “This is a strange commodity, for it is not a thing. The ability to labor resides only in a human being whose life is consumed in the process of producing” (37).

It is for this reason, that Giribala sterilizes herself and removes any future daughters from her womb to this fate. For the commodity Giri produces “unlike all other commodities, is unique to capitalism: the living human being”—the pubescent sexual laborer herself (James 36). By taking control over her body, Giribala directly subverts her husband’s domination over her reproductive organs and contests the transformation of her daughters into surplus labor to feed male sexual appetites. Because Giri’s fertile womb is essential for Auchland, Giri’s “refusing to produce, refusing to work, is a fundamental lever of social power,” which she enacts (James 36). Auchland’s chastisement of Giri’s actions confirms his economic motives: “Foolish woman, you shouldn’t have done that operation. The more daughters we have, the more money we can have” (Bardhan 288). Giri precludes her womb from begetting more fetishized commodities to be sold into sex bondage, for “no matter what euphemism is used, nobody ever sets up home for a girl bought with money” (Bardhan 289). Motivated by survival, Giri leaves Auchland “to work in other people’s homes in order to feed and raise her remaining children” (Bardhan 289).

While Devi positions her protagonist in the act of patriarchal resistance, she more importantly unmask the deep-rooted institutional relations, which sustain female vulnerability and sexual subjugation. “What happened to Bela and Pori was happening to many others these days. But leaving one’s husband was quite a different matter. What kind of woman would leave her husband of many years just like that?” (Bardhan 289). Here, rather than take action against a system that reifies and exploits their young daughters, the community has been indoctrinated into the patriarchal tradition of scapegoating the rebellious *Giris* of the system who refuse to service patriarchy’s sexual machinery. In this instance, Devi indicts the oppressive socio-political apparatuses at play within the community that bind women into their disposable “second skin” status. Indian demographer Ashhok Mitra makes a similar observation of the expendability of women’s reproductive systems:

In the last thirty years after Independence Indian women have increasingly become an expendable commodity, expendable both in the demographic and in the economic sense. Demographically woman is more and more reduced to her reproductive functions, and when these are fulfilled she is expendable.

Economically she is relentlessly pushed out of the reproductive sphere and reduced to a unit of consumption, which therefore is undesired (qtd. in Mies, *Patriarchy & Accumulation* 123).

In *Giri*, Bela and Pori’s case, they have been pushed out; yet, their bodies and labor are desired and essential for fueling an economy that demands a cheap service sector to sustain the sexual appetites of its political structure. Mies notes that it is precisely this process of pushing women out of their domestic spaces and reproductive units that turns “them into so-called ‘small

entrepreneurs' and 'housewives' in the so-called informal sector which makes unrestricted exploitation and super exploitation possible" (Mies, *Patriarchy & Accumulation* 123).

In "Dhowli," Devi adds another layer of caste privilege into the construction of patriarchal rape in which both women's reproductive systems and women's livelihoods are under siege. In this reportage, Dhowli, "an untouchable Dusad girl," is impregnated by an upper caste Brahman and left to fend for herself (Bardhan 186). Devi establishes that the sexual taking of young Dusad girls is nothing new in this village. To thwart Misra's sexual advances, Dhowli charges, "You landlord people, you take whatever pleases you. If you want to take my honor, take it then. Let me be through with it" (Bardhan 191). Dhowli resigns herself to her fate as, "All the Misra men do that, and there is not a thing that the Dhowli of the world can do to stop it" (Bardhan 191).

Fearful of how they will survive, Dhowli's mother asks her to visit the Sanichari for medicine "to remove the 'thorn' from the womb" as her fetus is a product of "greed and ruthless power" (Bardhan 188). After Dhowli refuses to give up the child, her mother takes her daughter and grandchildren's destiny into her own hands by enlisting Sanichari to deliver the baby and "to make sure she would be infertile after this baby" (Bardhan 196). Here, again, we witness an affirmative attempt to remove the womb as a social factory for reproduction. Dhowli's mother is quite aware of the plight of young girls and refuses to let her daughter produce sexual laborers for upper caste entertainment. After Dhowli gives birth her mother and child are shunned and starved out of existence. Dhowli finally charges her *deota*: "You ruined my life, turned it to ashes, and you can't even hear the hard truth? Is it being rich that makes one so tender-skinned?" (Bardhan 200). In Devi's testament to the truth, the answer to this question is a resounding "yes." Devi indicts a system, which tramples women's rights to human dignity. She charges the money

lenders who “took away the lease of her land from her mother” when her father died; she charges the *deotas* (gods) of the world who force both mother and daughters into indentured labor for food; she indicts the community that continues to believe that the fault for this national predicament lie with the foolish Dhowlis who give their bodies away on the pretext of love (Bardhan 188).

Dhowli further questions a similar fate experienced by Giribala’s daughters. “What will she do then? Will she end up opening her door at night when the pebbles strike the door? For a few coins from one, some corn or a sari from another? Is that how she must live?” (Bardhan 198). Will she too become a prostitute in order to survive? Full of rage, she prosecutes Misra: “Why did you destroy me like this?” (Bardhan 199). Dhowli contemplates suicide until she meets a “coolie supervisor and a coolie himself” and realizes it was him who was throwing clods of dirt at her door as a solicitation of sex (Bardhan 201).

She and her mother and child begin to starve and then the clods of dirt come and “when a pebble hits the door, she opens it. The man has brought corn, lentils, salt and one rupee. Dhowli pays him back with her body, to the very last penny” (Bardhan 202). When Misra’s brother discovers Dhowli’s business he tells his brother to do something and taunts his masculinity: “You’re not a man! Just a scared worm!” (Bardhan 204). To prove his manliness, Misra takes charge of the situation and visits Dhowli at night. “It is a changed Dhowli who opens the door—she is wearing a red sari and green bangles, and her oiled hair is in a plait down her back” (Bardhan 204). He affirms that she has indeed become a *randi*. She confirms this as her only way of surviving. “How else can I live? How can I bring up your son?” (Bardhan 204) His response is “Why didn’t you kill yourself?” (204). His question reflects a patriarchal ideology which reinforces the victimization of women and what Maria Mies refers to as “the ideology of the

eternal victim, the ideology of self-sacrifice” in that her sole sexual and reproductive purpose is to quench the desires of patriarchy (*Patriarchy & Accumulation* 165). Mies observes that within the Hindu religion as women are “self-sacrificing in the role of the mother and Pativrata,” a husband worshipping and self-sacrificing wife has “no autonomy over her own life, her own body, her own sexuality” (*Patriarchy & Accumulation* 165).

Dhowli admits that she had indeed entertained the idea of suicide, but later questioned why she, the woman, mother of his child should have to die. “You’ll marry, run your shop, go to the cinema with your wife, and I’ll be the one to die? Why?” (Bardhan 204). The question “*why*” disturbs the patriarchal universe; unfortunately, Devi shows how the legal system is also a fabrication of male privilege and power as Dhowli is restrained from prostituting herself in the village by orders of Hanumanji. She is forced “to go to Ranchi and get herself registered as a prostitute there. If she does not, her hut will be set on fire to kill her along with her mother and child” (Bardhan 204). Dhowli is banished from the village leaving, “her mother, with the baby in her arms, cries standing beside the bus. The baby holds out his hands to Dhowli” (Bardhan 205). Devi suggests that Dhowli’s perceived indentured occupation as prostitute is actually an act of sexual defiance in which Dhowli individually takes control over her sexual body and her destiny. In a declaration of self-determination, Dhowli ruminates on her socio-economic positioning. She contemplates:

If she were married she would have been a whore individually, only in her private life. Now she is going to be a whore by occupation. She is going to be one of the many whores, a member of a part of society. Isn’t the society more powerful than the individual? Those who run the society, the very powerful—by making her a public whore—have made her a part of society. (Bardhan 205)

Readers are left to consider whether Dhowli's claim of sovereignty over her sexual behavior is a viable resistance strategy to patriarchal exploitation; as in this society, a universe dictated by patriarchal impulses for power, money, and sex is indifferent to female suffering and subjugation. Maria Mies observes that "The concept of autonomy, usually understood as freedom from coercion regarding our bodies and our lives, emerged as a struggle concept in the context of body politics, the sphere where women's oppression and exploitation was most intimately concretely experienced" (*Patriarchy & Accumulation* 40). If we consider Dhowli's decision to maintain control over her sexual body and what Mies refers to as her "innermost subjectivity and area of freedom," then we must consider whether or not Dhowli has really truly freed herself from the master's house. Mies argues that "Women's first and last 'means of production' is their own body. The worldwide increase in violence against women is basically concentrated on this 'territory', over which the BIG MEN have not yet been to establish their firm and lasting dominance" (*Patriarchy & Accumulation* 40). Whereas, Dhowli has taken control over her "means of production," she is nonetheless producing for the structure that created her surplus labor to fuel the political economy. While her decisions to use her body for profit, might appear to be an act of autonomy, it is a "perverted" version of the concept (Mies, *Patriarchy & Accumulation* 40). Instead, what has transpired in the lives of the *Dhowlis* of the Global South is an "illusion that the individual is free to make choices to fulfill his/her desires and needs, that individual freedom is identical with the choice of this or that commodity, the self-activity and subjectivity is replaced by individual consumerism" (Mies, *Patriarchy & Accumulation* 40). Marx has referred to this as the "the democracy of unfreedom," in which Dhowli has been led to believe that her recruitment into prostitution has led her to sexual-economic freedom from a single Misra master. Instead, Dhowli will serve many masters.

Important to this discussion is the examination of how violence against women in Devi's stories is tied up in complex processes of "ongoing primitive accumulation." According to Maria Mies' observations in India:

In a Third World country like India, the people who have become 'free' subjects in the sense described is rather small. The fact that civil rights are enshrined in the Indian Constitution does not affect the de facto production relations which are, to a large extent, based on violence and coercion. We have seen that violence against women as an intrinsic element of the 'ongoing primitive accumulation of capital' constitutes the fastest and most 'productive' method if a man wants to join the brotherhood of the 'free' subjects of owners of private property. (*Patriarchy & Accumulation* 170)

Through Devi's reportage, we witness the pubescent face of these "ongoing" processes experienced as lived struggles as young women face violence, coercion, and the extraction of their sexual and reproductive labor—a crucial and necessary byproduct of both traditional and patriarchal capitalism.

In Devi most troubling inquiry, she asks, "Has nature too gotten used to the Dhowlis being branded as whores and forced to leave home? Or is it that even the earth and sky and the trees, the nature that was not made by the Misras, have now become their private property?" (Bardham 205). This provocative rhetoric raises questions about the enclosure of nature and its reproductive systems in the interest of "progress" for the bourgeoisie elite, a topic to be developed more fully in Chapter Four.

In "Douloti the Bountiful," Devi extends her reportage of the cycle of abuse portraying a 27 year-old "tormented corpse, putrefied with venereal disease" spread over the "map of India"

on India's day of Independence (*Maps* 93). Described as a "parable of post-colonial India, a parable addressed to whatever/whoever professes to be the nation," it is more importantly the story of gender violence that locks disposable subaltern women into subservient sexual surplus labor to support the system (Sen and Yadav 86). In "Douloti," Devi further explores the exploitation of the female reproduction system, this time focusing on the reification and commodification of the virgin "cunt" in the Himalayan District of Uttar Kashi, which she fictionally calls Seori. I proffer that readers must look past the metaphorical constructions of parable to witness how Devi narrates the epistemic gendered violence of decolonization in which she shows how husbands and fathers sell their wives and daughters into bonded sex labor. After their women are sold off in the city, they are incapable of repaying borrowed money to the upper-caste moneylenders.

Beneath the sari of exploitation, Devi observes how decolonization created pockets of patriarchal exploitation and the development of "making slaves on hire purchase" (*Maps* 21). Within the decolonial infrastructure building process, Devi links the "unnatural" imposition of census surveys to tally individuals to determine famine and to create strategic political districting. In this story, "women are just merchandise, commodities," and unquenchable male sexual desires have created a premium demand for fresh untouched hymen (Devi, *Maps* xx).

In "Douloti" we witness yet another account of how the plight of the tribals did not improve in post independence India and instead continued to suffer under the nation-state, as "decolonization" has not reached the poor" (Devi, *Maps* xx). Devi writes that "What I have written about in Douloti is how women were especially exploited" (*Maps* Xix). Devi confirms the same ethnographic accounts narrated in "Giribala" and "Dhowli" that the "fresh uncut harijan cunt" of pubescent daughters is a saleable commodity on the sexual market (*Maps* 76). She

further corroborates what Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, Rosemary Hennessy, Gayatri Spivak, and other social justice advocates have argued that “the sales of girls for rape still goes on” and “Douloti is still true, and true for the rest of India” (*Maps* XX). Important to this discussion is Maria Mies’s observation that “the rape of women was part of the feudal or semi-feudal production relations,” a proclamation she verified by collecting newspaper articles about the “atrocities of weaker sections” (*Patriarchy & Accumulation* 147). Mies’s analysis contributes to an understanding of Devi’s reportage on how women “had become victims of rape, molestation, and particularly sexual harassment and eventually murder because of ever-growing dowry demands” (*Patriarchy & Accumulation* 147). Devi’s *Imaginary Maps* confirms a principal argument of this dissertation that the female body is fashioned by the struggle for reproductive rights.

Sold into sexual slavery “after or before marriage” so that husband or father patriarchs can pay back “the borrowed money from the money-lending upper caste, they are taken straight to brothels in the big cities to work out that sum” (Devi, *Maps* xix). Once initiated, girls must take up to “thirty clients a day” without consideration of the physical toll on the female body. Devi not only indicts husband and father, but “Government—unine—contractor—slum landlord—market trader—shopkeeper—post office” in a corrupt bio-political arrangement in which women serve as playthings for patriarchal pleasure and commodity guarantees for loan obligations (*Maps* 25). She further notes how government officials exploit the poor through their belief system, as the people of Seori believe that they have been subjected to bonded labor “because of their sinfulness” (40), because “the West Wind” (42) entered the home country. The inability of different regions and districts in India to recognize that they are of “Mother India,” and “all independent India’s free people,” shows how even within the country there is an

interstitial space of misrepresentation and misunderstanding that has been manipulated for personal profit. The oppressive hunger for meager wages and little grain has created what Devi refers to as a government supported “agri-capitalist caste” of Kamiya exploiters raping the resources and people of India in a complex political web of socio-economic and personal interests.

By narrating the “true stories” of the commodification of fresh “virgin unwounded hymen,” Devi shows how government officials and commercial interests collude to violate “naked harijan woman’s helpless body” (*Maps* 58). Lawmakers, contractors, government officers, policeman—“they all come” for virgin flesh and so Devi asks, “Who will stop it?” (*Maps* 73). The lower-caste women have been turned into “land.” The boss plows and plows their land and “plows their bodies’ land” (59) until it is abused and ravaged to “quench the hunger of male flesh” (*Maps* 61). Devi’s “Douloti” is haunted by the relationship between the reification of the “unwounded hymen” and its brutal exploitation for profit and the ways in which women resist this feudal labor system. One such instance in “Douloti” is Devi’s Kamiya medicine woman character Jhalo who concocts medicine to abort any offspring that might be born into this brutal system in which offspring born into the factory whorehouse of flesh trade must beg on the street for survival. The body, the fresh untouched virgin body is traded “until their bodies dry up” (79), its life forces devoured, at which point it is tossed aside and new “fresh uncut harijan cunt” is sought after in every nook and cranny of the village fairs (*Maps* 76). In this world, of Misra’s brothel, women are forced to resume sexual duties immediately after abortion and in some instances like Kalawati die from lack of care. Radway Chakavarty observes that “Models of Western Feminism break down here; as Spivak says, abortion in this context is an

expression of ‘maximum social need’, rather than an assertion of individual reproductive rights” (198).

Devi’s Douloti is moreover repeatedly traumatized by the insatiable sexual hunger of the male upper caste in which she is “bloodied many times all through the night” to the sound of “grunt, grunt” (*Maps* 58). Again, we see women caught within a pervasive system of slave relations that shapes all its members as “the social system that makes Crook Nagesia a kamiya is made by men. Therefore do Douloti, Somni, Reoti have to quench the hunger of male flesh” (*Maps* 61). Reduced to fragmented body parts of “uncut harijan cunt” women become disassociated from their reproductive systems (*Maps* 76). Spivak points out that “Woman’s body is... the last instance in a system whose general regulator is still the loan” (*Outside* 92).

Within this indentured system, Devi includes the social scientists who arrive to research and “write everything down” then get in their cars to “buzz off to town” while the object of research remains static and supine in her same place, her body repeatedly tilled and plowed like ravaged land (*Maps* 20). In this context, the social researchers become part of the problem by blaming the victims for their circumstances. Devi, as in her other stories offers a didactic strategy for fighting the cycle of abuse through the voice of Father Bomfuller, who argues for the abolition of “bonded labor” throughout the region by creating “workable laws” through the “pressure of public opinion” along with the development of WNGOs for “social and “economic rehabilitation” (*Maps* 86). Devi acknowledges the complicated process of “passing laws” and “quoting laws” as still “fresh cunt” trade persists throughout India. Moreover, she questions whether the law itself can offer a viable solution when corrupt patriarchal institutional arrangements fail to enforce the law. Can passing and/or quoting the law create equitable economic and class and gendered relations? Can it subvert the value systems that have women

internalizing their victimhood? These are complex questions further interrogated within the prostitute's oral songs:

They are all the Paramananda's kamiya.

Douloti and Reoti and Sommi

Fieldwork, digging soil, cutting wells is work

This one doesn't do it, that one doesn't do it,

the other one doesn't do it

The boss has turned them into land

The boss plows and plows their land and raises the crop

They are Paramananda's kamiya. (*Maps* 59)

The prostitute's song demonstrates their isolation and alienation from a post-independence India that has turned a deaf ear to their suffering. It also raises the question, which Spivak addresses—that of personal agency. Are Devi's women confined to their disposable second skins to be plowed over and over again? Chakravarty suggests examining the “rhetorical structuring of the text” within the “gaps, disjunctions, and aporias,” for a resolution to the inherent “contradiction” (198). Within these spaces, we witness what Spivak refers to as the “bonded prostitute's body that Mahasweta makes visible as graphic cement on the entire map of India” (*Maps* xxvii). It is within this space that the inscriptions on the subaltern womb are made visible. It is also a space to recognize the hegemonic internalization of gendered violence, in which reproductive systems have disappeared and collapsed onto the map of India itself—a complicit space in which wombs, hymens, breasts, and other reproductive organs occupy marginalized emblematic territories where individual women become subsumed as allegorical byproducts of its creation.

Born a year after India's Independence from British Rule, Douloti dies at 27 years of age, her body ravaged from tuberculosis and venereal disease. The doctor overseeing her body is surprised that her skeletal body "had the innocence of a field of grain" (*Maps* 92). Douloti's ravaged body is the geographic symbolization of Mother India dying on the day of Independence "filling the entire Indian peninsula from the oceans to the Himalayas" with the cruel effect of "bonded labor spread-eagle" across the decolonial map of India (*Maps* 92). Douloti's "body graphematic" and her death speak beyond her narrative representation, as Devi posits that "Douloti still exists in India today"; yet, I challenge her assertion that "Decolonization has not reached the poor" (*Maps* xx). Douloti's tormented corpse bears truthful witness to the fact that decolonization has colluded in the collective processes of patriarchal rape of mother earth and gender specific violence against the many individual female bodies that populate India. Indeed, it has reached poor adivasi women by further marginalizing and exploiting them by homegrown patriachs. Perhaps a better summation is that decolonization created other forms of national, regional and localized systems of exploitation.

As terrorization against daughters and their subsequent disappearances spread across India, patriarchal scientific projects have cashed in on mother's fears of raising girls in a country that views their existence as a societal affliction that warrants remedying through new reproductive technologies aimed at the surveillance and monitoring of women's wombs. According to Vibhuti Patel, "84 percent of gynecologists currently perform amniocentesis in Bombay and view it as a 'human service to women who do not want any more daughters'" (qtd. in Shiva, *Earth Democracy* 135). Shiva is correct in arguing that NRTs are a strategic form of femicide to reduce the female fetuses and in turn reduce female population. Shiva quotes Vibhuti Patel who contemplates an advertisement promotion for amniocenteses:

‘Better Rs. 5000 now than Rs.5 lakhs later’ i.e. better spend Rs 5000 for female feticide than [500,000 rupees] as dowry for a grown up daughter. By this logic, it is better to kill poor people or third world masses rather than let them suffer in poverty and deprivation. This logic also presumes that social evils like dowry are God-given and that we cannot do anything about them. Hence victimize the victim. Investing in daughter’s education, health, and dignified life to make her self dependent are far more humane and realistic than brutalizing pregnant mother and would be daughter. (*Earth Democracy* 136)

Like Shiva and Patel, I argue that it is imperative we recognize how patriarchal scientific projects in the form of NRTs have targeted women’s bodies by rendering women susceptible to disposability and femicide. Current research by ActionAid and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) demonstrates plummeting female birth ratios since 2001 and approximately 10 million aborted female fetuses during the last twenty years (Disappearing daughters - sex selection in India 18 June 2008). As Spivak observes “internalized gendering perceived as ethical choice is the hardest roadblock for the women the world over” (*Maps* xxviii). I will take up Spivak’s concept of the need for “establishing an ethical singularity with the women in question” in the final chapter of this dissertation to argue the urgent need for reproductive justice.

Neo-Malthusian Ethics and Reproductive Control

Mahasweta Devi’s reportage in “Strange Children,” and “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha,” adds further credence to the proposition that strategies for tribal assistance and concepts of ethical responsibility have been aimed at population control rather than the real source of the problem—patriarchal and capitalistic exploitation of women’s reproductive systems and India’s

resources. Devi highlights how sociopolitical control of the subaltern womb has subverted more important discussions—oppressive poverty and the lack of life-sustaining resources that directly contribute to excessive childbearing as social security. In these stories, we further witness the rise of gender violence distributed on an unprecedented scale throughout post independence India.

To begin, in Mahasweta Devi's short documentary narrative "Sishu" (The Strange Children), we witness the impact of capital's penetration of the subaltern reproductive systems on the tribals of southeast Bihar. In Devi's haunting conclusion of "the most heinous crimes against human civilization," genitalia have shriveled up, semen and eggs have dried up and procreative acts have been sexually strangled (Bardhan 241).

A brief historiography of Indian Famine reveals that famine statistics doubled under British colonization with 31 serious famines compared to 17 famines under Indian rule. Some of the worst famines occurred in the periods between 1876-1879, 1888-1891, and 1896-1902. Reportedly after witnessing the Bengal famine of 1770, Adam Smith remarked, "a famine has never arisen from any other cause but the violence of government attempting, by improper means, to remedy the inconveniencies of a dearth" (34). Devi suggests in the case of the 1978-79 famine in southeast Bihar that the "improper means" of the state contributed to the inequitable disparity of resources between India's bourgeois elite and tribal populations. The short narrative "Shishu/Strange Children" exposes the systematic layers of political corruption that render the adivasis disposable sites of exploitation. Kalpana Bardhan writes, "The tribals are the casualties of economic development projects, which disenfranchise them for the benefit of other people in other parts of the country" (27).

“Strange Children” opens in the “burnt out valley” of dry “riverbeds,” “stunted trees,” and “dark copper colored” “lifeless” soil in a “place called Lohri” (Bardham 229). Expelled to this barren landscape “on special assignment” is “honest and compassionate” relief officer, Mr. Singh, on a three-month “loan from the food department” to deliver food supplies to the tribals (Bardham 229). Within this setting, the Agariyas who were once blacksmiths cannot make “any honest way of living” (Bardham 230); nor, can these tribals practice agriculture as the soil itself is “like a cremation ground” (Bardham 229). Instead, the tribals have buried themselves deep within the crevices and caves of the forests to protect themselves from the onslaught of destructive capital forces. Singh’s romanticized bourgeoisie Bollywood image of “men playing flutes and tribal women with flowers in their oiled black hair,” is devastated by the reality of “his first glimpse” of “naked, emaciated creatures, bellies swollen with worms and sick spleen”(Bardham 230). The incessant singing from the mournful chorus conjures the mythohistories and animistic beliefs in spirits that drive their existence and ability to make sense of their ecological predicament. The singing repeats itself “on and on until they die” (Bardham 235).⁷

The block development officer further explains their complicated entrapment in which they resist cultural and economic determinacy by the state by imitating and feigning desired behavior in order to survive on their own terms:

Lohri. The people are the weirdest of the lot. If you gave them land, they would sell it to the moneylender. Then they would glare at you and suddenly complain, ‘Where’s the water? Where’s the seed? Where’s the plow? and the buffalo? How can we cultivate without those? But even if you gave them those things, they would sell everything to the moneylender and then argue back. ‘What are we

supposed to eat until the crop is ready? We'd borrowed to eat. We have to pay the loan with the land.' (Bardham 230)

In this tragic and convoluted interplay, Devi points to the complicated nature of government assistance and the irony and failure of the type of projects that do not consider the socio-cultural, political and geographical factors necessary to engage in effective "development" projects. It is this failure of communication and the dearth of desire to understand the "geo-political others" it claims to help that propel the tragic consequences of this narrative.

Devi constructs a cultural foundation for her story by narrating the influential mythohistories in the construction of cultural beliefs and ideologies. Particular to this story is the legend of King Logundi who believed he was greater than the Sun, which provoked The Sun's rage to burn his eleven brothers and Lohri. To further complicate the curse of the Agariya, King Logundi's wife gave birth to Jwalamukhi who also cursed the Sun, who in turn cursed Jwalamukhi turning all "their work as blacksmiths into ashes" (Bardham 231). The block officer explains this is why the Agariyas believe that they live in a state of "impurity," as they have lost their traditional livelihoods and practices. He observes: "That's why the iron demon does not give them iron, the coal demon does not give them coal, and the fire demon does not grant them the right kind of fire" (Bardham 231). In establishing this legend, Devi juxtaposes another complicated socio-cultural factor, which competes for adivasi land and resources.

Devi chronicles an "all-knowing power"; this time it is India's post independent government's *mal*-development projects in which land and resource grabbing expand the basis of elite-bourgeois economic progress. In particular in this "ethnographic reportage" it is the pursuit of resources in Lohri in which two Punjabi officers and a Madras geologist were sent to the region to "explore for iron ore" in a sacred hill area inhabited "by their three demon gods"

(Bardham 232). The government team, discounted the Agariya's animistic beliefs, and "went ahead and blasted the hill" most probably emitting non-metallic toxic tailings such as cadman, lead, and arsenic into the atmosphere (Bardham 232).⁸ Devi's description of the land as the "color of dried blood," seems to indicate that the detonation severely impaired an already depleted ecosystem. The block officer notes that nothing grows in the soil, and that when his nephew attempted to do so "nothing came of it. The soil grows no rice, no wheat, no maize, no millet, nothing" to nourish the tribals who must sustain themselves from its "cursed land" (Bardham 232). Singh learns from the tax collector that the water he bathes in, the water that fills his morning tea is toxic water and is "hauled" from the detonated site from "the Kuva incident" (Bardham 236): "The blast made a crater in the hillside. Water collects in it during the monsoon and serves as our water supply for the rest of the year" (Bardham 232). The water becomes a daily reminder of their historical and ecological conditions.

Seeking revenge for the government action, the "Agariyas from Kuva village came in the night and butchered them. After that, they escaped into the forest and just disappeared," approximately "one hundred to one hundred and fifty people" (Bardham 232). In this brutal massacre, Mr. Singh, the block development officer indifferently recounts how after the police had concluded their investigation they employed strategic military tactics to prevent land usage—"[t]he police burned down Kuva village, poured salt over its soil and left" (Bardham 232). This points to how under the guise of "development," colluding government forces have destroyed Agariya's ecological habitation and reproductive livelihood rendering them scavenging for food items from do-good relief "projects." More importantly, Devi substantiates A. R. Desai's claims of human rights violations, "that the exploited and oppressed segments of Indian population are not accepting this situation passively and are reluctant to perish" in spite of

their emaciated physical conditions (viii). In this narration, in order to survive, ghostly, emaciated beings steal small portions from the relief supply at night and then descend back into the forests. In addition, in cases of extreme drought and famine the jeep driver notes, “they leave their babies at the mission doo[r]...” delivering them onto Christian missionaries for further reproductive colonization “ruining our religious tradition” and further complicating the layers of infrastructural survival mechanisms (Bardham 234).

The block officer recounts the circuitous and complicit route of relief supplies that more often than not fail to reach its designated recipients and instead end up in local markets for sale. “Clothes, blankets, shoes, stoves, pots, and pans donated from all over the world. Didn’t they turn up in the markets of Ranchi, and we didn’t we buy them?” (Bardham 233). Devi charges all segments of consumer society as complicit in the failure and often pilfering of philanthropic donations intended for the poor and marginalized. In this relief project even “College students are coming to work as volunteers” to assist with the relief program (Bardham 237). Devi’s positioning of academia within the emergency relief campaign is a trenchant critique on the convoluted socio-political institutions caught up within the dynamics of global development projects.

Layered on top of this, is the block officer’s growing belief in supernatural influences as responsible for the theft of food supplies. He believes that he saw “the children running away with a sack were not like human children” and were “abnormal” in appearance, “sniggering strangely” as they ran off (Bardham 233). Initially responsible for the thefts of food supplies in previous years, the tax collector picked “ten Agariya youth” to service the camps and protect Mr. Singh who foolishly believes he has established a trusting relationship with them when they address him as “deota” (Bardham 238). The youth, however, are responsible for lifting the tent’s

entrance and the theft of “a sack of rice and a sack of milo” (Bardham 238). The narration ends when the relief officer feels betrayed, his position of *deota* squashed, his do-good image bruised for having trusted the youth. He contemplates: “Is this how they return kindness? By sending children to steal relief supplies?” (Bardham 239). He runs after them through the forest and finds them with the sacks at “a huge treeless area, which must be where Jwalamukhi wrestled with the Sun” (Bardham 239). They see and approach him and in one of the most haunting observations of the impact of scientific patriarchal policies:

They come closer. Cold terror grips him. Why don’t they speak? Why do they approach him so silently? Their bodies are more clearly visible now. But what is he seeing? Why are they naked? Why is their hair grown so long? Why do the little boys have white hair? Why do the little girls have dried leathery breasts hanging from their chests? Why is that one coming forward to him, the one with completely white hair? (Bardham 239-40)

These are the people whose reproductive systems have suffered from years of exploitation and dispossession—the enduring disposable skins of the Global South. They have experienced the exhaustive interplay of global, national, and regional resource and land grabbing on an individual level and now are ghosts of their former physical selves. The little girls’ “dried and “leathery” breasts suggests the reproductive collapse of a whole generation as their systems have been depleted of the vital energy for procreative fertility.

Indeed, the people reveal that they are the survivors from Kuva, the original Agariyas who descended into the hills after the detonation of their sacred site and the ensuing massacre. It is the total desecration of their sexual organs that is most disturbing in this story. As the desiccated sexual organs enclose him, he observes: “He is showing him his genitalia: wrinkled,

dried up, hanging like a dead object. They are adults! No sound comes out of his mouth, but the realization explodes inside his brain, devastating it like Hiroshima and Nagasaki” (Bardham 240). The historical allusions serve to remind us of the oftentimes-devastating and genocidal nature of scientific enlightenment projects. The allusions are juxtaposed against the destruction of their sacred burial grounds and their revenge. The white haired Agariya explains:

Ever since we cut up your folks to save the honor of our gods inside the hill, we’ve been hiding in the forest. So many soldiers, so many policemen came to catch us. They couldn’t. The old man sniggers. Ghoulis chuckles go around. A few of us have lived with the help of the Agariya villagers. The rest of us died off without food, having to hide in the forest for so long. (Bardham 240)

The old Agariya chastises him for chasing after him when they had only stolen two bags of food compared to the hundreds of bags that remain. He demands that Singh take a good look at how post independent India has degenerated their bodies and depleted their sexual organs and reproductive procreativity:

The men show him their genitals, the women their withered breasts. The old man is now very close to him. They all come closer. Their genitalia touch him from all sides. They feel dry and repulsive, like cast-off snakeskin. We’re down just to these fourteen. Our bodies have shrunk. The men can’t do anything with it except piss. The women can’t get pregnant. That’s why we steal food. We must eat to grow bigger again. Don’t you agree? ... The Agariya villagers help us with it. The massacre of Kuva! We’re like this because of the massacre of Kuva.

The officer repeats to himself that what he is seeing can’t be true. If it is true everything else is false: the Copernican system, science, the twentieth century, the

independence of India, the five year plans, all that he has known to be true. He keeps saying, No! No! No!”.... (Bardham 240)

Singh’s previous reliance on twentieth century notions of *Baconian* progress and scientific patriarchy and what he had previously thought to be to be true has been crushed by the reality of his lived experience, and observations of the impact of the Agariya massacre. When they surround him with their naked bodies and rub their sexual organs against him, they are saying in effect: Look at us. Look at how governmental policies have rendered us sexually impotent.⁹

Singh cannot seem to comprehend their vengeance towards him. He has not experienced the appetite of “American,” “Canadian” nor “Russian”; he is “an ordinary Indian” living on the “absolute minimum” calories recommended by the World Health Organization (Bardham 241).

Devi suggests, however, that Singh, like all the other individuals operating within this interconnected system of global relationships, is indeed “accused of the crime on behalf of all others” (Bardham 241). Devi delivers an incisive critique of how tortured bodies become the historical battleground of deeper socio-economic and political issues, their reproductive systems a discursive site for the examination of insurrection, resistance, and decolonization. In this instance, Devi positions the sexual organs to represent the horror of post independence India’s genocidal policies towards the adivasis, in which, in human terms, people struggle daily to reproduce their livelihoods under governmental duress.

Singh’s “sheer frustration” renders him incapable of screaming at the violent horror that he witnesses. Instead, he “starts to weep” (Bardham 241). In the end, neither emotion will serve to end the *mal*-development policies and its association of national, regional, and local actors that contributed to the systematic reproductive collapse and socio-geographical peripheralization of the adivasis.

Similar to “Shisnu,” in Devi’s “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha,” we survey the anguish of indigenous tribals attempting to maintain their cultural traditions and livelihoods amidst encroaching capital and globalizing forces. In “Pterodactyl,” among other ideas, Devi explores the complicity of the state that has forced the tribals to seek protection deep within the womb of the earth in areas that have no water and little means of sustainable life other than goat grazing and acacia production. Because roads and development have forced the tribals to the edges of the earth and desecrated their livelihoods and ancestral burial grounds, the ancestral spirits are in mourning—captured by Bikhia’s cave drawing of the pterodactyl, which develops into a sacred shrine of ancestral memory. Ultimately, Devi’s “Pterodactyl” uses the pre-historic bird as a means to investigate the imperial annihilation of the tribals reporting how they were “invaded and crawled into earths’ womb for safety, never to emerge” (*Maps* 109). In this reportage, colluding interests continue to contribute to man-made famine and oppressive poverty in marginalized adivasi areas.

Devi observes that strategies for tribal assistance and concepts of ethical responsibility have been aimed at population control rather than the real source of the problem—patriarchal capitalist exploitation of India’s resources (Morton 137). Population control policies aimed at subaltern women are expressed in the form of Neo-Malthusian policies and its basis that “rapid population growth is a major cause of poverty, degradation, and political instabilit[y]...” (Silliman and King 3). Carolyn Merchant affirms that “Marx did not see a Malthusian ‘population problem,’ but a poverty and exploitation problem” (27). Physicist and Environmental activist Vandana Shiva notes the growing rhetoric that places blame on the Global South in order to make sense of the ecological crisis of the global elite (*Earth Democracy* 57). Similarly, Shiva argues that population reduction aimed at indigenous populations as witnessed in “Pterodactyl”

circumvents the real global demand for local resources (*Earth Democracy* 58). Diminishing tribal populations facilitates land and resource acquisition, as there are less people to defend against their dispossession.

In “The Great Land Grab: India’s War on Farmers,” Shiva observes how the “The World Bank has worked for many years to commodify land. The 1991 World Bank structural adjustment program reversed land reform, deregulated mining, roads and ports” (June 08, 2011 Al Jazeera English). It is through the legal wrangling of land grabbing schemes and Neo-Malthusian population control propaganda that the “the state could forcibly acquire the land from the peasants and tribal peoples and hand it over to private speculators, real estate corporations, mining companies and industry” (Al Jazeera 2011). Vandana Shiva goes as far as to declare the government war on farmers in order to grab their fertile land” (Al Jazeera 2011).

Devi’s “Pterodactyl” substantiates India’s governmental strategy to reduce adivasi populations by waging a hegemonic war against women’s reproductive systems by flooding villages with “One Child” propaganda posters. In these posters, “a happy couple” presumably smiles because they have heeded the imperative of “only one child, no more” (*Maps* 138). The posters delivered throughout Pirtha strategically target women’s wombs in order to restrict population growth and its correlative demographic growth and consumption of resources in the area. If the tribals can be contained, the area can be more suitable for resource development projects. At play in Devi’s Pirtha, is an illustration of the Homer-Dixon model in which tribals have been marginalized to the most extreme unsustainable ecosystems where their reproductive lives have been rendered vulnerable. In *Recovering Subversion: Feminist Politics and the Law*, Nivedita Menon observes the complicated politics of population control in tribal areas:

At independence, it was recognized by the Indian bourgeoisie that in order to promote industrialization, it was essential to create a market by reducing poverty in the countryside. As originally conceived, this objective was to be achieved by substantial land reforms. However the persistence of powerful land interest meant that effective land reforms were never carried out. Subsequently, economic policies in post-independence India have attempted to balance the interests of the different sections of their ruling classes—bourgeoisie, landed interest, the urban professional middle classes and upper classes. (70)

Rhetoric aimed at controlling certain sectors of the global population has further been taken up by Besty Hartmann who observes that “subsumed into the analytic framework of ‘population pressure,’ women implicitly become the breeders of both environmental destruction and violence” (qtd. in Silliman and King 8). Population pressure is quite apparent in Pirtha, where women have become a deliberate target of reproductive propaganda aimed at surveillance and control. Menon notes that “Since the 1990s, under the tutelage of the World Bank, the Indian economy has undergone liberalization and restructuring. More than ever, overpopulation is cast as the cause of poverty” (71). Within this gestational arena, women’s wombs, once again, become the site of hegemonic control and political persuasion.

Although specifically writing about abortion and sterilization policies in the United States amongst people of color, Jennifer Nelson observes that ongoing attacks on women’s reproductive systems are specifically leveled at “people of color as surplus populations” (137). Important to this discussion is how Western ideology and constructions of family and reproductive politics have been exported to the Global South to reinforce capitalist growth and consumption in the Global North. Tola Olu Pearce provides some insights in “Women’s

Reproductive Practices Biomedicine: Cultural Conflicts and Transformations in Nigeria” in which she correctly observes that “in several third world nations (particularly India) interest in the dissemination of new biomedical contraceptives has been heightened by the role of the state in family-planning programs” (195). In this socio-political economic arrangement, pharmaceutical companies and the governmental elite collaborate to maintain the marginalization of unwanted peoples in a system where the elite maintain their political power by reducing peripheral factions and pharmaceutical companies economically benefit from the demand of their new contraceptive technologies. In India, specifically, “Population control policies” were coercively “aimed towards the poor” when the government implemented “compulsory mass sterilization of men in slums” during the Emergency Program of 1975-77 (Menon 71). Menon argues that “strong reactions to this policy led the government to gradually target women as the object of family planning policies” (71).

The gendered politics of reproductive control is not new. Charges made by Black Muslims contend that “whites” have used reproductive technology as “their primary weapon in the genocidal war against Third World peoples in America and internationally” (Nelson 97). In 1967, Jennifer Nelson reports that “Lonnie 2X, writing for Muhammad Speaks,” believed that the “United States has sponsored sterilization clinics and other ‘birth control’ programs in nonwhite countries throughout the world (Nelson 97). Using India as an example of the Indian government’s collusion with USAID who are in turn in collusion with major pharmaceutical companies, Muhammad further argues that “Birth control has become a major phase of America’s foreign ‘aid’ program—in some cases, the ‘hook’ on which all other aid to underdeveloped countries hangs” (Nelson 96). While Nelson argues that “state-sponsored birth control” is a complex relationship of economic interests, Black Muslims revealed a racial web of

geographic population control policies (96). She further verifies that “after 1966, USAID and the World Bank pressured India to step up their population reduction efforts” (Nelson 96). The target on women’s wombs as sites of population control rhetoric dismisses substantial evidence that demonstrates that women’s reproductive birthing is not the real threat to social and environmental stability. Pravin Visaria argues that the “threat comes from the ideal of unlimited consumptions as presented by developed countries” and calls upon politicians to examine “population policies as inseparable from sustainable livelihoods, shelter, effective access to minimum needs, childcare, and child development” (Menon 93). More importantly, Visaria further notes:

Population has been defined so narrowly that important factors like the declining sex ration, morbidity, and malnutrition are not considered significant variables in demographic studies. The only demographic sector which has received an overdose of policy attention is fertility, and even this focus has been ‘an absolute obsession with sterilization, contraception, and abortion, while access to health care has been ignored.’ (Menon 93)

Significant to this discussion are Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s insights. Spivak, who works with a Bangladesh organization that focuses on the fight against coercive contraception and pharmaceutical dumping, notes that “All initiatives of population control or genetic engineering are cruelly unmindful of the dignity of reproductive responsibility (*Aesthetic Education* 190). Spivak joined in a movement against “Ciba-Geigy (now Novartis) and such companies for the harm done to women and land through pharmaceutical dumping” (*Aesthetic Education* 190). Spivak argues that “The blame for the exhaustion of the world’s resources is placed on Southern population explosion. And hence, upon the poorest women of the Global

South” (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 385). She further notes how placing attention on the subaltern reproductive systems diverts attention to “Northern over-consumption: the two faces of globalization” (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 385).

Equally important to my discussion of population control policies is Farida Akhter’s *Depopulating Bangladesh* (1992) in which she condemns “the individual right of woman over her own body as an unconscious mirroring of patriarchal ideology” (Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 386). Akhter establishes how the United States established reproductive control policies in conjunction with “International Planned Parenthood Federation and the Population Council, which was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and United States National Academy of Sciences” whose job it was to lay a political foundation connecting “the political elites in the Global South in order to prepare the ground for US-sponsored control of population growth by Third World Countries” (Morton 138). Key to an analysis of the One Child Propaganda in Devi’s “Pterodactyl” is an understanding of how the Family Planning Board chaired by health ministers was established in East Pakistan in the late 1960s (Morton 136).

The Family Planning Board trained and supervised “female family planning workers” sending them into rural communities to educate women about birth control technology, specifically intra-uterine devices. Deemed unsuccessful at limiting birth rates, the Board coerced rural women “into accepting contraceptives” by offering financial inducements (Morton 136). Akhter observes that after the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, USAID noticeably augmented its financing of population control programs and identifies two motives for the increased funding:

One was the US wanted to control nationalist movements, and Third World opposition to the foreign control of resources in general, and it saw an opportunity to do so by funding population control activities; the other was that the US

government wanted to help pharmaceutical manufacturers to find new markets for birth control pills. (Morton 136)

Through her involvement in FINNRAGE and UBINIG, Akhter attacks government and transnational business and NGO development rhetoric aimed at women's reproductive systems instead of support and funding directed towards female wellbeing, sustainable livelihoods and family planning that includes right *to have or not have* children. Both Maria Mies and Farida Akhter believe the discussion of reproductive rhetoric is based on Western concepts of individualism and bourgeois values. In *EcoFeminism*, Maria Mies cites Akhter to argue that “‘reproductive rights’ for women, propagated by feminist groups in the West, have no meaning for the majority of women in Bangladesh who are covered by population control measures,” rhetoric similarly repeated in *Pirtha* (Mies and Shiva 190).

Like Spivak, Mies, Shiva, and Akhter, I, too, am quite dubious of universal impositions of “technopatriarchal” population control that target indigenous women of the Global South. Although Devi cites these policies, according to the 2010 Procurement Planning and Monitoring Report, USAID, a major donor to International Federal of Planned Parenthood has worked diligently to reduce stock-outs in Bangladesh, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Paraguay, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Zambia. Also of note are the shipments of intra-uterine devices (IUDs) to Uganda, implants to Rwanda, and combined oral contraceptives to El Salvador. While I am a strong advocate of “choice,” I am nonetheless wary of the hegemonic exportation of Western perceptions of reproductive rights and its inadvertent (or planned?) side effects, which coerce reproductive limitations on subaltern women and their traditional cultures, traditions, and family structures. I tend to agree with Spivak that “all initiatives of population control and

genetic engineering are cruelly unmindful of the dignity of reproductive responsibility” (*Aesthetic Education* 190).¹⁰

Spivak’s “movement against reproductive and genetic engineering confronts the multinational pharmaceuticals and their conglomerate associates” (*Aesthetic Education* 190). In “Claiming Transformation,” Spivak contends that “women are the target of contemporary international civil society, by which she means the ‘United Nations and the powerfully collaborative Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)’” (Morton 134). International development projects in the form of the World Bank and the International Money Fund are designed to create politico-economic dependencies wherein the countries of the Global South become financially indebted to the Global North and led into believing that reproductive technologies are a common good (Morton 135).

In a socio-political structure that seems intent on curtailing tribal existence, cultural survival questions plague Devi’s “Pterodactyl,” as the tribals have taken it for granted that for some time “that the government has given them up” (*Maps* 101). Jennifer Nelson’s observation is particularly true in Pirtha as reproductive pressure is meted out against the poorest of the poor tribal women. Nelson further notes:

Policies that restrict women’s right to have and raise children—through forced sterilization or the denial of adequate welfare benefits are directly related to policies that compel women to have children, on the view that this is their primary function. Both kinds of policies constitute reproduction control by the state and affect the rights of all women insofar as women are the reproducers of children. (133)

This discussion of the benefit of “reproductive rights” is taken up in “Pterodactyl,” in a conversation between Puran and Sarpanch. Sarpanch argues that birth control posters are futile in a country where women deliver multiple children as child labor is integral for basic survival and as attested to in Devi’s stories, a way to generate income. In a conversation with Puran, Sarpanch observes:

—Yes ...they cover cracks if you put them up on the wall, they stop the cold if you spread them on the floor, I distribute them a lot. But no more than one child! Here you are unjust. If you people have even four children, they get enough to eat, they get learning. Does that happen with the poor? The more children the better.

—But you won’t be able to feed them.

Sarpanch smiles at Puran’s ignorance.

—He manages his kodo grain himself. One goes to fetch wood, one pastures the goats of the village neighbors or of distant householders, one minds the younger kids, and even cooks. The parents go to Bhalura to look for work. One brings water, one goes to market to sell firewood. And all of them weave Kharja-leaf mats to sell at market

Irrefutable argument.

—You can’t do family planning in a poor area. A poor household needs many children. (*Maps* 139)

This certainly appears to be the case in Devi’s stories in which women are compelled to have children and, yet birth rates have declined in Pirtha as “fewer and fewer children are being born” (*Maps* 101). In “Pterodactyl,” the tribals want an explanation to understand their dilemma within their own cultural imaginary (*Maps* 101). Within the inquiry, Devi juxtaposes the images

of government sponsored birth control campaign posters, which are used for mending “the holes in the walls” to keep the cold out and for spreading on “the floor” of their huts (*Maps* 107).

Herein, lies the premise of my own research in Africa, which I will address in Chapter Five.

Devi, as well as Spivak acknowledges that children are integral members of the economic family unit in the Global South. Whereas we in the North have as many children as we desire without the media imposition of “One Child Propaganda” at our door steps to influence our maternal reproductive systems, we propose regulation of the subaltern womb as a strategic method for famine reduction and the reduction of disposable skins citing environmental crises for our advocacy.

A critical examination of the epistemology of family planning and population control rhetoric reveals how individual choices outweigh community concerns for the integrity of population growth (Apffel-Margin and Sanchez 177). White middle class ideology is based on the rhetoric of individualism and individual choice and it is this ideological notion of universality that is perpetrated to all women without cultural and socio-historical considerations (Apffel-Margin and Sanchez 177). Frederique Apffel-Marglin and Loyda Sanchez go so far as to argue that International Planned Parenthood’s “bourgeoisie epistemology of individualism” disseminates “this internal colonizing dynamic worldwide” in which fierce individualism is propagated and women “control(s) her own fertility with carefully planned intent” (177). The universality of individual reproductive choice, while theoretically appears to be an emancipatory model for women’s liberatory politics, can in reality erect a “false reality in its removal from daily relationships of mutuality and intra-actions” (Apffel-Margin and Sanchez 178). The One Child Propaganda in Devi’s *Piritha* fails to acknowledge the manmade famine and the sad proposition that “the government doesn’t want that we (the tribals) live,” the wise Shankar said

(Devi, *Maps* 129). Devi's portrayal of reproductive collapse and reduced demographic populations shows the remarkable strength of the adivasis to survive and regenerate in spite of policies meant to diminish generational births.

In Pirtha, the tribals indeed have been exiled and new “metal roads” have emerged to “snatch harvests” and starving children whose parents can no longer tend to them. In this scenario poor adivasis seduced by “ten rupees a day and a full stomach” work as bond slaves (Devi, *Maps* 146). The government in turn offers nothing to ward off starvation other than the rhetoric of population control posters, which rather than discouraging multiple pregnancies during famine does the opposite of increasing birth rates. Post independence India has failed at including tribal populations within its social economic development trajectory, has failed at population control, and has failed at “eradicating poverty” even with its network of NGOS and comingling of foreign and domestic assets. “All the power is in the hands of the government, and a huge amount of money spent is not reflected at all in the demograph destitute of India” (Devi, *Maps* 170). Sadly, the tribals suffer the socio-political ramifications of corrupt power plays not only between foreign and national interests, but also within “fundamental failure or heartlessness of the tribal welfare department from state to district to subdivision”—all are responsible in the collusive stranglehold of adivasi reproductive life (Devi, *Maps* 170). In this scenario, everyone from subdivision district officer to independent contractors embezzle monies meant for tribals.

Yet, in “Pterodactyl” in Pirtha tucked away deep within the hillside forests, the adivasis have managed to survive as many indigenous peoples of the Global South have managed to do in spite of “all these arrangements for extinction” (Devi, *Maps* 170). These “arrangements for extinction,” derided by Devi arrive in tourist development projects that envision the development of ecotourism “Pirtha Packages” where tourists can visit “picnic spots out of the spring-fed pool

and hillside of Pirtha” and witness “a sample of tribal India” (*Maps* 171). As both Rob Nixon and Cynthia Enloe point out rather than encourage local economic sustainability, tourism in the guise of “Pirtha Packages” hastens economic disparity between indigenous peoples and bourgeoisie elites.

Whether or not to photograph and bring tourist attention to the pterodactyl becomes a moral and ethical dilemma for Puran. Will media attention be beneficial or detrimental to Pirtha’s traditional livelihoods? Can humanitarian tourism help or hinder the tribals? These are critical questions that if taken without considering the socio-economic and cultural ramifications of the peoples and ecosystems can spell disaster pushing the tribals closer to the edge of extinction. One can imagine a scenario of buses arriving on newly graveled roads with iPhone toting tourists ready to snap a selfie with an emaciated Dalit for instant Snapchat and Facebook messaging— philanthropic self-aggrandizement for all public friends to see. The morality of this scenario is chilling and is perhaps the reason that Puran decides against publicizing his findings. What good can truly become of publicity of the ancestral soul? Will witnessing the aboriginal ancestral spector provide Spivak’s “ethical singularity”? Or, as Devi suggests is tourism another form of exploitation and depletion of ancestral tradition and human dignity? Having witnessed similar humanitarian tourism and “Masaai tourist villages” alongside Safari Lodges, I argue the latter.¹¹

Juxtaposed against the desire for land and resources and the incessant struggle for food and water security is the desire of the tribals to maintain their cultural traditions and livelihoods. As Devi points out: “The tribals want to stay in the place which they know as their own. They want the respect that they hold for their dead ancestors. Whatever has come in the name of development has spelled disaster for the tribes” (Devi, *Maps* xxii).

What children are birthed within these dismal historical conditions struggle from food insecurity as evidenced by the governments 1991 statistics “of a region where 8,000 children died of food hunger” because of “trade liberalization and globalization,” which did not happen prior to these policies” (Shiva, *Earth Democracy* 34). Shiva further reports that in 2002, “47 percent of children’s deaths were caused by a lack of food” (*Earth Democracy* 34). Equally disturbing is a NBC News 2012 World Report entitled “India’s hunger ‘shame’: 3,000 Children Die Every Day, Despite economic Growth,” which reports the country’s inability to reduce the extreme levels of child malnutrition even though the economy tripled between 1990 to 2005. According to research fellow Purnima Menon, at the Institute of Food Policy Research, “It is a national shame. Child nutrition is a marker of the many things that are not going right for the poor of India” (Feb. 16, 2012). One of the many areas of concern that is “not going right” is the gendered and racialized politics of food security and survival—capitalist patriarchal policies directed at the control and surveillance of women’s wombs rather than at the provision of adequate resources to maintain adivasi female reproductive wellbeing. In a society where adivasis are deemed to be a blight on the postcolonial economy, I argue that not only is this according to Spivak, “the worst production of postcoloniality,” in a corrupt system that “uses the alibis of Development to exploit the tribals and destroy their life-system,” reproductive control itself is the most heinous of postcolonial crimes against humanity (*Frankenstein*; Devi’s *Pterodactyl* 64).

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I will draw into conversation Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, Gayatri Spivak and others to examine how women can reclaim their wombs from these exploitative patriarchal impositions that in Puran’s words is dead set in destroying “a continent in the name of civilization” (Devi, *Maps* 195).

Sites of Commodification and Exploitation in *Breasts Stories*

In “Breast-giver,” also often read as a parable about the decolonization of India, Devi “expands the thematics of the woman’s political body” (Spivak, *Other World* 355). Devi’s places her mother-goddess Jashoda as both metaphor for India as “mother for hire” in addition to documentary reportage of the oppressed mother and her lived experiences (*Breast Stories* 77). Questioning the sanctity of motherhood, Devi claims that she positions the subaltern wet nurse Jashoda to the body politic India who has been sucked dry of its fluids and resources by the nation-state India acting as a surrogate to the Global North. “Like the protagonist, India is a mother-by-hire” (Spivak, “Representation of the Subaltern” 107). In so doing, she posits that if “scientific help comes too late, she will die of a consuming cancer” of globalized homogeneity (*Breast Stories* 78). The problem with a metaphorical reading of Jashoda as mother India is that it precludes the gendered experiences of sexual exploitation and oppression faced by subaltern women. Spivak points out that “When the woman’s bodies is used only as a metaphor for a nation (or anything else) feminists correctly object to the effacement of the materiality of that body” and “to distance ourselves from the identity of the Woman with the female copulative and reproductive body” (“Representation of the Subaltern” 125). The breasts not only take on a historically coded meaning for the trauma of rape and exploitation of mother country India and resources, but also a personal meaning resistant to metaphor and symbolization. Similar to Devi’s strong protagonists in “Draupadi,” “Dhowli,” and “The Hunt,” women are driven by “the struggle for reproductive rights,” by bare life struggles of food and water security to find economic means to survive (Spivak, *Other World* 355). How will they feed themselves? How will they feed their children? Jashoda uses the only means available to her—her breasts.

Devi positions the personal story of Jashoda working as a wet nurse so that elite Indian women can “can keep their figures” and “wear blouses and bras of European cut” to show off their perky breasts to their husbands while still serving as sexual playthings and mothers for their husband’s desires (*Breast Stories* 107). Women’s ability to “say no,” is excluded from this domestic exchange. Jashoda’s breasts become an exploited domestic site for the social reproduction of surplus exchange value, her milk a commodity appropriated by the westernized Indian elite who want their wives “to breed yearly,” while keeping their bodies (*Breast Stories* 49). As “cow-mother,” Jashoda’s breasts are reified as “cheap labour” to the hungry mouths she is employed to nurse, her breasts transforming into “the alienated means of production, the part-object, the distinguishing organ of the female as mother” (*Other Worlds*, Spivak 368). In a “profundity” of a song, it is questioned: “Is a Mother so cheaply made? / Not just by dropping a babe?” (*Breast Stories* 50)

In this reproductive economy, Jashoda, gestates, lactates and produces the milk commodity to support her family unit. As Spivak points out, “By the logic of the production of value they are both means of production. By the logic of sexual production he is her means of production (though not owned by her as the field-beast or the beast of burden is the slave’s” (“Representation of the Subaltern” 111-12). In this reportage, Devi substantiates how women’s reproductive systems and reproductive affective labour is a strategic economic force at play in the marketplace even though Marx omitted “sexual reproduction” when addressing “social reproduction or reproduction of labour-power” (Spivak, “Representation of the Subaltern” 112). Jashoda’s actions to become a “professional mother” and take “motherhood as her profession” enable her to feed her husband and children. Jashoda’s production of milk is sexually produced through her reproductive system as a form of sexual reproductive energy.

Ann Ferguson refers to this as a form of sex/affective production, which includes “sexuality, nurturance of children whose satisfaction is just as basic to the functioning of society as is the satisfaction of the material needs of hunger and physical security” (83). In the exchange of milk for compensation, Jashoda enters into unequal contractual relations reinforcing a social hierarchical interdependence in the exchange in which “human beings rather than material products and services” are produced (Ferguson 83). Devi makes it quite clear, that Jashoda’s sex/affective production is driven by a patriarchal system of domination and female subordination, where, yet again, women’s reproductive systems are at the sexual and affective service of their male counterparts. Here we see how as Ann Ferguson posits: “The production of things and the production of people interpenetrate” in which Jashoda moves into an area of sex/affective production outside patriarchal control (qtd. in Spivak, *Other Worlds* 177). Jashoda’s over-worked body produces as both mother and working wet-nurse, confirming that she will supply more milk-product than she will be compensated for in this arrangement. Jashoda’s mammary glands transfigure into “Cow of Fulfillment,” and a vulnerable site of marketplace supply and demand (*Breast Stories* 48). Spivak posits:

That sphere is the site of the production of value, not things. As I have mentioned earlier, it is the body’s susceptibility to the production of value which makes it vulnerable to idealization and therefore to insertion into the economic. This is the ground of the labour theory of value. It is here that the story of the emergency of value from Jashoda’s labour power infiltrates Marxism and questions its gender-specific presuppositions. (“Representation of the Subaltern” 117)

In the end, Jashoda's breasts, which breast fed 20 of her own children and 50 others can no longer deliver to the demands of her hungry consumers. Jashoda's breast milk has dried up and she has lost her only means of production, her "left tit" "flaming red" "like a stone pushing inside" (*Breast Stories* 62). In the examination of Jashoda's strategy of survival—the implementation of her reproductive capacity as a mother in the act of "motherhood," which the narrator ponders is an "addition" that doesn't seize "even when the milk is dry" (*Breast Stories* 60). The narrator charges culpability to Jashoda herself for using her reproductive systems to save her family from starvation. "Jashoda's good fortune was her ability to bear children. All this misfortune happened to her as soon as that vanished" (*Breast Stories* 59). After Jashoda's "usefulness ended," she is discarded and throws herself at the mercy of the lionseated, "her ageing, milkless, capacious breasts" afflicted from too much exploitation as suggested by the doctor (*Breast Stories* 57).

Jashoda rightfully questions why her "breasts betrayed her in the end" (*Breast Stories* 66). She had given all she knew how to give—the milk of her motherhood and must come to the realization that "If you suckle you're a mother, all lies!" (*Breast Stories* 66). Although Spivak cautions against finding "precise answers" in theorizing the women's body, Devi's plot elements provide a convincing proposition for not only how the cancer of capital production spreads "at the expense of the human host," but how patriarchy colludes in this exploitative process (*Breast Stories* 73). "The sores on her breasts kept mocking her with a hundred mouths, a hundred eyes," wounds of capitalist patriarchy (*Breast Stories* 66). Here, Devi suggests the exploitive paradoxicality of the subaltern mother position, which serves as a dialectical host between patriarchal "indigenous and imperialist systems of domination" (*Breast Stories* 95). The violence of these hegemonic influences un-wombs the traditional mothering site of reproduction in the

interest of capital production and imperial discourse in a world in which even patriarchal science can't offer any way out, as "One patient's cancer means the patient's death and the defeat of science, and of course of the doctor" (*Breast Stories* 70-71).

Ultimately, Jashoda must meet her death alone, abandoned by all those in the community whom she suckled from her own children to the doctor and the untouchables. As Jashoda—"the mythic mother of Krishna and in that sense the suckler of the world"—she dies abandoned, her breasts rotting with putrescent cancer (*Breast Stories* 73).

In *Behind the Bodice, Choli ke Picche* Devi recognizes that "*Cultural invasion* is much more dangerous than *cultural revolution*" (*Breast Stories* 136). In this short story, Devi juxtaposes transnational silicon occupied breasts with the natural breasts of India when protagonist Upin becomes obsessed with Gangor's breasts after photographing Gangor breast-feeding her baby. Devi explores how natural aboriginal breasts became an object of study and fetish fascination by media and anthropologists. In this narrative, protagonist Upin has been influenced by Bombay's cultural media and is later crushed by the Enlightenment train of progress while pondering Gangor's silicon-free *mammal projections*. Western influences metamorphosized the breast into a recreational preoccupation. Upin now fears that the natural uncorrupted breast is endangered by the exploitation of capital hegemonic forces; however, it is not only the infiltration of silicon that endangers the breast, but the objectification and photographic capturing of its natural state for commercial purposes. The superficial obsession of the breast obfuscates more serious issues of crop failure, water scarcity and food security—an implied gang rape of the earth. This is not something that Upin's camera wanted and or focused to shoot and see. Upin's natural breast preoccupation complicates and interrogates external forces and dominant interrupting narratives that undermine, displace, and/or alter traditional

domestic structures and familial cohesion. According to Devi, “There is no non-issue behind the bodice, there is a rape of the people behind it” (*Breast Stories* 155).

“Behind the Bodice” unfolds the tragedy at the global intersection of hegemonic influences emanating from Western media when photojournalist, Upin travels to Purulia to photograph tribal exploitation. Upin Puri snaps a shot of the breast-feeding, young mother Gangor, who “works on a piece-wage basis in the kilns for light bricks and tiles” (*Breast Stories* 141). Upin’s frozen image exposes not only the Western gaze of the exotic natural woman’s sexuality, but media construction of the breast as a commercial site of patriarchal fetishization and fascination. Devi probes the complex layers of socio-economic and cultural signification of the breast and how it has been commercialized into an object of gaze in India with England’s exportation of the blouse as an article of moral cover-up. Devi attributes this moral cover up to an “anthropologist” who “went to Dandakaranaya forest after Independence,” felt “shame” and asked the naked breasted women to “wear blouses” to cover up (*Breast Stories* 142).

Within this layering of patriarchal interests, Devi juxtaposes the anthropologist who lost his mind, the commercial introduction of the blouse, and Upin’s fascination with Gangor’s natural breasts and subsequent commodification of the breasts. It is important to note that Gangor “did not object” to the taking of the photo, but instead “put out her hand for money. “Snap a photo so give me cash!” she tells Upin (*Breast Stories* 141). Gangor’s request for money subverts patriarchal relations in which women must assume a passive role of objectification. Instead, Gangor actively seeks compensation.

Ujan’s lack of “cultural sensitivity” of “semi-famine conditions,” is shocked by Gangor’s response of remuneration; yet, Devi is quick to insert into this narrative frame the implicit “hidden agenda” in most all relief distribution programs (*Breast Stories* 142). In this media

frenzy for the sexualized “exotic,” Upin is able to sell his photos for exorbitant prices to media outlets such as *National Pres* and *Lens Magazine*. The photograph ends up stealing Gangor’s reproductive livelihood by forcing her into a sexually coded spotlight of patriarchal attention, sexual fantasy, and community disgust, pushing Upin onto the borderland ledge of insanity, and ultimate death. Gangor’s engagement in a quid pro quo of photograph for monetary compensation ends up being a social transgression of patriarchal monogamy. Gangor is charged and chastised for breaking this heterosexual bond of male ownership of her body parts.

Devi further shows how media’s positioning of breasts in the forefront of news programming works to detract from more important discussions of “crop failure-earthquake, everywhere clashes between so called terrorists and state power and therefore killings, the beheading of a young man and women in Haryana for the crime of marrying out of cast[e]...” (*Breast Stories* 134). Once again, Gangor’s breasts divert the public away from more important issues of patriarchal capital’s cruelty to women’s conditions in which both females in this text have been equally burdened by sexual objectification. Whereas Gangor’s “breasts are natural not manufactured,” Upin’s wife Shital’s breasts are an enhanced liquid silicon fabrication of male fetishization –a fabrication that no longer captures Upin’s sexual imagination (*Breast Stories* 152). Gangor’s “statuesque” natural projections preoccupy Upin, and Devi rigorously interrogates this preoccupation. Behind his fiercely independent Himalayan climbing wife’s “choli is a silicone chest” that “remain(s) aggressive forever” “like plastic flowers” (*Breast Stories* 147). Devi positions Shital as a hybridized fragment of cultural exchange that abdicates her role as “natural Indian woman” to become a commercial hybridization of both East and West, neither the One, nor the Other, but “something else besides” in discourse that “intercut(s) across social sites and disciplines”(Bhabba 92). Shital’s Western-breasted *otherness* no longer

fascinates Upin. “Why Gangor and her natural, most complex sweat glands or bosom had turned Upin’s head he didn’t know” (*Breast Stories* 147). Upin feels “that Gangor and her chest were endangered” from the forces that usurped Shital’s breasts, the same forces from which he makes his living—patriarchal capitalism. It is perhaps this complicity in the exploitation, violence, and endangerment of female’s reproductive systems that ultimately drives Upin insane.

Ultimately, Upin’s breast pictures disseminate to Jharoa and come to the lustful attention of the police, Gangor’s breasts taking on a power of their own. According to the caretaker, “the Gangors of this world don’t come to die, Sir, they come to kill” (*Breast Stories* 149). The powerful mammary magnetism tempting “everyone to sin against God” including the police who eventually gang-rape her (*Breast Stories* 150). Refusing yet again to be victimized by patriarchy, Gangor files a police report “and that’s how all was lost” (*Breast Stories* 154). Abandoned by society, Gangor, like many of Devi’s other females, must now earn a living as a prostitute—a result of Upin’s initial commodification. In the end, Gangor’s breasts are not breasts at all, but “Two dry scars, wrinkled skin, quite flat. The two raging volcanic craters spew liquid lava at Upin—gang rape...biting and tearing gang rape... police... a court case... again a gang rape in lock u[p]...” (*Breast Stories* 155). Devi indicts the entire phallogentric system in the violent mutilation and desecration against the Gangors of India as “Women have to be careful in Shiva’s world.” “You’re punished if you don’t understand this” (*Breast Stories* 150).

Devi reveals in this patriarchal pantheon that there is “no non-issue behind the bodice, there is a rape of the people behind it” (*Breast Stories* 155). Realizing that his aspiration to save the endangered breasts is hopeless amidst the corrupt institutional layers of society, Upin is crushed by the weight of his own desire by the “wheels of the railway train midway between Jharoa and Seopura” (*Breast Stories* 137).

In concluding this examination of Devi's ethnographic listening and subsequent reportage, I return to address the original inquiry: How do the many layers of traditional and capitalist patriarchal forces violently collude to undermine, deplete and ultimately collapse women's reproductive systems and wellbeing? Amidst, the persistent collusive layers of patriarchal systems how do mothers feed their children? Devi's reportage, evidences the myriad ways women use their reproductive systems to subsist and survive. In "Giribali," we witness how mothers collapse their reproductive systems to remove their female offspring from cheap expendable pubescent commodification on the patriarchal market of sexexploitation. In "Dhowli," we witness how patriarchal systems force subaltern women into subservient sexual roles to satisfy male desires, creating a *coercive* consent into assuming the role of prostitute to service the sexual needs of the thousand faces of patriarchy. Devi's "Douloti" provides yet another venue to witness the ongoing historical accounts of the "sale of girls for rape" (*Maps* xx). In "Strange Children" and "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirth," Devi corroborates how *maldevelopment* projects and population control policies aimed at policing female reproductive systems have led to demographic collapse amongst the tribal populations. In "Breast-Giver" and "Behind the Bodice," we witness how mothers driven by struggles for food and water security strategically employ their breasts to reek out a subsistence living to provide enough food to feed their family. Conclusively, Devi's indictment of patriarchy testifies to a need for reproductive justice and institutional change.

Notes:

¹ See Mahasweta Devi, Introduction, *Agnigarbha (The Womb of Fire)* (Calcutta: Karuni Prakashani, 1978). Translated by Samik Bandyopadhyay, *Five Plays* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1986), viii-xi.

² After the Sepoy Mutiny, “The direct rule of the British Crown replaced the East India Company’s mercantile rule” (Bardhan 5).

³ Director Govind Nihalani turned this into the 1998 Hindi movie entitled *Hazaar Chaurasi Ma*.

⁴ In addition, the British instituted The Land Acquisition Act 1894, which employed “eminent domain” practices to usurp adivasi communal ownership by taking away land it deemed necessary for “public purposes,” without equitable provisions for just compensation to the adivasis. Because of their oral culture, the adivasis were incapable of filing formal legal written appeals and objections against their dispossession. After Independence, the Indian Government extended these laws “indiscriminately to acquire land for development projects, either without any compensation at all or for a song and to dispossess the adivasis” (Banerjee 4010). British legal wrangling of adivasi forests powered British industrial development in Britain and moreover in post independence India. When the adivasis protested against the loss of their lands, resources, and livelihoods, the British government instituted the India Act of 1935, which seemingly gave the adivasis more protection and independence. This was later amended into the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution, which according to Ministry of Trial Affairs grants the President legal and procedural authority of these Scheduled Areas:

- (1) In this Constitution, expression Scheduled Areas means such areas as the President may by order declare to be Scheduled Areas.
- (2) The President may at any time by order.
 - (a) Direct that the whole or any specified part of a Scheduled Area shall cease to be a Scheduled Area or a part of such an area.
 - (b) Increase the area of any Scheduled Area in a State after consultation with the Governor of that State.
 - (c) Alter, but only by way of rectification of boundaries, any Scheduled Area.
 - (d) On any alteration of the boundaries of a State on the admission into the Union or the establishment of a new State, declare any territory not previously included in any State to be, or to form part of, a Scheduled Area.
 - (e) Rescind, in relation to any State of States, any order or orders made under this paragraph, and in consultation with the Governor of the State concerned, make fresh orders redefining the areas which are to be Scheduled Areas.
and any such order may contain such incidental and consequential provisions as appear to the President to be necessary and proper, but save as aforesaid, the order made under sub-paragraph (1) of this paragraph shall not be varied by any subsequent order". Thus the specification of Scheduled Areas in relation to a particular State/Union Territory is by a notified Order of the President, after consultation with the State Governments concerned. The same procedure will apply while altering, increasing or rescinding any order(s) relating to Scheduled Areas. (Ministry of Trial Affairs)

⁵ I first became introduced to bee collapse disorder in 2009 when I noticed the daily occurrence of dying bees caught in the shore break along Southern California’s Coast. Far away from any vegetation, these bees had spent their last moments being washed up by the incoming tide. I asked several local scientists why this was occurring and they had no viable answer. Now we know this to be Colony Collapse Disorder. Similarly, *Nature Magazine* reported, reproductive collapse amongst the endangered saiga

antelope (*Saiga tatarica tatarica*), believed to be result of a “catastrophic drop in the number of adult males in this harem-breeding ungulate, probably due to selective poaching for their horns” (*Nature* 135). This has led to a “decrease in the number of pregnancies — a finding that has implications both for the conservation of the species and for understanding the reproductive ecology of polygynous ungulates” (*Nature* 135). I argue that we witness similar reproductive collapse in India resulting in the sharp reduction of the amount of females birthed. For more visit: *Nature* 422, 135 (13 March 2003).

⁶ “Literally meaning a girl likely to die; the name is perhaps intended to repel death, following the belief that death takes the lives people want to cling to most”(Bardham 276).

⁷ In the final chapter, I observe the purpose of similar songs and mythohistories amongst the Barabaig Tribe.

⁸ In “Phytoremediation: A Novel Approach for Utilization of Iron-ore Wastes,” Monalisa Mohanty, Nabin Kumar Dhal, Parikshita Patra, Bisweswar Das, and Palli Sita Rama Reddy point out the consistency of ores which contain toxic metals, which when released can cause environmental degradation.

⁹ In some tribal communities, Nairobi in particular, Ruth Wangari WaThungu recalls how when old people bear their genitals to people they deem threatening it is considered a “curse of nakedness,” which delivers the potent message: “This is where your life has come from. I hereby revoke your life” (Turner and Brownhill 116). The cursed feel this as a threat to the fertility of their communal resources. This appears to have the similar effect in Devi’s Agariyas.

¹⁰ From my research, it appears that IPPF seems to be in a deep global web of commodity exchange with USAID being one of its major supporters. In a recent job posting, IPPF actively seeks a USAID Project Director – Family Planning and Sustainable Networks (fixed term to end 2018 and subject to successful award) to “ensure USAID Mission buy-in at country level.” IPPF is actively involved in reproductive commodities exchange, global procurement and supply chain commodities management in partnership with key donors, suppliers and others, e.g. the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition, to support its mission. The donations are coming in from the Global North. Between July 2007 and December 2009, 15 European countries committed an additional €400 million to reproductive health, with a portion of this going toward supplies. It appears that IPPF not only deals in the flow of commodities, but Western ideologies of population control of subaltern peoples and further acts as an hegemonic apparatus of USAID to ensure “USAID Mission buy-in at country level.” Such preliminary investigation substantiates Spivak’s assertions that the World Bank, International Money Fund, USAID and other NGOS aid and abet economic and political dependency of the Global South by concentrating on women’s reproductive wombs as a cause of poverty.

¹¹ Recently, the Tanzanian Government displaced 40,000 Masai from their ancestral lands of Loliondo, adjacent to the Serengeti national park, to create a commercial safari hunting playground for Dubai and Middle Eastern elite. This latest land grab occurs after the Government previously recalled this plans after a campaign of global protest (*Daily Mail* 17 Nov. 2014.)

CHAPTER THREE
GENDERED POLITICS: RESISTANCE AND AGENCY
IN THE WORKS OF MARGARET RANDALL

I'd like to tell women everywhere that they should learn to fight for their rights, for their place as women, and not allow men to treat them like objects, not be satisfied with being paid less just because they're women, even though they do the same work as men. The only way for women to fight for their rights is if they get together and do it. The unity of all women is the answer.

Daisy Zamora

As we imitate men, we lose memory. Without the collective memory—our real history—we are denied our uniquely personal history as well. If we cannot remember the women who have gone before us, we cannot remember ourselves, our own lives. We are not whole. As we retrieve and recreate the memories, we recreate ourselves.

Margaret Randall, *Walking to the Edge*

In this chapter, I develop my argument on gender and reproductive politics, by analyzing the cultural production of Margaret Randall to show how women's bodies were also a site of struggle and contestation during Nicaragua's revolutionary period. I focus primarily on Randall's feminist historiography of the Sandinista Revolution in which strong revolutionary women demand their stories and voices be counted in the recording of historical memory. Randall's counter narratives situate a female collective consciousness of liberation disclosing the gendered politics of resistance and political mobilization against the Somoza Dictatorship. Her work offers myriad socio-economic, political and sex/affective reasons for women's participation in revolutionary processes—beyond as Kampwirth asserts the margin of footnotes (79-81). I proffer that women often subordinated their own agendas for the revolution against Somoza's repressive government, as "women no longer felt bound by public allegiance to a party in power" (Randall, *Sandino's Daughters* iii). Focusing on the rhetorical evolution of the establishment of a feminist agenda, I analyze the pitfalls and

failures of “Sandinismo’s ability to keep its promises to women—and to an entire people—as well as those problems that remained or emerged” (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* v).

In my analysis, I confirm Randall’s assertion that “the inability of these movements to develop a feminist agenda was *one* of the factors that brought them down” (my emphasis) (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* vi). More importantly, after reading Randall’s testimonial reportage, I argue that the failure of both men and women to recognize and systematically address gender inequality and reproductive violence was a critical factor in the present oppressive state of post-revolutionary gender specific violence and gender inequity in Nicaragua. Unlike the previous criticism, in the discussion of how patriarchy inscribes itself on women’s bodies, I use Randall’s discourses to bring into discussion the impact of this failure of the revolution to implement a feminist agenda. I point to the increasing Femicide rates reported in the half of 2014 in Nicaragua, the 2013 decision by lawmakers in Nicaragua to change landmark legislation on violence against women to offer victims mediation with their aggressors and Nicaragua’s new Penal Code introduced in 2008, which criminalizes women seeking abortions and health professionals who provide abortion services. Nicaragua’s 2008 Penal Code “provides for lengthy prison sentences for women and girls who seek an abortion and for health professionals who provide abortion services and life-saving and health-preserving obstetric care” (Amnesty International 7). I show how the failure to implement a feminist agenda rendered women’s reproductive and productive systems doubly marginalized and exploited. This is especially apparent under the power of former leader of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN)*, Daniel Ortega. In the last chapter of this dissertation, I will compare the perceived success of the Zapatista 1994

Women's Revolutionary Law with Randall's testimonial discourses of Sandinismo's miscarriage to birth gender equality.

In this argument, I contend that Randall's testimonies bear witness and provide significant historical documentation disclosing how the female body and particularly the womb became a violent battleground of physical and hegemonic contestation against patriarchal dominion and ideology. *Sandino's Daughters* specifically testifies to personal histories of imprisonment, torture, rape, abortion, and birth. What connects Randall's cultural production to Mahasweta Devi and Bessie Head is the way in which Randall reveals how women carry the memory of terror and pain in their wombs. It is within their reproductive systems that women cradle the memory of their pain, their suffering, and their survival. Randall illustrates how "women's histories are registered in their scars" and how each scar represents a historical marker in the body's memory of lived experience (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 663). I argue that women's bodies have been interwoven into the fabric of capital life, their labor a necessary prerequisite for progress. Randall correlates "the imposition of power to the invasion of a child's body," insisting "on making this metaphorical connection, as a way patriarchy usurps and denies female identity" (*Coming Up For Air* 25).

I will moreover demonstrate how women's bodies have acted as social factories and vital producers of labor power. In fighting against the myth of disposability and dispossession, I will use Randall's *Narrative of Power: Essays for an Endangered Century* to argue that "A reexamination of power is key" (22). According to Randall, this is about "power as a political category" and "until those intent on creating a society based on justice are willing to examine the problem of power, nothing will change" (200). In *Coming Up for*

Air, published in 2001, Randall writes about her life after the “failures of the revolution” and “how power struggles within the movements of social change themselves too often get in the way of our making connections” (13). She sees the failure of the revolution to realize its goals due to “the FSLN’s failure to embrace feminism and develop a gender analysis of Nicaraguan society” (Randall, *Narrative of Power* 197). Randall believes this failure to include issues of gender justice is responsible for the Sandinista’s loss of political power.

Randall’s oral histories illuminate the complicated socio-political processes, interlocking subjectivities, and relentless struggles women encountered as revolutionary participants. Although revolutionary women did not truly emancipate women’s reproductive systems, Randall’s oral histories prove women’s strong agency and advocacy positioning—never were women simply passive victims of masculine nationalist tyranny. In the final section of this chapter, I scrutinize the impact of gendered politics on female bodies and interrogate the written articulation and re-articulation of revolutionary feminist agendas to encourage female participation and fortress nationalistic goals.

I organize this chapter into five sections: “Women in the Mirror,” “Revolución Popular Sandinistas,” “Women of the Solution: *Sandino’s Daughters, Sandino’s Daughters, Risking a Somersault in the Air*,” “Gendered Politics and Narratives of Power: *When I Look into the Mirror and See You: Women, Terror, and Resistance*,” and “Reexamination of Power: *Taking Risks Feminist Activist Research in the Americas*.”

Women in the Mirror

Randall’s personal experiences show that as a mother/writer social activist, the revolution and her participation in it placed her in a position of making difficult choices between her political concerns and her family and relationships—a double bind many women

face when stepping outside of domestic spaces. Randall's struggle to develop her writing and social concerns is described by former companion, Robert Cohen who details how her involvement with the Beat poets and artists and the Marx, Engels, and Lenin reading group helped shaped her into a "consciously political" and "pretty mystical" woman "especially in terms of emotions and human relations" (Randall, *Part of the Solution* 14). Randall's moral and political awareness of the "ugliness and brutality of the system" encouraged her to sign "The Declaration of Conscience by American Artists and Writers" to rally support for the Cuban Revolution. Her desire to be part of a grander revolutionary vision brought her to Mexico where she married poet Sergio Mondragon and founded *El Corno Emplumado* ("The Plumed Horn"), a bilingual magazine that "was about making connections" (*Coming up for Air* 12). According to Randall, "For eight years it made the best new Latin American poetry and prose available to a North American audience and introduced our own *avant garde* work to readers south of the border" (*Coming up for Air* 12). By publishing a vanguard of such writers as Edward Dorn, Ernesto Cardenal, Roque Dalton, Luisa Pasamank and Susan Sherman, *El Corno* captured the vibrant passion and socio-political concerns of the times. Randall recalls that *El Corno* 26 reflected her "experience at the Cultural Congress, with a quote from Che Guevara that "Every day we must fight that this great love for humanity transform itself in concrete acts" (*Coming up for Air* 57). In Issue 26, she also includes her literary vision: "*El Corno Emplumado* continues this witness, which is action, this action which is poetry, this art which is life" (*Coming up for Air* 57). *El Corno* published thirty-one issues over almost eight years, until its final issue, as there "would be no #32" (*Coming up for Air* 71).

As a result of *El Corno* and her writings, Randall became the target of government and paramilitary investigation and harassment in Mexico and sent her children to Cuba for protection while she disappeared from oppressive authorities, who later confiscated her passport. The sending of her children to Cuba caused Randall great emotional, spiritual and physical anguish, which “wracked” her “gut” (*Coming up for Air* 89). The ordeal to regain her US citizenship after her participation in revolutionary activities became Randall’s personal battle, in which she balanced her First Amendment Rights against the “repression of ideas, be it one of freedom, justice, or simply respect for difference” (*Coming up for Air* 116). In the end, friends, writers, students, and politicians come to her aid to speak on her behalf, as one woman writes, “your books... they’re really important” (*Coming up for Air* 121). From this experience, Randall concluded that all one has is her integrity, something worth fighting for. Randall refuses to give into patriarchal persuasion that demands she lower her “eyes,” “voice” and turn against the “truth of her struggle,” as “any denial of place and culture denies a person’s identity: a loss with unimaginable implication” (*Coming up for Air* 117). Randall, similar to the many women whose testimonies she has recorded, refused to abdicate her freedom of expression and narration in the recording of historical memory.

Although “*El Corno Emplumado* was dead,” Randall’s writing career flourished into an impressive *oeuvre* of stories, poems, photographs, essays, oral histories, and celebrated books that capture her lived experiences and testimonial accounts of the revolutionary processes in Cuba from 1969 to 1980, in Nicaragua from 1980-1984, and North Vietnam in 1974. (*Coming up for Air* 83). In describing the “issues” she wishes “to explore” in her work, she cites June Jordan’s insights on how “the Politics of Sexuality is the most profound arena for human conflict” subsuming the myriad “ways in which some of us seek to dictate to

others of us what we should do, what we should desire, what we should dream about, and how we should behave ourselves, generally, on the planet” (*Gathering Rage* 36). Randall explores the “politics of sexuality” documenting how women’s reproductive systems became a violent battleground of “human conflict” against patriarchal dominion and ideology.

On October 2, 1968, the date of the Tlatelolco Massacre in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas Tlateloco, “400 people (not just students) were slaughtered by the U.S. Trained Olympia Brigade of the Mexican Army” during a peaceful student demonstration. Randall captures the bloody aftermath of this slaughter in the following verse. She beckons:

Come. See the blood along the streets.

Come see

the blood along the streets.

Come see the blood

along the streets. (*Part of the Solution* 32)

Randall’s literary voice beckons all of her readers to “come see” and “bear witness” to the bloody violence and tyranny when people rise up against oppressive political systems. Students demanding their voices be heard were met with fortified tactical vehicles and armed military forces from Gustavo Díaz Ordaz’s regime. Randall’s repetitive imperatives demand readers to first “Come” and “See” the tragedy of what happens when oppressive regimes are left unchecked. Hundreds of massacred bodies lay bloodied on the streets of Mexico City when the shooting ended.¹ The bloodbath precipitated a flurry of events in Randall’s life in which she travelled to Cuba and then to Nicaragua to “come see” and witness revolutionary processes and record women’s engagement in these revolutionary processes. Although this dissertation focuses primarily on her time in Nicaragua and does not examine Randall’s time

in Mexico, Cuba, or Vietnam, Randall's discourses have contributed to an understanding of women's participation in revolutionary movements. Randall, a midwife to the voicing of women's revolutionary struggles, shares her own history demonstrating how creativity is more often than not birthed in struggle.

Revolución Popular Sandinista

In order to provide a historical context to understand Randall's testimonial work and my argument that women's bodies are often sites of struggle and contestation during revolutionary periods, it is first important to establish the transnational significance of Nicaragua's geographic location. Adjacent to Costa Rica and Honduras, Nicaragua's Central American location is rich in mineral resources and arable lands making it a desirable region for the extraction and exploitation of commercial products for transnational commerce. Its three geographic regions the Caribbean lowlands, the Western lowlands, and the central highlands moreover make it an ideal location for transoceanic trading (Walker and Wade 196). Because of its flourishing ecosystems and resources, Nicaragua has been a contested site of both domestic exploitation by its ruling elite and, moreover, foreign intervention and exploitation advanced by the Spanish Conquest in the sixteenth century.

In 1522, Gil González contractually indebted to the Spanish Monarch, left Panama's hostile environment on an extended mission in which he "managed to covert close to 30,000 Indians, carry off 90,000 pesos worth of gold" and discovered the water canals between the Pacific and Caribbean (Walker and Wade 299). These early colonists annihilated a thriving population of a million Indians to approximately one percent of its former population within a decade of the Spanish arrival. Death in battle and death by European diseases wreaked havoc on reproductive systems resulting in the demographic collapse of Indian populations.²

In addition, the slave trade led to further Indian depopulation as close to half a million peoples were sold into slave bondage. Because of this demographic collapse, today's population is predominately *mestizo* (Walker and Wade 331-33).

Nicaragua achieved independence in 1838 and shortly after in the 1840s the United States made its descent into Nicaragua in attempt to usurp the interoceanic routes from British interests in which both countries wanted politico-commercial control of the possibility of a construction of the San Juan canal connecting the Pacific and Atlantic. The Clayton-Burton Treaty of 1850 attempted to assuage some of the tension over interoceanic rights, so that neither country could claim land ownership of Central American lands. In a bizarre turn of events in 1855, William Walker from San Francisco marched into Granada and took over the city. In July 1856, Walker became president of Nicaragua encouraging “developmentalist ideas” “foreign investment” and “increased exploitation of Nicaraguan resources”—ideas that have had a profound influence on Nicaraguan society (Walker and Wade 384-86). Although Walker surrendered in 1857, and attempted a filibuster in 1860, he was captured by the British and sent to Honduras. He died by British firing squad, forever capturing the political memory of Nicaraguans who annually celebrate September 14 as the San Jacinto victory against Walker.

Since Walker's brief presidency, the United States has had an ongoing strategic military and commercial presence in Nicaraguan politics, playing a pivotal role in the shaping of Nicaragua's *dependent capitalism*. US political modus operandi was to support those presidential candidates that were favorable to American foreign interests, and during the first US occupation of 1912-1925 backed “presidents—Adolfo Díaz, Emiliano Chamorro, and Diego Manuel Chamorro” (Walker and Wade 501). With the change of liberal and

conservative presidents and the rising threat of revolutionary sentiment and *foco* led by Augusto César Sandino, the US secured its interest during the second US occupation of 1926 to 1933 by seizing control of its infrastructure: “the American Embassy; the Marines ... the Guardia Nacional, with its United States Army Officers; the High Commissioner of Customs; the Director of the Railway; and the National Bank” (Woodward Jr. qtd. in Walker and Wade 589-90).

Although considered a mixed economy, today, Nicaragua continues to be economically and socially dependent on foreign investments to maintain its socio-economic and political structure. Walker and Wade point out that “the rulers of a dependent society have no such interest” in fostering a consumer society “because their markets are largely external. For them, the common citizen is important not as a potential consumer but rather as a source of cheap and easily exploitable labor” (230-36). Here, once again, we witness the complicity of the United States and Nicaragua’s government in undermining the prosperity and potentiality of its own populace. Randall points out that “This poverty and economic backwardness is the underside of the development over the past 100 years of a dependent capitalist economy” (*Sandino’s Daughters* xiii). From the dictatorial governments in Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Brazil, and Chile dependent capitalism has been an objective economic arrangement in which the privileged few gain access to the country’s wealth and resources at the expense of the indigenous and societal marginalized.

Nicaragua provides a particularly ripe example of how dictatorships are inherited within a family dynasty, as is the case of the Somoza family who from 1933 to 1977 were able to establish their power base by maintaining strategic alliances with the United States in a bilateral exchange of commercial and political support and interests. One such fortification

of power was the establishment of the National Guard, which ensured Anastasio Somoza Garcia's dynasty from 1937 until his assassination in 1956 (with a brief desposure from 1948-1950) after which his eldest legitimate son Luis Somoza Debayle took the helm from 1956-1963. Anastasio Somoza Debayle assumed the leadership of coercion and repression in 1967 and by the end of his reign was estimated to control "an economic empire estimated to be worth nearly a billion dollars, including one-third of the nation's arable land and many of the major industries" (Leogrande 1979).

In addition to a widening gap between the ruling elite and the citizenry under Somoza, Randall points out that Nicaragua moved from subsistence crop-production to mono-crop production by focusing its agriculture on coffee, an introduced species brought to Nicaragua in the early 1800s. Because coffee was a popular component of saleable beverages for international consumption, the ruling elite redirected agricultural production to coffee as their sole export, resulting in a loosely based "Banana Republic" economy. According to Randall, "As in so many other 'underdeveloped' countries this translates into benefits for multinational corporations (mostly U.S. at the expense of the majority of Nicaraguans)" (*Sandino's Daughters* xiii). This stranglehold of the economy, food and water insecurity, and the oppression of human rights led to the confluence of revolutionary forces to regain control of the country. "Women of all classes responded to this repression" by also "becoming revolutionaries" (*Sandino's Daughters* xiv).

According to reports from Amnesty International, Somoza faced international criticism from the Carter Administration and the Roman Catholic Church in which Nicaraguan bishops penned a "pastoral letter accusing the National Guard of humiliating and inhuman treatment ranging from torture and rape to summary execution"(Leogrande 1979).

Influenced by the memory of Augusto César Sandino, Liberation Theology in the form of Christian Base Communities –which spread the “social gospel” that the poor too “were made in the image of God,” and the FSLN’s Marxist ideology, the *Nicas* and *Nicos* working in unison from myriad social sectors were able to join in solidarity.³

Mounting pressures internally produced myriad anti-Somoza forces as the failure of democracy in rigged elections overseen by the National Guard reaffirmed “that there could be no real reform in the political system” (Walker and Wade 677). *Tendencia Insurreccional*, (*Terceristas*), advocated military resistance and instigated the clash of October 1977.

Randall reports how The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), founded in the early 1960s by a group of young Marxist revolutionaries who were inspired by the National Liberation Front in Algeria, challenged Somoza’s concept of democracy. Believing armed resistance was the only strategic option available to achieve democratic representation and social justice, the FSLN engaged in guerilla tactics of warfare, kidnapping, and other maneuvers against the Somoza regime. This groundswell of forces seeking social justice inspired the 1978-1979 War of Liberation, toppling the Somoza Regime in July 1979 (Walker and Wade 901).

Randall’s raw testimonies of those women who engaged in the struggle itself bear witness to “history’s telling” in which women retrieve their voices, scars, and stories from often violent patriarchal inscriptions (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 125). Her documentary oral histories in *Sandino’s Daughters*, *Sandino’s Daughters Revisited* and *Risking a Somersault in the Air* demonstrate how women’s bodies were often a site of reproductive struggle and contestation during the revolution.

**Women of the Solution: *Sandino's Daughters*, *Sandino's Daughters Revisited*, and
*Risking a Somersault in the Air***

In the preface to the 1995 edition to *Sandino's Daughters*, Randall explains the “renewed interest” in her work recording the efforts of revolutionary women who “successfully overthrew an almost fifty-year old oppressive dynasty” (v). They are the “first stories told to the world after years of silent struggle” (Randall, *Sandino's Daughters* v). In Randall’s interviews, which she conducted between 1979 to 1980 while “still living in Cuba,” I focus on those testimonial accounts that bear witness to women making choices between their personal and domestic lives and families and the revolution and to those accounts that testify to reproductive violence and reproductive torture during the revolutionary period as it relates to patriarchal political conquest (Randall, *Sandino's Daughters* xvi). I show how in many instances militarized sexual rape and assault were used as a political weapon to silence women’s voices and interests. Moreover, I reveal the gendered politics of resistance and agency in which Randall witnesses the female body and particularly the womb as a place of physical and hegemonic contestation against patriarchal dominion and ideology. Randall’s testimonial discourses provide crucial political “her” stories to examine women’s participation as guerillas in revolutionary processes, the impact of gender specific violence and gender agency in these processes, and, more importantly, the failure of women’s advocacy networks to address, argue, and sustain a feminist agenda. I read these works as historical documents to advocate for ethical and equitable gender rights.

It is estimated that 30 percent of the soldiers and “top guerilla leaders” of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* were women and according to the Sandinista Social Security, approximately 6.6 percent of those “killed in the war against Somoza were women”

(Kampwirth 62). As Randall's testimonies attest, women's participation in the Sandinista struggle moved beyond gender specificity of reconnaissance seductress to fill varied roles as military combatants, officers, and strategic planners. While myriad theorists like Timothy Wickham-Crowley have tried to gain an understanding of how gender operates in guerilla revolutionary movements in Latin America, Randall's testimonies provide first-hand detailed accounts of women's participation in revolutionary processes from former revolutionary guerrillas. What sets the Sandinista Revolution apart from other guerilla movements in the Americas is that "thousands of women participated as both armed and unarmed members of the guerrilla forces and revolutionary groups that together formed the Sandinista coalition" (Kampwirth 260-61).

One such woman, interviewed by Randall, is Gloria Carrion, former advocate for the *Asociación de Mujeres ante la Problemática Nacional* (AMPRONAC), which later became the Luisa Amanda Espinosa Women's Association. Carrion historicizes women's "objective condition" in Nicaraguan society as "the pillars of their families" (10) who when faced with economic hardships encountered "the task of holding the family together when the men lose their jobs and can no longer contribute to the support of the family" (Randall, *Sandino's Daughters* 13). Carrion argues that working class and peasant women's "involvement in the revolution is a result, in the first place of their class condition" (Randall, *Sandino's Daughters* 13). Cymene Howe substantiates Carrion's claim that inequitable class structures placed Nicaraguan women "at the bottom of a hierarchical, corrupt, and exploitative system that was managed through dictatorial rule," subjecting women to "vicissitudes of abusive labor conditions and political repression" (735-37). While Carrion acknowledges that women participation "crossed class lines," the emotional depth of the struggle came from those non-

bourgeoisie women who “had to fight each day for the bare necessities of life” and “had to struggle just to survive” (Randall, *Sandino's Daughters* 13).

In Randall's reportage of Carrion's testimony we witness how the exclusion of bare life from the political realm makes “the bare necessities of life” a revolutionary objective.⁴ So many poor farmers were pushed off their land that by 1978, shortly before the overthrow of Somoza, more than “three quarters of the economically active population engaged in agriculture could be classified as landless or land poor” (Kampwirth 299-300). Kampwirth points to several factors that influenced women's participation in the revolution:

STRUCTURAL CHANGES

Land concentration, increasing insecurity for rural poor (due to economic globalization and population growth)

- male migration and often abandonment of families
- rise in number of single-female-headed households
- female migration (to cities or Lacandon jungle)

broke traditional ties, made organizing more possible

IDEOLOGICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

Rise of liberation theology - growth of religious and secular self-help groups

Change in guerrilla methods

- from foco organizing to mass mobilization
- from military strategy to political-military strategy

POLITICAL FACTORS

State response to those self-help groups was often repression

- repression pushed many women into more-radical activities in self-defense

Ineffectual state efforts to co-opt (especially in Chiapas) gave women new skills and new resentment

PERSONAL FACTORS

Family traditions of resistance

Membership in preexisting social networks

(student groups, church groups, labor unions)

Year of birth

COMBINATION OF ALL FACTORS

-mobilization of women in guerrilla movements and other revolutionary. (196-200)

Randall reports that in response to the pressure of food insecurity brought on by land grabbing, displacement, and the increased cost of living of food for consumer goods, many women joined the *Movimiento Pueblo Unido*. Under the umbrella of the FSLN, women mobilized to launch the “Our Children Are Hungry, Bring Down the Cost of Living Campaign.” Mothers donning aprons and empty pots demonstrated in the streets to demand fair prices (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* 16). Mothers joined together to put on skits about the difficulty mothers faced in maintaining their households and protested increased taxes placed on food items that were precluding the purchase of basic necessities to feed their children. Their slogan: “Our Children are Hungry” was capable of “mobilizing large numbers of women” (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* 17). Mothers also politicized Mother’s Day as a way to draw attention to the struggle against economic and political oppression by using the slogan “The Best Gift Would be a Free Country” (*Sandino’s Daughters* 16). In 1973, Women protested the commercialization of Christmas. In another campaign, women implemented a

letter campaign to “guards’ wives in neighborhoods urging them to convince their husbands that they were betraying” their fellow Nicaraguans because of their work (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* 23).⁵

While women fought to maintain economic and food security for their families, women’s participation in the revolution also had adverse effects on family structures and domestic cohesion as more involvement meant less time “fully devoted to the home the division of labour within the family began to change” (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* 14). Randall details how many women faced with the either/or fallacy had to choose between fighting for the revolution or taking care of their children. 26 year-old Julia Garcia recalls the difficulty balancing her participation in the revolution with her family acknowledging, “it wasn’t easy being politically active with my kids and all. I nearly abandoned them, not because I wanted to, but in order to fight for what we have now” (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* 20). Randall’s testimonies demonstrate the double bind women faced making choices between serving their families or the revolution.

Mothers with children were asked to make choices between their families, their lovers and the revolution. Revolutionary mother and poet Vidaluz Meneses left her young children to take part in the “takeover of the United Nations building” (Randall, *Risking a Somersault* 46). Randall captures women’s personal struggles, solitude and conflicting sentiments in the revolution in the lines of Vidaluz Meneses’s poem “To My Aunt Adelina:”

It’s strange, we’ve joined our solitudes
chin on your chest and hands in your lap
before finishing our bedtime story.
Now when our talk goes on and on

always revolving about a single theme,
 because day after day you wonder
 at the size and ages of my children
 and you tell me, as if it just happened,
 the story of your brother's death.
 Let's sit and share this silence
 or I'll explain the Sandinista Revolution,
 the rectification of your teacher's pension
 or our first year of victory,
 why we women stand guard,
 the militia uniform
 and so many other new things you'll try to understand
 before you have to leave them. (*Risking a Somersault* 53)

Meneses justifies why "women stand guard." In a victory that took down a US backed dictator, her absences from her family and unfinished "bedtime stories" seem as urgent as the "rectification" of government shortcomings. Meneses's poem reveals how the sharing of poetry and other forms of artistic expression brought "new forms and content to the literature of the revolution" and was a way to "really democratize culture (Randall, *Risking a Somersault* 52). Randall's collection of writers in *Risking a Somersault* used literature as a social mediator and political corrective to promote social justice and change society's sensibilities in order to recognize as Ruben Dario suggests that "Eagle, the Condor exists; he is your brother in the heights" (Randall, *Risking a Somersault* 185).

Many Nicaraguans believed that “the poet is the high priest. The prophet. The Maker of Visions,” that shaped Nicaragua’s revolutionary vision by opening up political spaces of exploration and social possibilities (Randall, *Risking a Somersault* 5). The profound privileging of poetry as an essential discourse in structuring socio-political relations both nationally and internationally can best be summed up by former Minister of Culture, Father Ernesto Cardenal, who at a 1982 address to Harvard University, said, “Our army can offer advisers to any army in the world—in matters relating to poetry” (Randall, *Risking a Somersault* 12).⁶

Yet, I argue that in the restructuring of the patriarchal nation, women’s personal voices and concerns were strategically subdued. Poet, critic, mother Michele Najliz emphasizes that women had to negotiate what she refers to as a generational legacy of socio-political “snares,” which women had to break out of not only for themselves but “in order to create the possibility of happiness for our daughters” (Randall, *Risking a Somersault* 116). In describing her process in leaving her work in the revolution to write about revolutionary women she says, “It’s a lot like risking a somersault in the air, and not knowing if you are going to land on your feet or break your neck” (Randall, *Risking a Somersault* 117). Negotiating the space between motherhood, writing, and revolutionary activism proved to be a complex process of making choices.

In particular, Randall recounts how Giocondi Belli *put* her poetry on hold to work solely for the revolution and to “make my work the best poem I could write” (Randall, *Risking a Somersault* 141). Belli, who later worked in the information office of the Sandinista government, affirms Francisco de Asís Fernández’s belief that “we won’t bring the dictatorship and injustice down by poems alone” (Randall, *Risking a Somersault* 144).

For Belli, the revolution was the “most urgent poem all Nicaraguans had to help write” in order to create and shape a new society (Randall, *Risking a Somersault* 146). It was through Belli’s relations with other writers and revolutionaries that she learned to develop the praxis between expression and experience, affirming “that being a poet could also be a weapon in the struggle” (Randall, *Risking a Somersault* 49). Yet, the poetry that brought her “euphoria,” “at being a woman, a mother,” and celebrating her sexual womanhood was “scandalous,” as it was considered “immoral” “that a woman would dare speak in that way of her body, of her sensuality” (Randall, *Risking a Somersault* 145).

Twelve years later, Belli recalls how the “Sandinista women’s movement operated more in line with male interests, with the so-called national interests” (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters Revisited* 2910). In regard to domestic concerns, Belli testifies to how mothers were censured from discussing their families as it was “a mortal sin” and “if a woman said, ‘I can’t go to that meeting on Sunday because I have to be with my children,’ that simply wasn’t acceptable” (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters Revisited* 2921). Belli further remembers arguing with her comrades that this type of oppressive reprimand would only harm the children because they would “inevitably” equate the revolution with domestic collapse and “the loss of parents” (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters Revisited* 2921). In her novel *La Mujer Habitada* (*The Inhabited Woman*), Belli explores these conflicting emotions in which women are roused between romantic notions of love and revolutionary commitments, act upon their political obligations at the critical moment.

As women’s issues were seconded in favor of patriarchal nationalism, discussions of abortion, reproductive choice, rape, battery, and control of women’s bodies were tabled. Women caught between this dialectic of country/home and soldier/woman are depicted in the

first verse of the “Girl of the Sandinista Front,” by Carlos Mejia Godoy. Used as an epigram to Randall’s chapter “The Women in Olive Green,” the song portrays an almost sensual image of a young girl who chooses the revolution over her lover:

Lovely girl of the FSLN
with your boots and pants of drill
machine gun in hand
your long flowing hair
that grew in the month of April.
You left your lover
to begin another relation
for your true love
is he not he but another
it’s the love of an entire nation. (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* 129)

The romanticized juxtaposition of her “flowing hair” in April’s month of renewal suggests her leaving the carnal desires for her lover for the lofty desires of a nation in a sexualized exchange of a penis for a machine gun. The “other relation” is now the “love of an entire nation,” usurping all other feminine needs for what is another form of patriarchal nationalism, in which the male writer writes from his masculinized imagination a sexualized revolutionary object of phallocentric propaganda.

Cynthia Enloe observes, “Rather, nationalism typically has sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope” (45). Women were given “Not now, later” advice, and told that the revolution was first and foremost, other issues of personal relationships, family sustenance, and sustainability were seconded to the needs of

the nation (Enloe 62). The idea that women needed to be “patient” that “they must wait until the nationalist goal is achieved,” before “power relations between men and women” were addressed is one of several key factors in the failure of the revolution (Enloe 62). Enloe’s ideas on “masculine political privilege” are quite apropos in discussing the power and powerlessness in the Sandinista Revolution in which we witness woman after woman in Randall’s her-stories sacrificing their feminine desires and children for the “male-led collectives” of the “mythic later”(63).

Randall’s oral testimony of Dora Maria Tellez, one of the women who commandeered the take over of the National Palace in August 1978, further demonstrates the conflicting dynamics of motherhood and political activism and how women suppressed their personal desires for the future of the revolution. Dora Maria reflects on the difficulty of women trying to find their place in society and narrates how her time working in a delivery hospital inspired her to fight for equality and social justice. After assisting in the delivery of an 8 pound 6 ounce baby boy, she asks, “Have I completed my mission by aiding his birth?” To this question she answers, “No. Our work will be done when we can give these young ones a new world” (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* 49). It is here that Dora Maria commits to birthing a new world, her actions dedicated to the symbolic delivery of giving birth, which is both “painful” and “joyous” to a new vision of the world (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* 49). Similar to Che Guevara’s “new man” who is “more egalitarian, more altruistic, and more socially conscious, in short, more revolutionary, than the men of the old regime,” Dora Maria’s birth requires a steadfast commitment to the procreative birthing of this unrealized mythic world (Kampwirth 2392-5).

In Dora Maria's interview, she narrates to Randall how women put down their kitchen pots and took up arms to become combatants in the revolution and the important role mothers played in seeking justice for the deaths of their sons and daughters. In *Sandino's Daughters*, poet and former vice-Minister of Culture Daisy Zamora adds that "our goal was to raise consciousness around women's participation in our struggle" to show how mothers and daughters struggled to participate beyond their gendered roles of domestic task workers (115). Zamora writes of Dora Maria Tellez:

Commander Two*

Dora Maria Tellez

22 years old

small and pale

with her boots, her black beret

her enemy uniform

relaxed.

Behind the railing

I watch her talking to the comrades.

Beneath her talking to the comrades.

Beneath the beret her white neck

and the newly cut hair.

(Before she left we embrace each other.)

Dora Maria

the warrior girl

who blasted the tyrant's

heart. (Randall, *Sandino's Daughters* 108)

Responsible for the emancipation of León, Zamora aptly describes Dora María as a young, “small and pale” almost innocent young woman of “22 years” of age taking on the courage of a warrior capable of gathering her rage at Somoza’s inhumane regime to annihilate his heart of darkness. Her casual demeanor as she converses with her fellow comrades and the contrasting imagery of “white neck” and “black beret,” suggest that when confronted with evil she is capable of blasting “the tyrant’s heart” with relaxed resolute determination. While young women made up one-fourth of the revolutionary forces, records of female military deaths are found to be 6.6 percent, signaling a small percentage of women who actually served in combat positions.⁷ Many of these women who joined the Sandinista ranks came from the bourgeoisie sector with a level of education and political awareness to believe that they were fighting for a new social vision inclusive of women’s rights and gender equality.⁸ The 1969 Party Platform articulated this commitment to gender equality pledging to “abolish the odious discrimination that women have been subjected to compared to men [and further] establish economic, political, and cultural equality between men and women” (Rosset and Vandermeer 144).⁹

Although Randall reports many women like Dora María actively served in the revolution, Ilja Luciak provides substantial evidence that the FSLN egalitarian ideas to extend recruitment to women were likely motivated by strategies of inclusive mass mobilization. Luciak argues that Section VII on the Emancipation of Women in the FSLN's 1969 Historic Program "was conceived by an ‘internationalist’ FSLN collaborator” and was more “instrumental” than “principled” in terms of sustained female empowerment and gender equality (Kampwirth 2505-07).¹⁰ In Ilja Luciak’s interview with Dora María Tellez

about her participation in the guerilla movement, Dora Maria recalls never specifically discussing issues of gender equality. Cynthia Enloe observes that women working against socially oppressive governments “have often been split over how to connect their emerging sense of national identity and participation with their emerging political identities as women” (*Bananas and Beaches* 54). Women’s participation in revolutionary movements was given rhetorical momentum by Che Guevara’s 1961 manual on guerilla warfare in which he writes: “Men and women, especially women, should infiltrate; they should be in permanent contact with soldiers and gradually discover what there is to be discovered. The system must be coordinated in such a way that crossing the enemy lines into guerilla camp to be carried out without mishap” (qtd. in Harlow, *Barred* 39). Che’s military insight to see the “seductive” power of women as “reconnaissance” soldiers able to insinuate themselves across enemy territory to recover intelligence information, exploits the “traditional construction” of woman as seductress (Harlow, *Barred* 40). While Randall’s testimonies and photographs report myriad instances of women dressed in olive green combat fatigue fighting alongside their male counterparts, it has become sadly apparent that the nationalistic pride these women felt in regaining their country’s integrity and human rights was under the banner of patriarchal nationalism.¹¹

Randall’s testimonies of women placed into combat situations and coerced into having sex with their fellow *compañeros* have also been reported amongst Sandinista combatants.¹² Daisy Zamora, another of Randall’s interviewees, attests to the sexual pressures the female combatants experienced. Many male leaders continued to objectify their female counterparts with “macho slang” referring to them as “meat” or “cattle” (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters Revisited* 1745-47). She further recalls how women used their sexual

prowess to seduce men as “the quickest and easiest way for political women to acquire a ‘protector’ and gain direct access to power was by sleeping with someone in power” (Randall, *Sandino's Daughters Revisited* 1745-47).

Women’s bodies were recurrent sites of struggle and contestation during the revolution. In addition to women employing their bodies to gain access to power relations, there are moreover many instances of gender specific abuse reported. Randall reports that Luisa Amanda Espinosa, who bears the name of the Organization, is admired for being the first female revolutionary to fall during battle as she was “murdered by the Guard on April 3, 1970” by a round of gunfire from 20 guards (*Sandino’s Daughters* 24). She is more importantly admired for fighting off a rapist and killing him and an example of the “plunder, sex and death” that fueled Somoza’s regime (Howe 767-71). According to Emmet Lang:

I remember once when Luisa Amanda was coming from the mountains and three guards stopped her. She was dressed as a nurse. They took her in and one of them wanted to rape her. He took her down to the river and at first she played along with him. Then, right there by the side of the river, she killed him. That’s the kind of strength Nicaraguan women have...Luisa managed to get away, like she did so many other times. (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* 30)

Luisa Amanda’s courage and strength became a source of strength for other revolutionary women caught in the grip of national patriarchal violence, her rape becoming a political symbol to rally support for the revolution. Cynthia Enloe argues that when “we try to increase the visibility of particular rapes committed by particular men as soldiers, we are engaging in a political act” (*Maneuvers* 108). In the case of Luisa Amanda’s rape and

subsequent death, her story has been “framed in complicated ways,” and shaped by the myriad actors within the socio-political system—all of whom who have had specific “motives behind the ‘telling,’” retelling, and dispersing of Luisa Amanda’s story (Enloe, *Maneuvers* 109).¹³

In addition, Randall’s reportage of the traumatic sexual journey of Lesbia further captures the violent nature of Somoza’s regime. Lesbia became pregnant by a guard after being “arrested, imprisoned, and raped” at the age of 16 (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* 37). Lesbia’s story adds credence to sexual exploitation and marginalization by Somoza’s regime that were “known to use sexual torture against dissidents, male and female, to elicit information from political prisoners and punish political adversaries” (Howe 752-57).

Lesbia’s story produced a great deal of public controversy as to whether she should give birth or abort the baby. Some believed that the baby should be aborted because it would carry the stigma of hate and cruelty; Lesbia, on the other hand, believed that the “child would be a symbol of the struggle” and the “concrete manifestation of our people’s fighting spirit and resistance” (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* 37). Here and in other texts and contexts we witness the female body and particularly the womb as a place of physical and hegemonic contestation against patriarchal dominion and ideology. Lesbia’s story testifies to a personal history that many other women experienced of imprisonment, torture, rape, abortion, and birth in a world where women still had little freedom to make decisions concerning their bodies. According to the 1969 political platform, “the basic unit of society” was the family, which ensured “social reproduction, continued societal growth, and transmission of hegemonic notions of family” (Chinchilla 371).¹⁴ The ideology of family growth was adverse to preventive methods of contraceptive birth control and abortion, which reduced population

growth and “elective abortion was illegal in Nicaragua prior to Sandinista control” (Howe 915-17). In order to maintain solidarity with adherents to Catholic ideology, the Sandinistas compromised allowing for abortion in “special circumstances” that endangered a women’s life or “when the pregnancy had been caused by incest or rape,” in which cases therapeutics were allowed (Howe 915-17).

Nicaragua’s abortion laws regulating women’s bodies in the world have since become the most restrictive legislation in the Americas.¹⁵ “Amnesty International’s 2014 Periodic Review” corroborates that the criminalization of abortion has had a devastating impact on women. It argues that restrictions on choice is highly concerning, given the high levels of sexual violence against girls in the country” (3).

The shaping of reproductive politics in Nicaragua cannot be divorced from politico-religious influences, *Fundamentalismo Cristiano* and Catholic pro-natalist policies that profoundly placed woman’s wombs within the jurisdiction of patriarchal legislation. Nor, I argue, can it be divorced from the failure of patriarchal influenced organizations such as AMNLAE who ignored women’s reproductive agency. According to AMNLAE's general secretary, Glenda Monterrey in September 1981, “some women may think about abortion, but not the majority! And even if they did, now is not the time to dwell upon such issues; women and men alike must make fighting the enemy our main concern... “ (Randall, *Sandino's Daughters Revisited* 485). Here, yet again, Randall’s oral history reportage exposes patriarchy’s fabrication of the “the mythic later,” an emancipatory reproductive justice that has yet to arrive in Nicaragua even after women deployed themselves on the frontlines of revolutionary struggles.

Daisy Zamora observes in reflecting on the 1987 Constitution that women did not voice their concerns for reproductive autonomy “in spite of the fact that a number of women had an active role in writing the Constitution, the truth is that abortion or freedom of choice isn't established as a right” (Randall, *Sandinino's Daughters Revisited* 1802-03). According to Zamora who cites a study carried out by Managua’s Berta Caleron Hospital, “71.7 percent of all women begin to be sexually active between the ages of nine and fourteen and are considered fertile until the age of forty-nine, only 26 percent use any form of birth control” (Randall, *Sandinino's Daughters Revisited* 1804-07). The high pregnancy rates amongst young girls has led to “illegally induced abortions” and the rise of maternal mortality rates (Randall, *Sandinino's Daughters Revisited* 1809-10). Cymene Howe explains the traumatic repercussions of restrictions on reproductive autonomy:

Since therapeutic abortion was available only in very limited circumstances and with the approval of at least three physicians, access to hygienic and safe abortions was very limited for most Nicaraguan women. Although illegal, botched abortions were among the leading causes of death among women of reproductive age in Nicaragua, the Sandinistas never legalized elective abortion (Collinson 1990: 118– 19). The heavy casualties of the Contra war also buoyed a pro-natalist stance that encouraged women to have more children to repopulate the country (Kampwirth 2010: 164– 65). In part, the FSLN and AMNLAE were wary of addressing any change to abortion law or fear of alienating the politically and morally influential Catholic Church. (Howe 917-19)

Randall explains the failure of the revolution to advocate for abortion and reproductive choices as a result of “U.S. reproductive policy” in Latin America and its coercive sterilization program (*Sandino's Daughters Revisited* 144). Because of this miscarriage of reproductive justice, Nicaragua is one of seven countries in the world that maintains strict reproductive control over women’s wombs banishing all abortion procedures even in instances of child pregnancy, rape, and mother’s health endangerment. According to Klibanoff’s August 2013 report for the Pulitzer Center, birth rates for girls between the “ages of 10 and 14 who give birth has risen by 48 percent since 2000,” with “one in every four births here is to a girl between the ages of 15 and 19.” The ban on abortion has created dangerous situations for young mothers wishing to terminate their pregnancies with health experts reporting close to 30,000 illegal abortions performed each year. Amnesty International 2011 Report testifies to Former Marxist Revolutionary Daniel Ortega’s “newfound zeal for Catholicism” Medieval restraints on women’s reproductive systems with a “blanket ban on abortion, which is illegal even for girls and women impregnated as a result of rape” (Witte-Lebhar 1). The report further declares that “the country’s ultrarestrictive abortion law--updated in 2006 to remove all exceptions--adds insult to injury for rape victims, who have no choice but to carry their pregnancies to term” (Witte-Lebhar 1).

Randall’s works bear witness to decades of rape and other stories of gendered specific violence within the revolution and most certainly from Somoza’s military regime. This is especially true in her testimony of Amada Pineda who recalls being raped by several National Guard men seventeen times: “My legs were black and blue, my thighs, my arms. I had bruises all over me. That’s the way they treated all the peasant women they picked up; they raped them and tortured them and committed atrocities” (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters*

80). These testimonies demonstrate how Somoza's regime systematically tortured women in gender-specific ways, combining rape and torture as a brutal mode of intimidation. Women, moreover, were psychologically tortured as mothers as another weapon of ruthless oppression. Amada Pineda further recalls how Maria Castil was raped and tortured in front of her own three children (Randal, *Sandinista's Daughters* 89). Although wartime rape is endemic in masculinist military operations, Enloe urges against casting soldiers as rapists as an inevitable outcome of war:

This assumption shores up the (mistaken) belief that there is no policy choice being made, that there is no one responsible—in other words, that soldiers' behavior is universal and ahistorical, that soldier-perpetrated rape is nonpolitical, that rape is nonpolitical. A more analytically useful task is to look for the decisions and the policy behind these acts of rape. (*Maneuvers* 127)

Chilean anthropologist Ximena Bunster has probed the psychological reasons behind rape linking it to a patriarchal strategy to buffer "national security" (Enloe, *Maneuvers* 129). Bunster argues that psychologically, "women's torment is ... systematically directed at her female sexual identity and female anatomy" as is the case throughout Randall's testimonies of reproductive violence (qtd. in Kampwirth 2656).

In addition, the influence of *marianismo* and Catholic constructions of woman as the sacred, chaste all abiding self-sacrificing mother aides and abets patriarchal violence when women dare step outside this construction. Enloe argues that torturers weave these notions into their motivations as "militarized masculinized protectors of the nation" and defenders of *marianismo* (*Maneuvers* 129). Women who stray from these images are perceived as not

only a threat to national security, but to patriarchal images of motherhood. Bunster's investigation reveals how militarized rape and torture were specifically aimed at women's reproductive systems making it a discursive space for the imposition of patriarchal ideology.

Bunster writes:

The sexual violence against women political prisoners is seen as the key in controlling them, through punishment and interrogation. Gang rape, massive rape becomes the standard torture mechanism for the social control of imprisoned women. Politically committed, active women who have dared to take control of their own lives by struggling against an oppressive regime demand such torture—as do the women who have stood by their men in an organized political effort to liberate their country and themselves from a coercive military regime. (qtd. in Harlow, *Barred* 170).

The political aim of militarized rape and torture was to reduce women to nonbeings who could be reprogrammed and follow patriarchal orders as the dutiful self-sacrificing, submissive, all abiding mother when she returned home (Enloe, *Maneuvers* 130).¹⁶ Amnesty International continues to have concerns regarding impunity for gender specific violence against women (3, 2014). In this “hush-hush” patriarchal world, “Nicaragua has closed its eyes and ears” to the increasing levels of gender specific violence against pubescent and adolescent girls (Witte-Lebhar 1). Amnesty International's 2011 analysis of police records demonstrates that of the “nearly 14,400 rape cases reported between 1998 and 2008. More than two-thirds (9,695) involved minors under the age of 17” (Witte-Lebhar 1).¹⁷

In spite of the fact that in 1996 The International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague established rape as a separate war crime, Daniel Ortega's administration has failed to address

the alarming epidemic of sexual violence.¹⁸ Amnesty International evidences Nicaragua's 2006 failure to initiate a 2001 task force to address sexual violence, dissolving the "The Consejo Nacional de Atencion y Proteccion Integral a la Ninez y la Adolescencia (CONAPINA), a government agency tasked with coordinating strategies for protecting children from violence" in 2007 (Witte-Lebhar 1).

At the heart of this interrogation are the many women, young and old, resisting, recovering and re-visioning their lives after institutionalized rape, torture, and other sexually violent patriarchal acts. What emerges in Randall's models of ethnographic listening are strong voices that have been able to not simply survive, but viscerally combat the violent cruelty to their reproductive systems and productive livelihoods by passing their "legacies" of struggle and survival from mother to daughter.

One example of this is 24 year-old Revolutionary mother Indania Fernandez who penned a letter to her daughter Claudia before she was killed by the National Guard in April 1979. Randall refers to this letter as a "legacy from all revolutionary mothers to their children," in which Indania Fernandez wishes for her daughter a "free society where you can grow and develop as human beings should" (Randall, *Sandino's Daughters* 202). In this letter she urges her daughter to understand the importance of developing a consciousness of the past struggles where "brave people have given their precious blood" in order that she can live in freedom and peace (Randall, *Sandino's Daughters* 202). Similar to Dora Maria, she observes that mothers aren't simply those who give physical birth to her child. "A mother feels the pain of all children, the pain of all peoples as if they had been born from her womb" (Randall, *Sandino's Daughters* 202). Indania tolls the patriarchal line that a "true mother"

births a dedication to human justice. She admonishes her to “defend justice always defend it against whatever and whomever would trample it” (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* 202).

Come, show me your pretty face
 Lovely like flowers and freedom
 And give me energy to struggle
 Uniting your laughter and our reality
 Daily I think of you
 Imagining always how you are
 Always love our people, our humanity
 With all the love of your mother, Indania
 until our victory, forever.

Free Homeland, or Death. (Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters* 203)

Reading Randall’s discourses through testimonies and poems, it is hard to not to question if these strong warriors and “pillars of strength” subordinated their womanhood to die in vain for quixotic egalitarian notions of nationalism. Disgruntled feminists failed to see a reversal of macho culture even after Violeta Chamorro’s 1990 campaign. Female Sandinistas were further discouraged by the sexual abuse charges brought by Zoilamérica Ortega’s reports of sexual assault and molestation by her stepfather Daniel Ortega.

Gendered Politics and Narratives of Power: *When I Look into the Mirror and See You: Women, Terror, and Resistance and Coming Up for Air*

Margaret Randall continues her examination of gender specific violence and struggles in Central America after the fall of the Somoza’s brutal dictatorship in 1979. In *When I Look into the Mirror and See You: Women, Terror, and Resistance* she gives voice to the

thousands of disappeared individuals in Central and Latin America by bearing witness to the stories of Nora Miselem and Maria Suarez who were among many “disappeared” by “repressive forces during the state-imposed terror of the 1970s and 1980s” (131-32). Nora and Maria were kidnapped, tortured, and disappeared in Honduras for less than two weeks in 1982. Randall’s interviews provide further evidence to U.S. intervention in Nicaragua, in which the United States in conjunction with Somoza’s ousted National Guard worked to overthrow the Sandinista Revolutionary Government. With assistance from both the US beginning in 1981, and Argentinian neo-Nazis in 1980, Somozist contra-forces regrouped along the Honduras border (Chomsky 128). According to “The Scope of CIA Activities” document, a “critical element of U.S. Policy” is to authorize and support “covert action programs to Nicaragua and Central America,” which includes the authorization of “material support and guidance to Nicaraguan resistance groups” (Chomsky 128). The report further documents how “paramilitary pressures created by this program are linked and essential” documenting that “arms and other support” were authorized to arm the paramilitaries. Further reports substantiate US delivery of “ammunition and weapons” to be delivered to Guatemalan military officers to assist “Freedom Fighters” against the Sandinista Government.

Taking official US documentation into consideration along with Randall’s historical reportage, I argue that the US government aided and abetted the perpetration of gender specific violence against women, including Nora Miselem and Maria Suarez who were kidnapped and disappeared in Honduras for less than two weeks in 1982. As stated in a 1993 report from the *International de Resistentes a la Guerra*, “during the US-supported Contra War in Nicaragua, an estimated 5,000 women were kidnapped and held in Contra-Camps,

where they were constantly sexually abused. Their release was never an issue in negotiations for peace, and no one knows what happened to them.” Several reports from Amnesty International dating from 1979, provide clear and convincing evidence that the rape, torture, disappearance, and other human rights abuses detailed in Randall’s testimonies, were encouraged by the CIA.¹⁹ According to former contra leader Edgar Chomorro, as reported by Larry Rohter of the *New York Times* 1982 article “Nicaraguan Rebels Accused of Abuses,” “Rape was very common.” Chomorro further charges Contras with sexual abuse as, “Contra officials rape their own female soldiers,” and have sometimes been “raped at knifepoint by contra leaders.” In Chomorro’s statement, he said the “contras targeted Hondurans who disagree with their policies” and strongly suggests that these sexually violent activities “would not exist without the CIA.” Randall supports these findings, establishing that “Violence, like all other human interaction, is gendered: women and children are most often its victims, men or male-controlled states their victimizers” (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 28) Historically significant is how capitalist patriarchal violence of “local armies and paramilitary groups were funded, trained, and supported by the United States” (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 51-52). Within these “clandestine prisons” located throughout Central America thousands of “extreme gender-specific abuse have been documented” (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 84). Randall’s testimonies provide an evidentiary framework for the intense scrutiny and interrogation of masculinist oppressive policing powers and their inhumane systems of political imprisonment. Her reportage substantiates how women’s participation in revolutionary movements destabilizes patriarchal construction of gender roles. Through the veracity of Randall’s testimony, we witness how women’s bodies transformed into political struggles—women’s reproductive systems often the site of

militarized violence to secure female subordination and weaken masculinist perceptions of their role as protectors of women. Sexual intimidation, gender-specific violence, and psychological assault were furthermore strategically employed to ensure women's political destabilization and demobilization. Military and paramilitary consistently targeted women's sexual bodies as a strategic space of political domination—rape a powerful tool of brutal antagonism to silence women's voices.²⁰ The persistence of widespread sexual violence, brutality, and torture against women as a deliberate method to combat counter insurgent voices prevails with impunity.

Randall reports that like many Central American countries, women were bound to traditional roles of duty and obedience to their husbands. When women stepped out of these roles, they became targets of violence, as witnessed in the reports of gender-specific abuse in clandestine prisons set up to punish nonconforming women (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 84). Maria and Nora's personal stories of disappearance testify to the on-going gendered violence against women.

Nora Miselem a Honduran woman who at the time of her disappearance worked with a Human Rights Organization called COSPUCA: the Committee of Solidarity with the Peoples of Central America, that worked with refugees in Honduras. Nora recalls working on a campaign that published "lists of the names of the Honduran soldiers who were raping children, murdering refugee[s] ..." (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 195). In her interview with Randall describing her abduction and torture, Nora details how her reproductive systems were violated by the paramilitaries:

And they began applying electric shocks to my feet, to my knees. They told me to open my mouth and stick out my tongue so they could put the wires

there. But I wouldn't let them. They made me open my legs and began running the electricity to my vagina. And they said: You bitch, women like you shouldn't be allowed to give birth. They said they were going to sterilize me, because I didn't deserve to have children—that idea they have of a woman as some sublime being whose sacred role is bearing children. According to them I was breaking with the tradition of what a woman was supposed to be. And they were going to punish me, from their point of view, so I wouldn't be able to have children. A woman like me didn't deserve to be a mother. (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 325-27)

Nora's declaration testifies to the type of merciless retributive reproductive violence meted out against women deemed threats to capitalist patriarchal objectives. Barbara Harlow theorizes on this complicated dialectic between torture and torturer: Harlow proffers:

The attack on the personal identity and the body of the victim is calculated now to undermine the social body as well. Nor is it, for the most part, only information that the system of power is concerned to extract. Torture in political detention is calculated to produce propaganda and to intimidate, if not destroy, the human and political constitution that continues to resist. The witnessing of torture by the tortured yields, however, another kind of information, that, is the testimony, often clandestine, of the political prisoner who survives. (*Barred* 26)

Nora's testimony to the vaginal shocks to her womb, her maternal site of birth and reproduction evocatively demonstrates to this other "kind of information"—patriarchy's gender specific degradation of women, "systematically directed at her female sexual identity

and female anatomy" (Kampwirth 2656). Nora recalls, however, not giving in to her torturers, not allowing them to turn her into a "disposable" patriarchal nonbeing. She concedes that while her tormentors physically brutalized her, she refused to let them "morally, or emotionally, or ideologically" conquer her (349-50). "The only recourse I had was to attack their morale, because they wanted to rape a woman who was afraid" (349-50). Nora's survival and testimony of her torture provides a specific historical record to indict the political systems of torture that violently abridge human rights.

Maria Suarez, another of Randall's interviewees, was a professor in the School of Education at the University of Costa Rica working on a literacy campaign in Honduras at the time of her disappearance. She recollects her abduction as one of thousands of people during 1965 and 1985 who were engaged in social activism and forcefully "disappeared" to "ensure democracy," a "euphemism" for safeguarding patriarchal imperialism (Browdy de Hernandez 3).²¹ Maria ruminates on the irony of her disappearance because she had "worked for five years on behalf of the disappeared in all the countries of the region, and they never knew that. I myself had been one of the disappeared" (Randall, *Women, Terror, and Resistance* 2279-80). Randall cites the tens of thousands of disappeared "during the two decades of the dirty wars" throughout Latin and Central America:

Argentina (30,000), Chile (20,000), Uruguay, Paraguay, Haiti, Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico, and Peru. Central America offers similar statistics. In El Salvador, since the 1980s, 7,000 cases of disappeared persons have been reported. Guatemala is the Central American country with the highest number of disappeared: more than 40,000 since the 1960s. In

Honduras, 185 men and women have been disappeared since the early 1980s.

(*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 1169-74)

Nora and Maria are five of the 185 who survived their disappearance in Honduras and live to humanize the historical record of abductions, their testimonies providing documentation to never forget the 180 women who still remain faceless (Randall, *Women, Terror, and Resistance* 1180-81). According to Randall, the incidents of disappearance are so common that the word “disappeared” itself transformed to a “reflexive verb” indicating a victimization in which people were taken against their will during their regular daily activities (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 1149). The phrases, “He was disappeared; she was disappeared,” were the frightful words linking together the victim and the ensuing psychological terror felt by the family and the community (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 1149-52). Randall asserts that “of all the strategies for terrorizing individuals, families, and entire populations, disappearance may be the most psychologically damaging” (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 102-03). Community and family members who have had a loved one “disappeared” have experienced psychological distress and emotional disturbances ranging from severe anxiety to clinical depression.²² After the disappearance, the absence of legal and psychological resolution makes the family’s healing process more difficult to endure. Important to remember is that the arousal of terror and fear is precisely the desired socio-political and psychological objective of the perpetrator’s action. Once a mother, daughter, wife is disappeared she immediately becomes a symbol of retributive justice in the community of what happens when women step out of submissive domestic roles. Sheila R. Tully explains in “A painful purgatory: grief and the Nicaraguan mothers of the disappeared,” the devastating “rupture” that occurs within social and domestic spaces in

which life is torn asunder and domestic units and reproductive livelihood permanently impaired. Yet here and elsewhere, the very systems that sought to undermine individual integrity were successfully challenged by “the countering strategies of collective resistance” of strong women working together (Harlow, *Barred* 16). Nora, Maria, and Randall believe that retrieving the collective memory of these experiences is a necessary step in recovery, healing, protest, and advocacy. Remembering the stories of torture and disappearance is to go deep inside the psychic wound to travel “the length of one's own history, but inside” to recover “those files we keep in our bodies and souls” (Randall, *Women, Terror, and Resistance* 580-82). Recovering these personal historical files is a way to bridge the past and the present with the future in a “*her*” *storiography* that “recognizes our shared wombs” and shared experiences as women constructing our own stories.

For Maria Suarez, memory is a mirror to reflect on her choices “in terms of the burden that neoliberalism places on us, in terms of globalization, for me the Achilles heel is something we've been developing out of the women's movement, out of feminism” (Randall, *Women, Terror, and Resistance* 624). Remembering allows her to recognize that each individual story is different even though globalization is trying to indoctrinate the peoples of the world into the same globalization dance so “that we're all the same” (Randall, *Women, Terror, and Resistance* 624). Important to Maria and to this dissertation is Maria's idea of being able to see our individual selves in the reflection of other women's narratives. “Not only to see other women when I look in the mirror but to see myself in the mirror of the other” and recognizing our own experience in those stories (Randall, *Women, Terror, and Resistance* 681-83).

Different from Maria's experience, Nora's memory is registered in her scars as she recalls her vaginal electric shock treatments used on her because paramilitaries told her she was unworthy of being a mother and having children because she broke "with the tradition of what a woman was supposed to be" (Randall *Women, Terror, and Resistance* 324). Nora carries the memory of this terror and pain in her womb; it is here that she cradles the memory of her pain, her suffering, and her survival. Nora's story illustrates how "women's histories are registered in their scars" and how each scar represents a historical marker in the body's memory of lived experience (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 663-64). Randall urges women to "learn to read our bodies and then to trust our reactions, our impressions, our emotions" (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 667).

In addition to memory, Nora and Maria's stories both recognize that there's a certain "safety in women's space" because it is within this political space that we can truly see the face of the "other" staring back at us. It is within this space of recognition of the "other" that possibilities are created to negotiate social justice, a concept addressed more fully in the last chapter. In a world that "trains its people to forget," Randall urges to remove the layers of hegemonic interference that blinds our awareness to human injustice and suffering and construct "a new mirror" in which we "retrieve our collective memory not only by listening when others tell their stories but by recognizing our own experience in those stories" (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 683). Gayatri Spivak refers to this as the ability to recognize "a simultaneous other focus," that recognizes both the self and the "other woman" (Beverly 63). For Randall, it is in the remembering of individual stories and testimonies in which the power lies to "disentangle" political memory from deceitful mechanisms of hegemonic control. In this sense, memory is the political space of social activism and political resistance

against a privileged patriarchal power structure that persistently subordinates women's lives to years of injustice and gendered impoverishment.

Randall literally and figuratively comes up for in her book *Coming Up for Air*, published in 2001.²³ Randall's experiences show that as a mother/writer social activist, the revolution and her participation in it placed her in a position of making difficult choices. In this text, she specifically discusses her ordeal to regain her US citizenship after her participation in revolutionary activities and the infringement upon her First Amendment Rights of expression and how her repression affected her body and collective memory. Randall's experience with her INS deportation order adds her personal testimony to how nonconforming expression of ideas threatens patriarchal order. In a summoned interview with an INS officer in the 1960s, highlighted sections of 31, 30 and 25 of *El Corno Emplumado* were opened up for interrogation and her clarification on the content and ideas displayed on the pages. Although Randall recalls being comfortable in the situation, in October 1985 she received a deportation order from INS district director A.L. Guigni that "...her writings go far beyond mere dissent, disagreement with, or criticism of the United States or its policies..." (*Coming Up for Air* 107). Randall, who admits to voicing opposition to US involvement in Vietnam and Central America points to her "womanhood" as a primary reason for what she calls her "persecution" and denial of US citizenship adjustment status.

Randall's observations support the primary thesis of this dissertation that women standing firm and holding onto their personal politics of truth generates masculine rage in different socio-political contexts and geographic regions throughout the globe (*Coming Up for Air* 108). In a world where women across the globe from India, Nicaragua, Honduras, Mexico, South Africa, Botswana to the US, are forced to "cede, acquiesce, say we're sorry,"

we have witnessed time after time the brutal patriarchal tactics of suppression in the form of gender-specific oppression. The only identity women reserved for women in a patriarchal society are “as servants guaranteeing reproduction, production’s bottom line” (Randall, *Coming Up for Air* 25). Although not tortured with electrical charges to her reproductive system, Randall felt that she “was the target of gender-specific assumptions and attacks” resulting in an array of physical trauma to her body (*Coming Up for Air* 108).²⁴

Randall sees gender specific repression as a totalitarian strategy to censure subversive elements ranging from the “poor or homeless, people of color, gays and lesbians, people with AIDS-by a state that fears their struggle for justice” which might undermine elite patriarchal power structures (Randall, *Coming Up for Air* 116). As we have seen in Randall’s work, women were disappeared, raped, and tortured because of their expression of ideas dissenting ideas –“be it one of freedom, justice, or simply respect for difference”(*Coming Up for Air* 116). Although Randall charged the INS with usurping First Amendment privileges of “intellectual exchange among writers and artists,” the US Supreme Court refused to hear the case (*Coming Up for Air* 114). Randall received the clear and convincing warning:

...[i]f ... I did not relinquish my ideas and my right to express them, I risked losing my home, in the most comprehensive definition of that word: history, memory, place, family and other loved ones, cultural context, earning power, personal process and the ability to function. But if I gave up, if I said I was sorry and wouldn’t write those things again—something the forces of authority seem intent upon forcing women, especially, to do-if I accept their patriarchal prodding to recant, lower my eyes and my voice and turn against the truth of my struggle, I would lose much more. I would lose the meaning of

truth, for myself and for all those who believed my freedom of expression linked to theirs. (*Coming Up for Air* 117)

Randall concludes, like the other courageous women in this dissertation, that all one has is her integrity, something worth fighting for. Randall refuses to give into patriarchal persuasion that demands she lower her “eyes,” “voice” and turn against the “truth of her struggle,” as “any denial of place and culture denies a person’s identity: a loss with unimaginable implication” (117). Randall suggests that women must forever stand vigilant against patriarchal impositions on their integrity and dignity –which she deems as integral to these struggles (*Coming Up for Air* 122). Randall’s ordeal in recovering her integrity and dignity acted as a transformational process in which she unleashed the individual core of her identity recovering her memory of her own incest by her grandfather and discovering her own sexuality as a lesbian.²⁵ In the last stanza of her poem “Immigration Law,” Randall shows how often creativity is birthed in our past and present struggles: “The present always holds a tremor of the past. Give me a handful of future/to rub against my lips” (*Coming Up for Air* 127).

Randall’s prose and poetry in *Coming Up for Air* further ruminates on her life after the “failures of the revolution” and “how power struggles within the movements of social change themselves too often get in the way of our making connections” (13). She sees the failure of the revolution to realize its goals due to the imposition of power and authority and its restrictive access to the powerless. Similar to her discourse in *Women, Terror and Resistance*, Randall correlates the imposition of power to the invasion of a child’s body, she insists on making this metaphorical connection, as a way patriarchy usurps and denies female identity. There is, however, hope in the stories of courage of women who use their activism,

poetry, and prose to speak out and offer another perspective of lived and shared realities.

There is hope in the stories shared from great-grandmother to grandmother, from grandmother to mother, from mother to daughter. In “All her Memory’s Women,” Randall writes:

On this land raped of generation
and of song,
in this copal air that conjures another time
when a woman dressed in her life
deserved all honor,
the stories: their steady gaze,
the woman gathers all her memory’s women
into that place where fingers touch
across her strafed lap.

Quiet flees like the land and the good teeth.

Patience becomes one woman speaking to another,
speaking to another speaking ... (*Coming Up for Air* 154).

Opening spaces and channels for women to speak to each other and share in their memories, stories, and experiences is a central focus of Randall’s world, a world where women listen and support each other. Randall conveys that the gathering of “all her memory’s women” is the antidote to a raped landscape. It is through “patience” and “women speaking to another” that song and reproductive creation can be restored.

Reexamination of Power: *Taking Risks Feminist Activist Research in the Americas*

Randall proffers a feminist call to action to *gather the rage* to interrogate women's history of gender specific violence and survival. In her summons, Randall reasserts her previous assessments that the miscarriage of "twentieth century revolutionary experiments" resulted from their failure to "develop a feminist agenda within their own processes of change" (*Our Voices* 167). In 2004, reflecting on the Sandinista defeat, Randall observes, "Nicaragua is once more deeply mired in poverty and desperation it knew before the victory of 1979. Unemployment is among the highest in Latin America" and "sex education is no longer part of public school curriculum" (*Narrative of Power* 197). We have witnessed the endemic quagmire of gender inequity in daily 2014 reports out of Nicaragua in which young girls under the age of 17 experience unprecedented sexual violence. According to Amnesty International's 2012 annual report, "The failure to bring to justice those responsible for these crimes further entrenched impunity for gender-based violence in many countries and helped foster a climate where violence against women and girls was tolerated" (Rogers). Under the stranglehold of patriarchy's legal and political apparatuses, rape is arguably one of "patriarchy's most protected" crimes against humanity (*Narrative of Power* 169). The term impunity comes up again and again in discussions of violence against women in a world where patriarchal jurisprudence arguably fails to bring perpetrators of sexual violence to justice and most certainly shields its aggressors (*Narrative of Power* 171).

Revolutionary rhetoric purporting to establish a feminist agenda has proven to be simply political rhetoric without the specific intent to achieve gender justice. Patriarchal nationalist appropriation of feminist discourse and written articulations of gender equity seduce women into believing gender inequity will be addressed and ameliorated. History has

proven otherwise, not only in Nicaragua but in Mexico as well with the Zapatista Revolution and the participation of women in the autonomous government—a topic I will examine in the last chapter of this dissertation. Randall’s argument that the “re-evaluation of power is key” is critical to understanding how feminism has been seduced not just by capitalists as Hester Eisenstein suggests, but revolutionary movements as well. The appropriation of feminist discourses entices and entraps women with their bodies, minds, and souls undermining the principled determinism of feminist struggles for reproductive justice (Castillo and Mora 154).

Randall is correct in her declaration, which maintains that in order to understand crimes of gendered violence they must be examined in a broader context of corrupt power structures: “Societies based on greed and the acquisition of power, societies that enable a few to become wealthy by exploiting great majorities of people, societies that are racist and misogynist, societies that abuse the air we live on the air we breathe and the water we drink—such societies are engaged in continual acts of rape” (*Narrative of Power* 165). Extending acts of rape beyond the female body, she includes environmental, political, and genetic rape of domestic reproductive spaces. Examining contemporary trans-border connections between women of the Global South who rent their wombs and sell their reproductive parts to the bourgeoisie of the Global North—it becomes apparent Randall’s observation continues to ring true: As complex as academic researchers and global activists would like to make it, there is simply “one common denominator” that links women of the world in the process of capital exploitation— “an abuse of power” (*Narrative of Power* 166).

The question that continues to arise in this dissertation is: *Why?* From Central America to India and Africa, *why* do women bear the brunt of patriarchal structures and capitalist exploitive politics and markets? I agree with Randall that indeed, “Both patriarchy

and capitalism are systems based on rape” in a complicit system that reinforces and duplicates itself at the expense of women (*Narrative of Power* 166). I argue that if we neglect to understand the reasons behind women’s violent subjection in the tyrannical house of patriarchy, we will never be able to address *how* to rectify gender specific reproductive violence and construct a new vision of a world free of aggressive patriarchal impositions of poverty, exploitation and oppression. I concur with Randall that in order for this to happen we must understand that “power is a political category” and gender specific crimes, the disappearing of women, the silencing and torturing of women are about power and patriarchal privilege (*Narratives of Power* 200).

In addition, I believe that it is equally important to examine what Hennessy refers to as the epistemology of bearing witness to examine the motives and politics of witnessing, particularly in its “empathetic responses from audiences” (*Fires* 74). Randall’s oral histories have proven to act as powerful political discourses chronicling “the intense struggles for national liberation by peoples” in Central America (Randall, *Testimonios* 14). Randall acknowledges an “empathetic rhetorical strategy” in writing of Nicaragua’s revolution as a form of conscious raising—“not only as a vehicle for recording the present, but as a tool for recuperating a collective identity out of the past as well[1]...” (Randall, *Testimonios* 3). According to Randall, “leaders,” “writers,” “poets,” stimulated this raised awareness to discover “the authentic Nicaraguan person” and create “the institutions necessary to a more just society” (*Testimonios* 3). Yet, as we have witnessed throughout Randall’s work, the “authentic Nicaraguan person” was/is and has always been *Nico/male*.

Randall writes of giving a seminar on oral history at the Ministry of Culture in 1979, that Nicaraguans from all walks of life came to reconstruct their history as “the

reconstruction of a people's history is essential to its consolidating a national identity" (Randall, *Testimonios* 4). She further notes that the rise of oral histories is "no accident because recognition of, knowledge of and understanding of one's personal and collective identity is essential to a people's revolution" (Randall, *Testimonios* 5).

Hennessy, moreover, notes that "wrestling with the politics of witnessing is a fundamental feature of the ethnographer's ethical responsibility"; it is a responsibility that is cumbersome with socio-political and personal subjectivities (*Fires* 76). There is most certainly an accountability factor for oral historians like Randall who spend countless hours recording the lives of women of the revolution "whose lives they (she) represent(s)" (Hennessy, *Fires* 76). Randall's raw *testimonios* clearly bring into "critical vigilance" the specific gender brutality during the revolution when read with eyes wide-open today. It is crucial then to question the epistemological role of recorder in the articulation and consolidation of Nicaragua's male-centered national identity—a patriarchal tyranny that has left single women, mothers, and children struggling to survive. If "there will always be a certain perspective that emerges from our ideology," then why did the recorders, the ethnographers, and the oral historians of the Sandinista Revolution fail to ask questions of reproductive justice? Were these bourgeoisie ethnographers, oral historians and reporters also seduced to subordinate reproductive justice and women's issues for a nationalist socialist agenda? (Randall, *Testimonios* 10). Finally, were Randall's discourses of rape, torture, and disappearance purposefully written to fuel the revolution? If "testimony also offers us the possibility of reconstructing the truth," why was the truth of women's gendered subordination usurped by patriarchal nationalism? (Randall, *Testimonios* 11). More simply, if oral historians such as Randall engaged in the important endeavor of recording "the

testimonies of an historical moment,” which will be the “inheritance of future generations of Nicaraguans” and “future revolutions in other countries,” then why did they/he/she not recognize the propagandist “her” stories that were deployed as political weapons to change “his” stories?

In writing about the subordination of a feminist agenda amongst the Zapatistas, Eisenstein writes: “Women’s issues tend to come behind national issues, and demands for greater equity in the community behind demands placed on the state; patriarchy, in other words, will once again be dealt with only after capitalism and racism” (204). While it is certainly true that oral testimonies, bearing witness, poetry, and taking “cargo,” are important in disseminating information and recording histories and “her” stories, the declarations of injustice do not go far enough to alleviate gendered reproductive inequity and violence. Ideological rhetoric and the articulation and re-articulation thereof does not a mouth feed, nor go far enough to ensure reproductive justice and freedom from gender specific violence (Eisenstein 204).

In reflecting on the disappointment of 20th century revolutions to produce gender justice Randall writes, “The failure to develop an indigenous feminist discourse and a vital feminist agenda impeded the consolidation that would push an otherwise more humane society forward” (*Gathering Rage* 160). In 2013, in *Che on My Mind*, Randall qualifies her initial focus of a feminist agenda to include an “analysis of power: cross-class, cross-gender, and across the division between vanguard and masses” (128). Randall recognizes that “authoritarian” and “male-centered models” have not worked because they have not been inclusive in “the struggle itself” (*Che*, Randall 128). As a recorder of “nationalistic “his” stories during the revolutionary struggle, I wonder if *at the time*, Randall saw, perhaps,

her own collusion in the omission of a feminist agenda, her own oversight to interrogate this omission. If Harlow's observations are true that "The emergence of radicalized political consciousness, public activism, and organized resistance struggle is embedded in manifold historical circumstances and material conditions, informed by the individual woman's life histories as well as the geopolitical context within which they contest exploitive power and authority" then it is also true that Randall's discourses derive from these very geopolitical contexts (*Barred* 44). Arguably then, Randall, too, was caught up in the patriarchal stranglehold of nationalist sentiment—her testimonies written to arouse Western audiences to Sandinista causes.²⁶

In hindsight, Randall sees the *revolution's* oversight to specifically address feminist concerns, (and particularly for this dissertation, reproductive and productive justice) as a critical impediment to true inclusionary earth democracies.²⁷ In order to begin an interrogation of reproductive inattention, Randall guides us to reexamine "*the relationship between base and superstructure*" to gain some understanding as to the androcentric world in which over and over again men dominate by rule and might (*Gathering Rage* 160). In directing us to examine the concept of base, we are brought once again to Classic Marxism and the omission of women's reproductive and productive labor to the foundational mechanisms that establish patriarchal economies. According to Randall, in patriarchy's house, "women were left outside," in a structure built off the backs of women who were/are denied access to reproductive and productive control (*Gathering Rage* 163). "Under capitalism, we are always up against a system whose viability is based upon our exploitation," as witnessed throughout the reportage in this ethnographic project (Randall, *Gathering Rage* 161). Yet, also reported, but not as strongly articulated is the socio-political

power of traditional *machismo* “whose viability” equally renders/rendered women subject to oppressive exploitation.

To stop exploitation and gender violence and finally construct a world of social justice and gender equality, Randall summons women to “control their own labor” and to “come to know and control their lives,” and, “become center to ourselves and to society, not *other*” (*Gathering Rage* 163). Randall’s call to action places women at the center of social life and reproductive processes, and reinforces one of my fundamental principles—women’s necessary place in imagining an earth democracy of true justice for all. “Because women have been written out of history, and history has been written without us, we must insist on the freedom to remember, recreate, and return to our centrality” (*Gathering Rage* 167).

Randall’s strategy for writing women into “his” story into life is the recollection and retrieval of women’s memory into what I refer to as a collective “her” storiography in which women’s voices speak to and for a society of gendered global justice. “Collective memory is quite literally our history” (*Narratives of Power* 70). To retrieve our memory, we must step outside of power systems that exploit women rendering them silenced, disposable, second skins and “speak with our own voices, to claim the space of our real histories,” learning “to trust our memories, feelings, and experiences” (Randall, *Narrative of Power* 63). Randall is correct in her assertion that this requires a rejection of the “master’s tune,” that silences women who play outside the orchestration—those women who conduct their lives and rhythms from their own self-determined scores and symphonies.²⁸ She concedes that like many women, she had to “walk (and drag myself and crawl and stumble and leap) the distance between consciousness of male power abuse and an understanding of the authoritarian nature of

patriarchy as a system” (Randall, *Narratives of Power* 208). In order for women to recover their collective “her”storiography, she encourages women to consider:

... {w}here we come from how we got here, what possibilities exist for our future lives and those who will come after. The cultures of different groups are preserved and kept alive through each group’s collective memory: tradition, values, shared experience, custom symbol, senses of honor, humor, manner of play, excitement mode of agreement or disagreement, and art, among much else. (Randall, *Narratives of Power* 70)

The retrieval of memory and women’s stories enables both men and women to move their way “feelingly” across the globe with open heart and mind (Randall, *Narratives of Power* 70). Randall moves feelingly through her body to recover the memory of the sexual abuse by her maternal grandfather through body therapy, a topic she explores in *This is About Incest*. It is through this step-by-step process she learns to release the memory of her abuse. In theorizing about memory she is “more convinced that memory is not limited to that part of the body called the brain, but is stored in every cell and clearly in ways we do not yet fully understand (Randall, *Narratives of Power* 71). Failure to recover memory inhibits its release leading to dis-ease that will “inevitably do us harm” (Randall, *Narratives of Power* 71). The resurrection of female memory is crucial not only for women but for contemporary societal structures and its ability to form peaceful human relationships.

For this to happen, however, we must learn how to *listen* or “forever remain irrationally stratified along national, class, race, gender, ethnic, sexual and other lines” (*Narratives of Power* 4). For Randall listening also means being honest and waking up and remembering the impact of U.S. policies throughout Central America:

I think of the decades of shameless support a succession of U.S. administrations gave Somoza, the dictator finally overthrown by the Sandinistas just months before. President Teddy Roosevelt had called the First Somoza ‘a son of a bitch, but...our son of a bitch.’ While enjoying U.S. support, the Somoza family killed and imprisoned thousands, while keeping the great majority of his country’s people in misery. (Randall, *Narratives of Power* 3)

Waking up, bearing witness and taking *cargo* of these “memories” are essential to shaping a humanitarian feminist agenda. Randall is correct in further asserting that our listening must be inclusive of different ethnic regions and political and cultural geographies:

We are going to have to listen in other parts of the world, hear why they hate us and change our behavior so decent people everywhere will feel as compelled as we do to route out violence of every kind. Only a village in which we respect one another—as well as our earth and the creatures that inhabit it with us—will be capable of creating lasting peace, a true security. (Randall, *Narratives of Power* 21)

Randall’s work provides a model for ethnographic listening, free of socio-political academic constraints, otherwise inhibiting her work if she were tied to institutional bureaucracies.²⁹ Her oral histories of courageous revolutionary women willing to “risk a somersault in the air” for social justice provide lessons for ethnographic listening – a process which invites us to open our hearts, minds, and souls and truly listen to the stories that are shared. In gathering our rage and consciousness, she challenges readers to *listen* in order to

reexamine power structures. Randall's work allows her readers to join alongside her in this ethnographic space of listening. For she insists: "We, the witnesses, must listen, despite our increased conditioning that what takes place in distant lands and to people different from ourselves is no concern of ours" (Randall, *Women, Terror, and Resistance* 1140-42). Her discourses enable readers to witness alongside her the revolutionary stories of struggle and survival in a space of ethico-political engagement. In this womanspace of shared stories, Randall urges: "Ours must also be an active listening, one that enables us to respond, to act" (*Women, Terror, and Resistance* 1140-42).

Randall's listening is part of a three-prong strategy for achieving gender justice: Remembering, Listening, and Sharing. Randall's purpose is to awaken *memories* of patriarchal abuse, to *listen* to the stories of injustices and *share* those stories locally, regionally, nationally, and globally in order to promote more equitable global institutions and a humane livable world. Her oral histories and memory work embraces the urgent subsistence needs of many of the world's populations living under both socialist and capitalist patriarchies that offer little socio-economic relief to women's reproductive and productive deprivations.

Her argument is that humanity's desire for social justice is universal; all human beings must have equal status and access to human rights, regardless of race, culture, class, or ethnicity. Randall refutes the capitalist patriarchal impositions on women's bodies and livelihoods, conceding to the failure of twentieth century revolutions to truly develop a feminist agenda. Gender equality is "an integral part of social change and should be elemental to revolutionary thought as class struggle and issues of diversity" (Randall, *Narratives of Power* 200). The prioritization of the reassessment of power is the only way to

produce reproductive justice. She argues that “Until those in control of the economy, political power and social relationships, prioritize an analysis and reassessment of power—and act to insure its equal distribution—revolutionary projects will remain truncated and vulnerable” (Randall, *Narratives of Power* 200).

Influenced by the Hopi Elder’s message, which she understands to be about power, Randall reinforces her female centered consciousness to posit: “‘We are the ones we’ve been waiting for,’” which means each of us must risk everything for a viable future (*Narratives of Power* 211).³⁰ Randall’s passionate rhetoric of listening is foundational to her visions of human collectivity.

In this chapter, I have argued that Randall’s discourses on gender and reproductive violence during periods of revolutionary transitions provide valuable documentation as to how women engage, negotiate, and resist gender specific violence and the politicization of their bodies—her discursive documentation invaluable for writing human rights. Randall’s cultural production and theorization on women’s participation in revolutionary movements provide a deeper understanding of how gender must be a constitutive factor in the structuring of revolutionary organizations and agendas. Margaret Randall’s insights on the failures of the Sandinista Revolution to develop a feminist agenda is crucial for women engaged in revolutionary leadership and struggles in the Philippines, Nepal, India, Central America, Africa and other geographic locations.

Notes:

¹ See Kate Doyle's "Tlatelolco Massacre: Declassified U.S. Documents on Mexico and the Events of 1968." National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 10.

² David Richard Radell, "Native Depopulation and the Slave Trade: 1527-1578," in his *An Historical Geography of Western Nicaragua: The Spheres of Influence of León, Granada, and Managua, 1519-1965* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1969), pp. Walker, Thomas W.; Wade, Christine J. (2011-01-04). *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle* (Kindle Locations 578-579). Westview Press. Kindle Edition.

³ Advocates of Liberation Theology included both lay people and clergy working together to advocate for a social justice action agenda.

⁴ For further discussions of Giorgio Agamben theory on the politicization of bare life see *Homo Sacer* 41.

⁵ Mothers as social activists collectively joining together to bring attention to human rights violations and injustices has been documented throughout Latin and Central America in Jo Fisher's *Mothers of the Disappeared* and Marjorie Agosin's *Mothers of Plaza de Mayo*.

⁶ Ernesto Cardenal later became Minister of Culture implementing *poesia de taller*, workshops that inspired the writing of poetry amongst the working class during the early years of the Sandinista Government (Harlow, *Barred* 15).

⁷ See Carlos Vilas, *The Sandinista Revolution: National Liberation and Social Transformation in Central America*. New York, Monthly Review Press, 1986, 108-109.

⁸ Glenda Monterrey, "The FSLN Opened the Door for Us." *The Nicaragua Reader: Documents of a Revolution under Fire*. Eds. Peter Rosset and John Vandermeer. New York: Grove Press. 1983: 325.

⁹ Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), "The Historic Program of the FSLN." *The Nicaragua Reader: Documents of a Revolution under Fire*. Eds. Peter Rosset and John Vandermeer. New York: Grove Press, 1983: 144.

¹⁰ VII. Emancipation of Women

The Sandinista people's revolution will abolish the odious discrimination that women have been subjected to compared to men; it will establish economic, political, and cultural equality between woman and man.

- A. It will pay special attention to the mother and child.
- B. It will eliminate prostitution and other social vices, through which the dignity of women will be raised.
- C. It will put an end to the system of servitude that women suffer, which is reflected in the tragedy of the abandoned working mother.
- D. It will establish for children born out of wedlock the right to equal protection by the revolutionary institutions.
- E. It will establish day-care centers for the care and attention of the children of working women.
- F. It will establish a two-month maternity leave before and after birth for women who work.

G. It will raise women's political, cultural, and vocational levels through their participation in the revolutionary process.

¹¹ Randall's photograph of Ana Julia Guido dressed in olive green army combat from head to toe with a military rifle by her side as her lips open wide to the camera in a half smile provides evidence of working machista military women.

¹² Maria reports *compañeros* expecting *compañeras* to "screw" them (Kempwirth 415).

¹³ Margaret Randall's inclusion of this story in her text and of course my analysis of Luisa's story as an object of academic inquiry is included within these political activities.

¹⁴ Chinchilla, "Revolutionary Popular Feminism in Nicaragua: Articulating, Class, Gender, and National Sovereignty." *Gender and Society* Vol. 4 No. 3, 1990.

¹⁵ Criminal Code Law 641 declares all forms of abortion criminalizing abortion "in all circumstances, even if the life or health of the woman or girl is at risk, or she is a victim of rape," imposing long "prison sentences on women and girls who seek or obtain an abortion" in addition to abortion providers (Nicaragua: Amnesty International submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review 19th Session of the UPR Working Group, April-May 2014).

¹⁶ Maria Mies refers to this as "the ideology of the eternal victim" (*Patriarchy and Accumulation* 165).

¹⁷ Similar conclusions are corroborated in "Listen to their Voice and Act: Stop the Rape and Sexual Abuse of Girls in Nicaragua," a report published in November 2010, *El Instituto de Medicina Legal's* 2008 study and findings from *Movimiento contra el Abuso Sexual* (Witte-Lebhar 1).

¹⁸ According to Christian Chartier, a spokesman for the court, "This is a landmark indictment because it focuses exclusively on sexual assaults, without including any other charges." She further notes that: "There is no precedent for this. It is of major legal significance because it illustrates the court's strategy to focus on gender-related crimes and give them their proper place in the prosecution of war crimes" (Simons, Marlise. "U.N. Court, for First Time, Defines Rape as War Crime." *New York Times* 28 June, 1996.

¹⁹ See: Doyle, McManus and Larry Rohter. "Nicaragua Rebels Accused of Abuses." *New York Times*. Mar 07 1985.

²⁰ (See the works of Diane Nelson, Alicia Portnoy, and Dette Denich).

²¹ While Browdy likens "ensuring democracy" as a euphemism for "securing safe conditions for imperialist capitalism," I believe it is important to clarify the nature of this global patriarchal project (3).

²² See Munczek DS, Tuber S. "Political repression and its psychological effects on Honduran children." *Soc Sci Med*. 1998 Dec. 47(11):1699-713.

²³ Because of her writings, Randall became the target of government and paramilitary investigation and harassment in Mexico and sent her children to Cuba for protection while she disappeared from oppressive authorities, who later confiscated her passport. The sending of her children to Cuba,

causes Randall great emotional, spiritual and physical anguish, which “wracked” her “gut” as well as her attempts to regain entry and U.S. (89). In the end, friends, writers, students, and politicians come to her aid to speak on her behalf, as one woman writes, “your books... they’re really important” (*Coming Up for Air* 121).

²⁴ Randall reports attacks ranging from “viscous hate-mail” to “almost being pushed off the freeway” (*Coming Up for Air* 109). She also reports support from people around the country who believed in her right of expression.

²⁵ Randall reports attacks ranging from “viscous hate-mail” to “almost being pushed off the freeway” (*Coming Up for Air* 109). She also reports support from people around the country who believed in her right of expression.

²⁶ Randall’s discourses provide substantial historical evidence for researchers to interrogate specific gender violence during this time period.

²⁷ I emphasize revolution as opposed to Randall’s culpability in failing to proffer a feminist agenda.

²⁸ I define memory according to Randall’s definition “as the ability to hold, retrieve, articulate and refer back to an experience in whatever part of our being (68).

²⁹ See Carolyn Nizzi Warmbold’s “Women of the Mosquito Press: Louise Bryant, Agnes Smedly, and Margaret Randall as Narrative Guerillas.” Diss. University of Texas at Austin, 1990.

³⁰ Message from Hopi Elders

You have been telling the people that this is the Eleventh Hour, now you must go back and tell the people that this is the Hour. And there are things to be considered...

Where are you living?

What are you doing?

What are your relationships?

Are you in right relation?

Where is your water?

Know your garden.

It is time to speak your Truth.

Create your community.

Be good to each other.

And do not look outside yourself for the leader.

This could be a good time! There is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid. They will try to hold on to the shore. They will feel they are being torn apart and will suffer greatly.

Know the river has its destination. The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open, and our heads above the water.

See who is in there with you and celebrate. At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally. Least of all, ourselves. For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey comes to a halt. The time of the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves!

Banish the word struggle from your attitude and your vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. (*Narratives of Power* 176)

CHAPTER FOUR

PATRIARCHAL SCIENTIFIC PROJECTS AND STOLEN LIVELIHOODS IN THE
WORKS OF BESSIE HEAD

The whole world is crashing and inter-changing itself and even remote bush villages in Africa are not to be left out!

Head, *A Woman Alone*

Babies die most easily of starvation and malnutrition; and yet, within this pattern of adaptation people crowd in about the mother and sit, sit in heavy silence, absorbing the pain, til, to the mother, it is only a dim, dull ache folded into the stream of life. It is not right.

Head, *A Woman Alone*

Bessie's Head's writing explores personal journeys and interpersonal relationships within a changing socio-political schemata. Her inward interrogations of the female psyche during moments of transitions reveal deep layers within political and family structures of native peoples adapting to independence in South Africa. Within this space of ideological contestation, female identities are described, inscribed, and re-inscribed in a dialectical pattern of power, struggle, and resistance. Synthesizing Spivak's "rhetorically sensitive approaches" to read for "literariness," and McClintock's politics of female agency, I examine the double bind in Bessie Head's characters as "ethical agents of production" to produce epistemological possibilities. I read *A Question of Power*, against Anzaldua's "radical visions of transformation" and *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *Collector of Treasures* against Merchant's *Radical Ecology* and Shiva's *Stolen Harvest* (AE 351). Similar to Devi and Randall, Head's discourses "represent[s] an amalgam of reflection, semi-fiction, narrative, journalistic reportage and cultural comment" (Head, *Alone* xiii). Although Head defied genre categorization, as some of her works are "short descriptive observations, some are fictional or semifictional, some historical stories," she was

influenced by African oral culture tradition and “liked to refer to her short stories as tales” (Head, *Tales of Tenderness and Power* 10). Head’s borderland consciousness and her deep restless bewilderment not only informs her narratives, but leads to her personal collapse alienating her from her family, her South African homeland, and her connection to the Botswana community. Moreover, these exilic tales challenge genre designation and ultimately materialize in the psychic and reproductive fragmentation of many of her characters as well.

Collapsing reproductive systems incapable of supporting cohesive family structures and the livelihoods of its members mark Bessie Head’s life. In “Notes from a Quiet Backwater I,” Head writes, “The circumstances of my birth seemed to make it necessary to obliterate all traces of my family history” (Head, *Alone* 19). Born and raised in Apartheid South Africa, Bessie Emery was birthed by a black stable hand and an upper class white woman in the Pietermaritzburg Mental Hospital. Bessie Amelia Amery, who was divorced at the time of her pregnancy reportedly, had a history of mental illness. Her relationship with the black stable hand was considered to be a criminal violation as South African legislation made it illegal for “extramarital sexual intercourse between blacks and whites” (Sample 2). Head’s mother was put in a mental institution for her transgressions and committed suicide six years after giving birth to Bessie. Upon Bessie’s birth, she was promptly given to an adopted family who returned her at which point she was given to a “coloured foster mother” (Head, *Alone* 19). Head was in foster care until the age of thirteen when she was subsequently removed because “the foster mother fell into a state of abject poverty”(Head, *Alone* 19). According to Stephen Clingman, “Indeed, if sexuality is where desire is active and transgression controlled, it becomes a key symbolic marker for

colonialism, not only because it upholds the boundaries preventing miscegenation, but because it represents also the limit and shape of a whole order of being” (qtd. in Kapstein 81). This is certainly the case for Bessie Head who internalized manifold alienation leading to a fragmented identity of “shattered little bits” in search of psychic, racial, national and sexual wholeness (Head, *Alone* 47). Head’s “soul evolution,” as she refers to it, appears to be connected to the sexual dynamics of masculine power and the struggle for self-autonomy.

Head was sent to a mission orphanage in Durban where the Durban Magistrate’s Court told her the circumstances surrounding her birth and implicated Bessie in the culpability of her mother’s social-sexual transgressions. “Your mother was insane. If you’re not careful you’ll get insane just like your mother. Your mother was a white woman. They had to lock her up as she was having a child by the stable boy who was a native” (Head, *Alone* 20). Kapstein observes that “the magistrate’s pronouncement” and the discursive “power of official documents and histories to exercise control” construct a pattern of discipline and punishment over Head’s life (92).

Head’s passage into the world is initiated by emotional suffering, rejection, and marginalization. In “Refugees and Homecomings: Bessie Head and the End of Exile,” Nixon observes how Head “came to experience the ideas of home and the family not as natural forms of belonging but as unstable artifices, invented and reinvented in racial terms, and conditional upon the administrative designs of the nation state” (116). For Head, rather than the nation acting as an inclusionary force enacting familial and communal ties and interconnections, it excluded her from this national embrace and instead imposed on her the “other” status of strict regulatory measures. Nixon speculates that Head was stuck from 1964-1979 between “two immobilizing documents—a South African exit permit and a

United Nations Refugee Travel Document—both of which denied her a national identity” (Nixon, “Border Country” 111). Because of her refugee status, Head had to account weekly to the police. Head, the “other,” lived within these liminal borders of orphaned, stateless, mixed-race outcast forced to negotiate a sense of belonging. Even in the village of Serowe, Botswana, the community positioned Head alongside the disdained “lighter skinned ‘Bushmen’ or ‘San’” who were referred to in the derogatory term of Masarwa (Nixon 112).

The absence of her parents, the exile from her homeland, and her inability to fit neatly within Botswana’s national and racial distinctions haunt Head stories as she tries to reconcile the racialized, gender, and geographic exteriority that shapes her psychic interiority. The collapse of Head’s family unit and the dislocation of its nuclear members wreak havoc on daily life. In “Tao,” Head comments on how colonizing policies changed patterns and dynamics within the family unit:

Things were different long ago when marriages were arranged by parents and elders of the village, but custom and tradition were broken down by taxation and the resultant enforced labour on the mines many miles away from home. Family life and a home are things of the past and for the future there is only continued uncertainty. (*Tales of Tenderness* 53)

Huma Ibrahim further proposes that even “the simplest aspects of human life, such as parenthood and marriage are stolen from this White woman and Black man just as motherhood and fatherhood are taken away from so many Black South African families through apartheid” (156). The conflicting inner/outer “work-out” of exilic consciousness in turn sculpts Head’s creative processes. Yet, as an adult Head warmly reflects on her mother’s desire to “seek some love and warmth from a black man” (Head, *A Woman Alone*

21). Head's desire to find "some love and warmth" and a sense of the rhythms of life in an "unholy" estranging world affects her "shattering sense of anxiety" and borderland consciousness (Head, *A Woman Alone* 44).

Much of Head's writing traverses these borderlands of belonging and non-belonging as she tries to find meaning amidst the brutal world of apartheid politics that allows such racialized suffering to exist. As Ravenscroft observes, "Bessie Head makes one realize often how close is the similarity between the most fevered creations of a deranged mind and the insanities of deranged societies" (qtd. in Ibrahim 127). Head's exilic prose confronts the binary of race, class, and gender politics—between black and white, male and female, apartheid politics and emancipatory consciousness and liberty. According to Linda Susan Beard, "Head's revisionary prose undermines the binary madness—the formulaic antithesis—that long centuries of de facto apartheid begat long decades of de jure apartheid" (qtd. in Ibrahim 145).

A pioneer of opening spaces for the exploration of indigenous feminist historiography and feminist resistance to phallogentric structures, Head denied identification with "either African nationalism or feminism" (*Tales of Tenderness* 14). Rather Head, believed that "If I had to write *people is people* and not damn white, damn Black" (her emphasis) (*Tales of Tenderness* 17). Adding to her paradoxical character, she considered herself a South African writer; albeit, her discourses are set in Botswana (Head, *Alone* 84). In 1964, after the dissolution of her marriage, Head departed on an exit pass with her son to Botswana. Exiled eight years in Botswana, Head's writing yearns for a sense of belonging to an open indigenous space where for black people "it is possible to dream" (*Alone* 86). Her writing reflects this friction between the personality that seeks tranquility in the peaceful

village of Botswana with her bitter outrage against intolerant and subjugating political systems.

Her specific objection to dehumanizing policies is portrayed in “Son of the Soil,” reportage in which she chronicles South Africa’s “downward slide into hopeless slavery” and how the true historical accounts “of oppression were never recorded” (*Tales of Tenderness* 116). Influenced by her appreciation for Sol T. Plaaje, a delegate of the Native National Congress who opposed the Native’s Land Act and other discriminatory legislative policies, Head recounts how Europeans carved up African lands and appropriated its natural resources forcing native populations to be tenants or squatters on their ancestral lands (*Tales of Tenderness* 117). She recalls in 1833 that the Boers “settled on the back of the black man like a leech,” and resented the abolishment of slavery by the British (*Tales of Tenderness* 117). For Head, the 1948 Boer imposition of apartheid created a “world against which there was no hope of appeal” (*Tales of Tenderness* 117). She recalls that on March 21, 1960, the “son of the soil,” “laid their passbooks down,” to rise up against native dehumanization and the “over-crowded, low-cost municipal outside the big cities” that solely existed “to serve the cities with their cheap labour” (*Tales of Tenderness* 117). One of the protestors used his position as a Radio Bantu announcer to tell the community that “The Boers have a monopoly over everything but they still want a monopoly over our mind[s]...” (*Tales of Tenderness* 123). Many of Head’s discourses address this rigorous “work-out” of decolonization of the mind and body to regain independence and self-autonomy from these dehumanizing monopolies. This is most particularly true in *A Question of Power*.

Head admits that in South Africa, she felt pressured as a writer amidst the daily grind of “oppression and exploitation” (*Alone* 85). Considering herself a “pioneer blazing a new

trail into the future,” Head hoped to “record any hopeful trend” (*Alone* 87). It was in exile in Botswana that Head’s creativity manifested into prolific being opening up channels for the expression of her anxieties, her fears, her hopes. Head writes:

It has surprised me, the extent to which creative writing is often regarded, unconsciously, as a nationalistic activity, and perhaps this expression of national feeling is rather the subdued communication a writer holds with his own society. I have so often been referred to as ‘the Botswana writer,’ while in reality the Botswana personality isn’t as violent as mine. I wasn’t born with gentle inquiring eyes of a cow but amongst black people who always said, when anything went wrong: why don’t we all die? And the subdued tone was: ‘since the white man hates us so much.’ (Head, *A Woman Alone* 129)

Head’s ruminations of her personal contradictions in which she was told that she was “not black enough” and “not white enough” along with her anxieties and hopes kept her in the liminal state of negotiating these contradictions always hopeful of a transcendent space of possibility (Ibrahim 79). The result was a deep-rooted disengagement from an identity politics of exclusion to a Hindu-Buddhist transcendent politics and its universal tenet of “basic goodness and decency.” In spite of the corrupting abuses of political power throughout the local, national, and global system, Head’s steadfast commitment to her ideal of uncovering human kindness in the ordinary rhythms of village life underscores most of her oeuvre.

Questions of Power on the Borderland of Botswana and South Africa

The gap between hopeful idealism and the brutal reality of racialized and gendered politics comes crashing together in turbulent passions and violent acts of oppression in *A*

Question of Power. In this autobiographical “journey into hell,” Head summarizes her understanding of the dialectical interplay between “knowledge of evil, knowledge of its sources, of its true face and the mystery and suffering it inflicts on human life” (*Alone* 85). In Elizabeth’s nocturnal “work-outs,” we not only witness the dialectical struggle between male and female, power and powerlessness, but also the struggle of living within the borderlands of the black and white world, colonizing institutions of apartheid, and diasporic subjectivities. Head writes: “Whatever my manifold disorders are, I hope to get them sorted out pretty soon, because *I’ve just got to tell a story*” (*Alone* 24). Head’s *A Question of Power* becomes a way for her to write through her struggles and dismantle the constrictions of dualistic thought.

Head had lived in Botswana for ten years prior to the publication of *A Question of Power*, which helps to explain the Janus-faced psychic fragmentation between Elizabeth’s interior and exterior worlds. Head depicts the anatomy of her nervous breakdown through her character Elizabeth, a product of miscegenation who shares similar traumas experienced by Head. In the epigraph of the novel, D.H. Lawrence’s poem admonishes of the power of “slow, corruptive levels of disintegrative knowledge” to pull one into a godless “abyss” (Head, *Question of Power* 2). Elizabeth, like Head, internalizes the polarities of her external world and through her disintegration deconstructs the western binary of opposition allegorically represented in the battles between Dan, Sello, and Medusa and their “strange journey into hell” (*Question of Power* 4). Here, we witness how “loosely knit personalities” can be turned into a contesting battleground of “dominant, powerful persons,” competing for control and dominion over her psyche (Head, *Question of Power* 4). In this journey to hell, Head positions her character Elizabeth seized between two commanding male powers that

occupy and torment her nocturnal spaces—spaces where sexual, emotional, and psychological violence reign. Head introduces Sello, characterized as a prophet-like monk in the first section, who attempts to awaken Elizabeth’s soul, introducing his vulnerability to good and evil as both God and Satan. The evil and manipulative Dan materializes in the second section to control Elizabeth’s body and sexually terrorize her with his sadistic infidelities. In one particular nocturnal visit, Dan ecstatically bashes “her head” and “hack(s) her to death between blackouts” (Head, *Question of Power* 193). Dan then turns into a laughing monster imposing on her mind “images of women people raped,” his erected penis assaulting “her head the way he had attacked the vaginas of the nice-time girls he’d displayed before her for a whole year” (Head, *Question of Power* 193). Head’s proclivity for confronting man’s heart of darkness positions Elizabeth within the vicissitudes of its destructive grip to “work-out” the power struggles within the dialectic of good and evil. These grotesque combatant forces replicated in Dan, Sello, and Medusa reflect apartheid’s deeply rooted power struggle and the manifest madness of colonial violence (Borzaga 32). In describing this novel, Head writes:

Patterns of Evil. My third novel, *A Question of Power*, had such an intensely personal and private dialogue that I can hardly place it in the context of a more social and outward looking work I had done. It was a private philosophical journey to the sources of evil. I argued that people and nations do not realize the point at which they become evil; but once trapped in its net, evil has a powerful propelling motion into a terrible abyss of destruction. I argued that its form, design, and plan could be clearly outlined that it was little understood as a force in the affairs of mankind. (*Alone* 92)

Influenced by Bertolt Brecht's *A Choice of Evils*, Head portrays the workings of evil on Elizabeth's psychosocial development.¹ The brutality of these discourses sweeps Elizabeth from the tragedy of apartheid politics in to what Gloria Anzaldua refers to as the borderlands where "the prohibited and the forbidden are its inhabitants" (3). Elizabeth's borderlands have become a space of redoubled contestation and violence as witnessed when her principal warns of her family origins. "Your mother was insane" (Head, *Question of Power* 17). It is within this tragic borderland existence between the polarities of "other" and nonwhite "other," colonized and colonizer, male and female, and life and death that Elizabeth negotiates the tumultuous landscape of her conflicted existence. For Elizabeth this inner torment begins "to sound like South Africa from which she had fled. The reasoning, the viciousness were the sam[e]..." (Head, *Question of Power* 55). In this world, Elizabeth is caught in the anxiety of masculine power, sex, and exploitation of the "high, sexual hysteria" and the "feverish soul of the man" aimed at dominating her (Head, *Question of Power* 171).

In "Sorrow Food," Head refers to man's "downhill" spiral of "booze" and "women" in which a man can say, "here's your five bucks. Africa is one big loose female. Thanks for the ride" (*Tales of Tenderness* 33). The "skidding" collusion of male and female demonstrates a "critical stage of the history of Africa" (*Tales of Tenderness* 33). Head likens Elizabeth to a helpless beetle negotiating the blurring of good and evil, male and female, the beetle on its back flaying to construct "counter-themes of goodness to evil"; yet, powerless against an evil "world of no appeal" (*Question of Power* 63). In spite of the gravity of darkness, Elizabeth's tenacity to struggle with the polarities of good and evil, acknowledges that both extremes are innate aspects of the same psychic consciousness of being. "Nothing

happens in the real world unless it first happens in the images in our heads,” writes Anzaldua (59). Mirroring Head’s own “final howl” of internal battles of images, Elizabeth looks into the depths of both goodness and evil to examine “the basic ingredients of the soul” (Vigne 143). Head writes: “...[f]ew people understand deep horror, fanatical possessiveness, the extremes of emotions, a kind of battle where evil is used to outwit the enemy; or if not outwit—then to sever memories” (Vigne 145). Positioning Elizabeth to confront these wrenching clashes of the soul, Head explores the “big howl”—the mechanisms of suffering and insanity. She does so by getting close to the devil to study his principles (Vigne 175). Head writes, “if the things of the soul are really a question of power then anyone in possession of power of the spirit can be called Lucifer...’It might not be quite the right way to say it but it is one of the last lines in the book from which I take the title” (Vigne 160). For Head, this is the paradoxical nature of excruciating suffering—suffering the necessary imperative to becoming “relaxed and free and ungrasping” (Vigne 147). Suffering—witnessing, and experiencing evil in its many physical, spiritual, and psychological manifestations—is transformative.²

Elizabeth faces two nervous breakdowns throughout her transformative soul journey leaving her son, Shorty to fend for himself to build flying paper objects that will too lift him away from his burdensome reality. Elizabeth’s battles between Dan, Sello, and Medusa become negotiating spaces where her fears and personal injustices are articulated, carrying the tormented afflictions of her emotional past and personal history. In her essay, “A Search for Historical Continuity and Roots,” Head acknowledges that good and evil are two disparate sides of the same world, which she had hoped would interconnect in unison (*Alone* 111). Head reflects that “My personal feeling is that people, when faced with a power

structure that attempts to destroy their humanity, find ways and means of keeping their humanity intact” (*Alone* 124). She further explains how her writing reflects this struggle to move past the binary of good and evil:

From an earlier background, I know of a deep commitment, an involvement in questions of poverty and exploitation and a commitment to illuminating the future for younger generations. I needed an external and continuous world against which to work out these preoccupations. One of my preoccupations was a search for an African sense of historical continuity, a sense of roots, but I remember how tentative and sketchy were my first efforts, not finding roots as such but rather putting on layer after layer of patchy clothing. This patchy clothing formed the background of most of my work. (Head, *Alone* 111-12)

Ibrahim compares Head’s foray into insanity with Michel Foucault’s “social archeology of reason” arguing that “for Head the insanity comes from amassing power which in turn corrupts to the point of making both society and individual evil” (158). Foucault begins with the hypothesis that initiates from the desire to socially exclude through confinement those people who do not conform to social prescriptions. Those individuals who defy established bourgeois conventions are whisked away to social medical facilities for behavioral conformity treatments. Head’s parents defied strict socio-sexual codes unsettling the illusive artifice of secure racial borders in which Bessie becomes both “the bulge and rupture of the limiting membrane of South African society” (Kapstein 81). Women like Bessie Head’s mother, and Elizabeth who had sex outside the acceptable categories of partners were locked up as mad, manifesting “hysterical” behavior stemming

from their womb.³ Certainly, during this historical juncture, it was socially and politically unacceptable and “very dangerous for daughters of upper middle class White English families, or indeed any White families to start producing Black children in South Africa, even in the post apartheid era. Therefore it serves the interest of the bourgeoisie class to categorize such behavior as ‘mad’ or immoral” (Ibrahim 159). Banishment and exile to prison like asylums was the response to admonish society of what happens when individual members transgress socio-political taboos.

As previously mentioned within this historical framework, “an extramarital affair between people of different races not only broke one of the most entrenched social taboos, it was also a punishable offence” (Yousaf 116).⁴ According to B. J F. Laubscher in *Sex, Custom and Psychopathology*, Europeans were able to maintain native behavioral restrictions through the attribution and designation of mental disorders “where the psychotic and defective native becomes a nuisance to European society” (Kapstein 91). Elizabeth’s “passage” through insanity to sanity mirrors Head’s lived historical reality and apartheid’s enduring madness; moreover, this “passage” reflects the pathology of her mother’s suffering and punishment for her life’s choices and circumstances.

What this confinement reveals, according to Foucault, is society’s socio-cultural and ethical directives towards subversive behavior. Foucault employs a 15th century analogy of the ship of fools in which a ship of outcasts are taken from one port to the next searching for a safe harbor, but are always expelled as the captain receives remuneration to keep them at bay.⁵ Foucault demonstrates how a person can become “prisoner of his passage:”

Confined on the ship, from which there is no escape, the madman is
delivered to the river with its thousand arms, the sea with its thousand roads,

to that great uncertainty external to everything. He is a prisoner in the midst of what is the freest, the openest of routes: bound fast at the infinite crossroads. He is the passenger par excellence: that is, the prisoner of the passage. And the land he will come to is unknown—as is, once he disembarks, the land from which he comes. He has his truth and his homeland only in that fruitless expanse between two countries that cannot belong to him. (11)

Foucault clarifies the “passenger par excellence” who like Head and her character Elizabeth border the “infinite crossroads” of the “fruitless expanse” in a perpetual search for meaning and belonging. Foucault’s linkage of madness and oceanic migration is noteworthy for examining the impact of colonial ventures on explorers and indigenous populations. Kapstein observes that the fear and anxiety is a twofold act “of trespassing on foreign land, accompanied by profound fear that the sea voyage or the passage into the interior might itself incite insanity” (Kapstein 88). Similar to the prisoner on the ship of fools Elizabeth journeys through the “uncertainty” of her doubly marginalized existence as a black/white woman drifting between two countries “that cannot belong to him (her)” in a historical purgatory “imposed on her through apartheid, its attending madness, and the Botswana reminder of her foreignness” (Ibrahim 160). Helen Kapstein observes that similar to Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and Doris Lessing’s *The Grace is Singing* (1950), Head situates madness “at the point of passage and on the margin” (89).

It is here at this crossfire of competing socio-cultural relations that Head places Elizabeth on the “margin” and threshold of “sacred” transcendence—on a spiritual migration to personal and cultural identity. Elizabeth’s mental colonial occupation and

territorialization is “the perfect metaphor for colonization—the takeover of body and mind” (Rose 405). Head, herself, ruminates on how she had felt in control of her life up until she was thirty-eight when “conflict due to unaccustomed feelings” possessed and consumed her to the point that the gamut of her emotions vacillated between rage, terror, destruction, and tenderness (*Tales of Tenderness* 47).

Behind the aesthetics of these conflicting emotions is a powerful “political consciousness” of resistance that invites a “critical awareness” that asks the reader to “participate actively in making the history of the world, and not simply to accept passively and without care the imprint of one’s own personality from outside”(Gramsci 59).⁶ In this way, Head reveals the workings of the inner life to reveal itself with all its paradoxical madness and complexities. Embraced in this tormented madness, Head’s madness becomes a discursive site of “resistance to official constructions of reality” in which possibilities exist for her consciousness to grow (Kapstein 72).

In order to do this, Elizabeth must engage in similar processes that Margaret Randall encourages—“rememorying,” integrating, and *listening* to her past in order to engage in the present and envision the future (my emphasis). It is in this madness that “critical awareness” of her lived historical experiences have “left an infinity of traces gathered together without an advantage of an inventory”(Gramsci 59). Elizabeth must take inventory of her stories in order to “work-out” these historical processes. Gramsci emphasizes the importance of repetition of the message in the “role of ideological struggle” in order to achieve a “transformation” and a buttressing of the counter-hegemony (Simon 31). Head employs Elizabeth’s madness as a vehicle to transverse and recollect the historical memories and personal stories of apartheid South Africa. According to Chinweizu, “This means that the

new African historiography must seek out and highlight the adventurous and highly creative periods in African history so we can draw inspiration from them” (Ibrahim 208). Elizabeth must welcome all the socio-cultural, racialized and gendered political stories that shaped her “coming into being” in order to simply be (Ibrahim 208).

Leslie Marmon Silko observes that these shape-shifting stories must be kept alive in the memories of its people and as “long as you remember what you have seen, then nothing is gone and the story can remain alive” (231). Silko’s answer is to revision the ceremony and the stories and poems of America’s native people as, “You don’t have anything if you don’t have the stories” (229). Through Elizabeth’s borderland madness, Head recaptures these shape-shifting stories. In a 1978 interview in *London Magazine*, Head said, “In *A Question of Power* the work-out is so much more subtle. It shows how the narrator, Elizabeth, with good intentions, is so broken down—the whole process of break-down and destruction is outlined there” (Ibrahim 146).

In one of the most climatic “break-down” scenes Elizabeth finally rages at her subjugation: “Oh you, bloody bastard Botswana! You never really liked Africans. You only pretend to. You have no place here. Why don’t you go awa[y]...” (51). Similar to Anzaldua’s poetics and theoretical praxis, Elizabeth’s decolonizing process of the mind and soul bursts open a poetic space of images and metaphors for a catharsis of psychic and cultural integration.

Female fellowship and her reconnection to the land through her garden activities, enables Elizabeth to move past the oppositional cacophony of identity politics and self-definition that haunts her. “After using the madness trope to break down a series of artificial boundaries, then, Head discards it in favor of a more materialistic strategy, grounded in land

and her garden” (Kapstein 96). Elizabeth, like Head, like Anzaldua occupies “this between state” of a necessary unfolding to uproot “dualistic thinking” and revision the world (Anzaldua 102). In this sense, the outer and inner merge in chorus to influence and shape each other and create a new world free of polarities in which “absolute titles has been shared” and where “[t]here are several thousand people who are ‘God’” (Head, *Question of Power* 31) Bessie Head’s Elizabeth has materialized highly fluid spaces of alliances of open-minded peoples who can forge commonalities and shared experiences of mankind “and black people fit in ther[e]...” (*Question of Power* 133). Influenced by Eastern metaphysical thought Elizabeth recognizes that “any assumption of greatness leads to a dog-eat-dog fight and incurs massive suffering. She did not realize it then, but the possibilities of massive suffering were being worked out in her” (Head, *Question of Power* 34). Through her soul journey she witnesses the suffering “poor of Africa” who seek her assistance. “Will you help us? We are a people who have suffered,” they ask (Head, *Question of Power* 26). Their pain and suffering along with her own diasporic history has been transcribed upon her body.

Elizabeth eventually finds solace in the earth in which the garden becomes her mother and the source of fertility and renewal nurture her back to wholeness. Elizabeth’s engagement with Kenosi and Tom, enables her to become grounded in the earth planting and preserving seeds of life. Like the “poor of Africa,” her “seedlings do not wilt or die because they are so strong” (Head, *Question of Power* 161). The reproductive strength and will of the African people is unconquerable. Though Elizabeth’s mental and spiritual decolonizing processes, she rejects a dualistic worldview of nature and its dominating relations of power and reconnects with the strength of ordinary people and the divinity of

ordinary people. In so doing, she reconceptualizes history and dismantles the polarities and ambiguities of living within the borderlands, revisioning a new world order rooted in the ordinary and nurtured in integrity, human dignity and reproductive renewal.

Stolen Livelihoods in *When Rain Clouds Gather*

Bessie Head's first novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather*, is perhaps one of her most "ethico-political" narratives to examine the introduction of modern capitalism and patriarchal science against the haunting spectral of traditional tribal systems in pre-Independence Botswana, a Bechuanaland Protectorate, which won its independence in 1966.⁷ Set in Golema Mmidi, which ironically translates to "grow crops," Head immediately sets the ideological tension between capitalist agricultural and traditional pastoral livelihoods providing a detailed model of how the merging of these systems produced intensive capitalist development by recruiting labor from traditional agricultural structures and supplanting the collective relationship of subsistence farming, kinship systems, and cattle herding with cash crops and individual wage incentives. While some Marxist-feminists posit that pre-class society is categorized by equal and complementary social relations in the sexual division of labor, I argue the contrary showing how traditional subjugating kinship systems existed prior to colonization and capitalism. Instead, I proffer a mode of production theory that scrutinizes gender relations within indigenous systems, to investigate the interconnections of colonialism, capitalism, and development.

Prior to the arrival of the British, the tribals adapted to the conditions of their landscape by living nomadic lives and migrating with their cattle. The introduction of villagization processes created permanent settlement pockets of originally nomadic pastoralists in villages like Golema Mmidi. Here, agricultural livelihoods and pastoral life

merge into a complicated village of “individuals who had fled there to escape the tragedies of life” or were displaced or dispossessed forcing them to make the land the central part of their existence (*Rain Clouds* 16). Head throws a monkey wrench into this fragile world of collapsing socio-political structures and ecosystems with Gilbert’s introduction of modern capitalism and scientific patriarchy. The result is a battle of competing paradigms in a narrative that demonstrates a deeper struggle for reproductive justice. Informed by Carolyn Merchant and Vandana Shiva’s discourses on the necessity of biodiversity for the sustainability of reproductive life, *When Rain Clouds Gather* moreover offers a productive ground for investigating how women’s traditional reproductive and productive livelihoods have been disrupted by the collusion of traditional patriarchy and modern scientific patriarchal projects. Whereas Head’s *A Question of Power* examines the impact of racial apartheid on psychological development, this fictional paradigm, creates an interdisciplinary space for probing ecological apartheid in which scientific violations based on the “logic of extermination” have separated humanity from nature.⁸

In this discussion, I problematize the *mal*-development projects aimed at addressing Golema Mmidi’s reproductive collapse and consider three interrelated concerns. The first concerns the imposition of a mechanistic worldview on indigenous subsistence livelihoods and the subsuming of traditional subsistence systems into dependent capitalist formations. The second concerns the manipulation of traditional land tenure systems, the introduction of cooperative capitalist enterprise in the production of monocultural cash crops, and, more importantly, the deployment and appropriation of women’s labor and “cradle know how” to sustain the production of these exchange commodities (*Serowe* 180). The third concerns the introduction of modern interventionist technologies in the form of “scientific production of

high-grade beef,” “imported seed grass,” and other “imported drought-resistant grasses,” and “tractors,” “planters, harrows, and cultivators.”⁹ A corollary concern to this interventionist technology is the “dynamiting,” “damming” and “enclosing” of Golema Mmidi’s ecosystems. Bessie Head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather* provides a seminal interdisciplinary study to examine “what is at stake for women and nature when traditional methods and norms of biological reproduction are disrupted by interventionist technologies” (Merchant 208). Additionally, the interrelationships in Head’s Golema Mmidi afford a community for epistemological engagement and a place to imagine what Spivak refers to as a “robust notion of responsibility” (*Aesthetic Education* 341).

Influenced by her five-month stay on the Radisele Farm, which in her letter of February 10, 1967 narrates how it was started by “Tshekedi and Guy Clutton-Brock,” Head contrives to construct Golema Mmidi as a hopeful place against the stifling environment of South African apartheid politics (Vigne 50). It is within this space that Head positions her protagonist spiritual idealist Makhaya (Mack) who lives within the triple bind of his Zulu tribal past, his diasporic migrant status in Botswana, and the influence of Western thought – all the while struggling with spiritual dilemmas that haunt his ancestral soul. Having fled South Africa after serving two years in prison for plans to blow up a power plant, Mack seeks refuge in Barolong, Botswana because “he could not marry and have children in a country where black men were called ‘boy and ‘dog’ and kaffir”” (Head, *Rain Clouds* 10). Head immediately sets up the importance of what Maxine Sample refers to as man’s desire for an “affective bond between person and place” (28). Mack flees from a collapsing political system to a collapsing ecosystem—in a search for a sense of belonging and reproductive possibilities (Sample 28).¹⁰ Although Mack says, “It’s not so much what I’m

running away from,” it becomes quite clear that he desires a fertile ground to produce “a wife and children” free of both customs and apartheid politics (*Rain Clouds* 26). After leaving his “mother in a state of complete collapse,” Mack desired to cut the ancestral umbilical cord to a tribal past “that was mentally and spiritually dead through the constant perpetuation of false beliefs” (*Rain Clouds* 10). He disdained concepts of tribalism and “the mentality of the old hag that ruined a whole continent—some sort of clinging, ancestral, tribal belief that a man was nothing more than a groveling sex organ” (*Rain Clouds* 9). This contempt for traditional belief systems affirms his initial renunciation from his tribal roots (*Rain Clouds* 9).¹¹

Instead of finding a flourishing Eden, Mack encounters a collapsing landscape of malnourished children who die from hunger “with their knees cramped up to their chins” (*Rain Clouds* 118) and “where even the trees were dying from the roots upward” (*Rain Clouds* 164). Head suggests that the withering kinship tree of “the royal line of headmen or chiefs,” which once “stretched way back time” to where “a single family often made a nation” has been subjected to myriad traditional, colonial, and patriarchal capitalist destructive impositions (*Serowe* 71).

In describing Paulina’s tribal community Head describes it as once being “the most closely knit of all the tribal groupings, each one claiming at least a distant relationship to even the most insignificant member of the clan” (*Rain Clouds* 70). In *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, she observes how “In those days a single family made a nation”(71). Sadly, this is no longer the case as Paulina’s close knit “family structure began breaking down under the migratory labour system” in which men moved to urbanized areas to work in large companies where maintaining the correct accounting ledgers was privileged over family

relations (Head, *Rain Clouds* 70). Head positions Paulina Sebesco's husband as a casualty of this system who ultimately "hanged himself from a tree in the yard" (*Rain Clouds* 71). Paulina and her two children are later dispossessed by the "certain large company" for whom her husband worked (*Rain Clouds* 71).

On the other hand, traditional epistemologies have also led to destructive tendencies as in the case of the secretive and secluded Mma-Baloi who was allegedly accused of being a witch because of the "surprising number of child deaths in the village of Bodibeng" (Head, *Rain Clouds* 47). To the villagers, the deaths of the children and Mma-Baloi's strange behavior were connected. After the postmortem investigation of the body of a young woman, it is discovered that she "had died of a septic womb due to having procured an abortion with a hooked and unsterilized instrument" (*Rain Clouds* 47). According to the report, "the septic condition of the womb had been of three months' duration" (*Rain Clouds* 47).¹² In this case, we witness the underlying despair of women living under depleting traditional patriarchal systems. Faced with birthing another child into extreme conditions in which death by starvation is an ordinary occurrence, women choose to empty their wombs as a form of reproductive survival.

Mack welcomes "Gilbert's scientific perspective" as an alternative to these "retrogressive" traditional systems of destructive ancestral beliefs (Head, *Rain Clouds* 130). "It was he, Makhaya, the individual, who was seeking his own living life because he was fearful of the living death a man could be born into" (*Rain Clouds* 131). Embracing similar notions of individualism as Gilbert, Mack recognizes his place in the collective suffering of mankind as well as "his own separateness" from humanity (*Rain Clouds* 75). Head situates Mack within this contested space of socialism and capitalism, subsistence livelihoods and

scientific agro-improvements, tribalism and nationalism. She is meticulous to point out the competing ideologies in which “sons of chiefs, and “sons of slaves” compete amidst attacks of “imperialists and neo-colonists who were still skillfully manipulating the affairs of an oppressed people” (*Rain Clouds* 58). Gathering missionaries, NGOs, and political dung slinging from above and below, Head invokes the “second scramble for Africa” under the direction of patriarchy and subordinate assistance of her strong female characters (who as usual) perform all the dung mixing (*Rain Clouds* 59).

Dinorego’s wise declaration that “most of the trouble is caused by people from outside” doesn’t stop Head’s outsiders from collaborative co-operative enterprise. South African outsider Mack dedicates his life to joining forces with outsider English agriculturalist Gilbert, another robust “intellectual” head bent on improving the conditions of the impoverished by introducing modern agricultural methods. Described as a “giant” and “dressed in the stereotypical “short khaki pants” of a British do-gooder, Gilbert arrives on the African landscape “seeking some new challenge” from his previous life in England (Head, *Rain Clouds* 23). Head roughly bases Gilbert on Vernon Gibberd who she describes as a “big agricultural man” who she worked with at the Bamangwato Development Farm (Vigne 220). She claims much of her agricultural knowledge is informed by working with Gibberd and his agricultural papers (Vigne 221).

After visiting three years prior on a “student travel grant,” Gilbert is allegedly inspired to take on the White Man’s Burden and venture into a career in “agricultural development and improved techniques of food production” (Head, *Rain Clouds* 17). Perhaps, the connection between student overseas travel to the Global South and the implementation of agricultural assistance activities is one of the reasons why *When Rain*

Clouds Gather is on the *Peace Corps 2014 Botswana Welcome Book* so that other aspiring Gilberts too can contribute their Western knowledge “at the service of the country” (*Rain Clouds* 18).¹³ Gilbert—“the gigantic storage house of facts and figures and plans and intuitive judgments and impressions”—speaks to Mack’s longing for an ordered world where the sun can shine benevolence on the poor and forgotten (*Rain Clouds* 76). For Mack, Gilbert’s enlightenment reason can do more than a sun that failed to reach the poor and “shut-away worlds where the sunlight never penetrated, haunted worlds, full of mistrust and hate” (*Rain Clouds* 76).

Makhaya considers Gilbert’s mind to be similar to a “loud humming” stop-watch whose spinning “wheels kept on turning at such a fast pace” that Makhaya becomes dumbstruck into serving Gilbert’s mechanistic worldview of nature. Merchant proffers that the mechanistic worldview “arose with the support of early capitalism,” replacing Renaissance concepts of “nature as a living organism with nurturing earth at the center” with a *Baconian* “ethic of domination” (11). Gilbert’s scientific patriarchal machinations are rooted in the “mechanistic science of the seventeenth century” (Merchant 70). Gilbert’s ethical intentions to employ the natural habitat of Golema Mmidi at the service of commodity production of Turkish tobacco represents one of the “central tenets” of commercial capitalism —“the use of nature as commodity” (Merchant 70). Gilbert’s mechanistic view runs contrary to the existing subsistence economy, which he blames for the dire conditions and ecological destruction, contending that “the people engaged in subsistence farming were using primitive techniques that ruined the land” (Head, *Rain Clouds* 17). Yet, Head observes that people battling to survive on the “barest necessities” is as old as the land itself (*Serowe* ix). For Gilbert, “nature, the human body, and animals all

could be described, repaired, and controlled, as could the parts of a machine, by a separate human mind acting accordant to natural laws” (Merchant 71). Ecofeminist and alternative Nobel Peace Prize winner Vandana Shiva argues the contrary positing that “Subsistence economies which satisfy basic needs through self provisioning are not poor in the sense of being deprived” (Shiva, *Staying Alive* 10). Referencing *Poverty: the Wealth of the People* by an unnamed African writer, Shiva observes the “otherness” of the culturally perceived poverty of subsistence economies, which motivates Gilbert’s do-gooder plans. Shiva distinguishes between the “poverty as subsistence, and misery as deprivation” (10).

According to Shiva:

Culturally perceived poverty need not be real material poverty; subsistence economics, which satisfy basic needs through self-provisioning are not poor in the sense of being deprived. Yet the ideology of development declares them so because they do not participate overwhelmingly in the market economy, and do not consume commodities produced for the distribution through the market *even though they might be satisfying those needs through self-provisioning mechanism[s]* ... [A]s a culturally biased project [development] destroys wholesome and sustainable lifestyles and creates real material poverty, or misery, by the denial of survival needs themselves, through the diversion of resources to resource intensive commodity production. (Shiva, *Staying Alive* 10)

Within Gilbert’s scientific patriarchal mindset, he cannot understand the indigenous subsistence perspective based on nature’s systems of reproduction and renewability in which food security is harvested by women the color of the soil (Head, *Rain Clouds* 118).

Moreover, Gilbert recognizes that if he is to implement his foreign NGO-backed “grand scheme” of co-operative enterprise, he must enlist Makhaya, “someone with the necessary mental and emotional alienation from tribalism to help him accomplish what he had in mind” (*Rain Clouds* 24). Since Makhaya has ties to the indigenous Zulu tribe, he will be able to assist Gilbert’s ability to manipulate “the complexity of the land tenure system,” which he believed “was a hindrance to agricultural progress” (*Rain Clouds* 32). Because of Gilbert’s attack on the traditional land tenure system, which was “designed to protect the interests of the poor and to prevent the land from falling into the hands of a few rich people” he found himself flailing in the vortex of a “violent storm” of ideology with Chief Matenge who is dead set on maintaining traditional land tenure holdings (*Rain Clouds* 32).

Head’s conflicting anti-tribalism attitude surfaces in her depiction of the greedy Matenge; yet, Matenge, in all his psychological complexity, sees land as a key social component and unifying factor that nourishes indigenous identity and spiritual connections to each other and their village community. Under the traditional system, “ownership of the land was vested in the tribe as a whole” and “no man could claim that he had purchased a plot of tribal land and anyone who asked was merely allocated a portion free of charge by a chief” (Head, *Rain Clouds* 32). Gilbert must rhetorically backtrack and qualify his proposition to forever alter the traditional tribal land tenure system by declaring that “co-operative organization was similar to communal ownership of land” (*Rain Clouds* 32). The clash between Gilbert and Matenge over customary land usage offers an inquisitive space for understanding tribal land policies and issues within Golema Mmidi’s changing landscape.¹⁴ Within this dynamic exists the inner tribal conflict between Chief Matenge, who tries to preserve traditional customs and his position within the tribal community. The

villagers of Golema Mmidi must adapt, accommodate, and, or, dismiss the environmental, technological, and ideological forces challenging their community.¹⁵ Incapable of suppressing the changing socio-economic and political forces in Golema Mmidi and strong “outsider” voices inhabiting this landscape, Matenge like Chinua Achebe’s Okonkwo kills himself.

The privatization of communal land holdings and increased technological agricultural development has had a devastating impact on sustainable livelihoods rendering tribal populations vulnerable to hunger and collapsing kinship structures. Although Gilbert masks his intention in do-good rhetoric of cooperative enterprise, his economic model is shaped by capitalist patriarchy and strategically rooted in the economics of development and bottom line productivity, which has led to growing economic disparities and reproductive inequities throughout the Global South. The key assumptions of Gilbert’s “grand scheme” appears to be based on individualistic motivations of self-interest disruptive to indigenous notions of community and traditional notions of place. Hence, as “Gustavo Esteva assert[s] ... development has to be refuted because it threatens survival itself” (qtd. in Shiva, *Staying Alive* 13).

The implementation of Gilbert’s agricultural development plans not only demonstrates a masculinist shift of farming as “a process of generating profits,” but moreover a hegemonic imposition of dualistic thinking between man and nature (Shiva, *Staying Alive* 97). Gilbert’s logocentric ethic further motivates him to want to “show everyone else just how quickly things could really change, how ordinary people could get up and do things for themselves and produce enough for their needs and have some left over for sale” (Head, *Rain Clouds* 182). According to Gilbert:

Large chunks of the year went by just watching the sunrise and sunset, and who knew too if the subsistence man did not prefer it this way? It was easy, almost comparable to the life of the idle rich, except that the poor man starved the year round. Not in Africa had the outcry been raised, but in the well-fed countries. Something had to be done about the man who lived on subsistence agriculture, because without his co-operation the world could not be properly fed. Gilbert took this a little further. Voices had to be raised in Africa too, and they had to come from men like Makhaya who deeply craved a better life, not only for themselves, but for all these thousands and thousands of people who walked around with no shoes. (Head, *Rain Clouds* 118)

Herein, lies another contested battleground between indigenous customs and modernized agriculture in a village with a predominantly cattle existential focus—which leads to another concern: the introduction of monocultural cash crops. Gilbert, like today’s international farming conglomerates represents patriarchal science, patriarchal capitalism, and the masculinization of traditional agricultural practices.¹⁶

According to Gilbert’s paradigm for profit, Golema Mmidi’s ecosystems make it desirable to grow Turkish tobacco for cigarettes.¹⁷ Not only is Turkish tobacco conducive to the bioregion, but “very good cash crop too, and if everyone in Golema Mmidi grows a bit and we market it co-operatively—why, we’ll all be *rich* in no time” (my emphasis) (Head, *Rain Clouds* 54). Gilbert’s political economy joins two fundamental concepts—capital accumulation and reproduction. Gilbert perceives growth and its intersected means of production as driven by profits, expansion of the market, gender division of labor, and

forces of production. Gilbert's capital accumulation depends on reproduction, which includes biological reproduction of his labor force and social reproduction of its male privileged social systems. Gilbert's scheme is not gender neutral as while Paulina is cast as stage manager of this production team, she is not an equal partner in Gilbert's "development" enterprise. Rather, his system, which on the surface appears to provide a new form of food and water security and female liberation intensifies inequalities, placing women and nature in subordinate positions at each different level of production. Gilbert had felt that "he had stumbled onto one of the major blockages to agricultural progress" the failure to incorporate women into development plans (*Rain Clouds* 28). Although women "were the traditional tillers of the earth, not the men," (*Rain Clouds* 28) it was the men who were trained in biotechnical destruction in "the use of pesticides and fertilizers, and the production of cash crops" (*Rain Clouds* 29). Gilbert's get "rich" production scheme, involves the dismantling of these traditional kinship arrangements with the gendered animation of women to cultivate, cure, and dry the tobacco in addition to hauling the mud to construct the storing sheds (*Rain Clouds* 94).

Here, we witness one of the first instances of violence against women's subsistence livelihoods by the seduction and integration of women's economy into his plan. "Ecology is the science of the household, economics is supposed to be the management of the household. When economics works against the science of ecology, it results in the mismanagement of the earth and its resources" (Shiva, *Making Peace with the Earth* 14). Enlisting women to engage in the rape of nature, the rape of their own livelihoods is an egregious violation against ecology and humanity as a whole.

Agri-technocrat Gilbert has his own visionary ethics of obtaining “paradise,” and equips the women with “pickaxes and spades” to scrape out the foundation for the many sheds that are needed to dry the tobacco. Head portrays Gilbert’s animated female soldiers stepping in line to the patriarchal development tune of environmental destruction dreaming of a Gilbert or Makhaya to save them from their plights (*Rain Clouds* 103). The very idea of women switching from subsistence crops needed to feed their families to the single production of Turkish cash crops to sell at the market under the direction of a white male scientist highlights perhaps one of the major concerns of indigenous farmers—food security. Crop diversity is essential in maintaining bio diverse ecosystems and the production of edible food supplies. Studies have shown that Gilbert’s maximization of tobacco production over other food crops will impair the “natural integrity of the resource base necessary for food production by eroding biological diversity, promoting pest and disease infestation, depleting soil fertility, and requiring massive application of harmful agrochemicals” (Gonzalez 432).¹⁸ Contrary to Gilbert’s speculations, monocultures not only instigate collapse of the ecosystem, cash production of monocrops have exasperated sustainable livelihoods by undermining basic food security. Gilbert’s plan to move to Turkish tobacco and cash crop production not only disrupts women’s roles as providers of subsistence crops for family sustenance, but channels food production to commodity production for export. His cash-cropping scheme entails the extraction of land and labor from mothers as well as the enticements to mothers who will be able to buy commodities with generated income.

Gilbert realizes that to consolidate patriarchal power between European men, Tswana elders, tribal leaders and development officials he must integrate women to support their accumulation and growth in the capitalist sector.¹⁹ Eisenstein observes:

When one states that capitalism needs patriarchy in order to operate efficiently one is really noting that male supremacy, as a system of sexual hierarchy, supplies capitalism (and systems previous to it) with the necessary order and control. This patriarchal system of control is thus necessary to the smooth functioning of the society and the economic system and hence should not be undermined... Capitalism uses patriarchy and patriarchy is defined by the needs of capital. (Eisenstein 27-28)

Certainly, Gilbert recognizes that it is the women who have in the past engaged in small-scale subsistence farming, and like today's international farming conglomerates strategically enlist women's assistance to do all the agricultural dirty work, including the building of seed storage huts under the supervision of Mack's love interest, headstrong Paulina.

Again, we witness how for many African women, the discourses of labor and reproduction are interdependent discourses. Gilbert's agricultural production schemes demonstrates how "the politics of food is gendered at multiple levels" (Shiva, *Staying Alive* xvi). The women in Head's Golemi are cast "like Frankenstein monsters, only animated by the white man for his own needs" in this case it's development guised as "economic growth" (*Rain Clouds* 128). Head's female characters take up Gilbert's vision of "Turkish Tobacco" harvesting in which the influential Paulina Sebesco and Mma-Millipede are enlisted to persuade other women to "attend classes" on how to "cultivate" in their own yard[s]..." (*Rain Clouds* 101). The dependence on male saviors in this story seems to legitimate a political, social, and economic dependence on patriarchy. Gilbert and Maka replace the Tswana kinship system with a European version of *dikgosi* royals and "heroes."

Their grand entrances suggest a fusion of patriarchal privilege in a narrative in which men waltz on stage in heroic proportions with theatrical displays of great determination and optimism. Similar to the men Head idolized—Khama the Great (1875-1923), Tsheledi Khama (1926-59), and Patrick Van Rensburg (1963-)—her fictional characters make “great gestures” to “change the world” (*Serowe* xiv).

Head’s account of the masculinization of farming and the manipulation of Golema Mmidi’s crop farming foreshadows the shift from local control crops raised on women’s traditional knowledge and productivity to monocrop commodities driven by transnational patriarchs, the global market, and corporate monopolies. As Enloe points out in *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*, these “attempts to reform agrarian politics—in the name of nationalism or development—have failed to change patriarchal relationships” or ensure reproductive security (150). For what Gilbert perceives as cooperative agricultural development is in reproductive terms vastly destructive production. Not only is crop diversity usurped by inedible monocrop tobacco production, but also women’s traditional skills of maintaining subsistence food security are supplanted by crop cash production.²⁰ “When these resources are already being used by nature to maintain her production of renewable resources and by women for sustenance and livelihood, their diversion to the market economy generates a scarcity condition for ecological stability and creates new forms of poverty for women” (Shiva, *Staying Alive* 9). The violence intrinsic of mono-cash-crop commodity production is violence against women’s reproductive and productive livelihoods and “nature’s biodiversity.” Shiva is correct in her assessment on food security: “When the household and community are food-secure, the girl child is food-secure” (Shiva, *Staying Alive* xvi).

In a place “where people ought not to live” and sustainable sources are scarce, people and cattle sulk across the landscape together searching for food and water sources to survive (Head, *Rain Clouds* 19). For women like Paulina, “cattle were all that stood between her children and outright starvation” (*Rain Clouds* 136). Makhaya’s suggestion to Paulina “to sell the damn beasts” upsets Paulina’s existential world in which the belief persists that a “Motswana without any cattle might as well be dead” (*Rain Clouds* 137). In Head’s Golemi, cattle begin to drop like flies, one man’s herd reduced from 200 to 80. Head situates Gilbert’s accompanying proposal for “scientific production of high-grade” as the antidote for “low grade beef” on a perishing landscape precipitated by “uncontrolled grazing” (*Rain Clouds* 29). For Gilbert, “there was a serious reason for finding urgent solutions: the country was in the grip of a severe drought, which had already lasted five years and was becoming worse with each succeeding year” (*Rain Clouds* 29). Gilbert’s proposition for herd reduction incorporates a “corned beef” venture based on an “accelerated slaughter of emaciated beasts at the abattoir,” which would then be “boiled down to corned beef” (*Rain Clouds* 149). His plans to “beef up” the remaining cattle include the “latest development in fodder crops for cattle feed and silage-making and his own experiments with the natural grasses of Botswana and imported seed grass” (*Rain Clouds* 149).

It is unclear whether in addition to imported seed grass, Gilbert also proposes a “drought-resistant type of grass seed,” or if it is one in the same that is sown as he tries to judge “whether indigenous grasses or imported drought-resistant grasses would be best suited for cattle grazing” (Head, *Rain Clouds* 33). Regardless, his pursuit for drought resistant seeds extends to the “drought resistant millet seed,” which is engineered to retain water in arid locations (*Rain Clouds* 35). Although tribals prefer sorghum and maize to

millet, and consider those who do eat it “inferior,” Gilbert’s engages in “intensive research” studies on millet production in contra-indication to traditional eating habits. According to Gilbert:

Yet fifteen thousand varieties of millet had been tested in the country, and the authorities had initially bred a type that could produce a crop in only three inches of rain, with a few most-needed advantages. Witchweed, which is a parasite that is germinated by and lives on the root of maize and sorghum plants, stunting their growth, was germinated by this type of millet as well, yet the plant remained unaffected by it. (Head, *Rain Clouds* 35)

Gilbert’s scheme to introduce a genetically modified drought resistant seed situates him as a pioneer of Botswana’s biotechnical Green Revolution.²¹ What Gilbert’s “research” does not tell him is that the reproductive genetic engineering of millet seed has the potential of cross-contaminating other food crops disrupting Golema Mmidi’s bio-diverse ecosystems and food security by introducing viruses and bacteria to existing food crops (Shiva, *Making Peace with the Earth* 190). “While increased food productivity is the argument used to promote genetic engineering, when the issue of potential adverse impacts on farmers is brought up, the biotechnology industry itself argues that genetic engineering does not lead to increased productivity” (Shiva, *Making Peace with the Earth* 172). Patriarchal science and what Vandana Shiva refers to as the imposition of a “production boundary” has not only failed nature’s ecosystems it has usurped and devastated women’s reproductive livelihoods. What Gilbert, the vanguard of stress-responsive transgenic seed, cannot foresee is that “genetic engineering is thus not a reliable technology for drought tolerance” (Shiva, *Making Peace with the Earth* 189).

Adding to the crisis is Gilbert's plan for disrupting the natural water cycle of Golema Mmidi, which entails a militarized strategy for creating a "network of boreholes and reservoirs," by damming and dynamiting the ecosystems into subservience (Head, *Rain Clouds* 108). His desire for constructing a "paradise" in his own image entails blasting "out with dynamite" large mud pits to be filled with "polythene and the sides to be supported with sandy, concrete-filled plastic" for collecting water (*Rain Clouds* 131). Juxtaposed against the destructive images of blasts and explosions, Makhaya ruminates on the interconnectedness of nature's innocent creatures as he witnesses "the soft juicy bodies of white ants, and thousands of birds" whose survival depended on "these juicy morsels" (*Rain Clouds* 132). Paradoxically, while the cattle are dropping dead, the ants are still "soft and juicy," capable of maintaining their existence within the natural life cycle of its bioregion without Gilbert's masculinist irrigation and water management machinations. Of course, under his plans even the "soft and juicy" ants will be blasted to smithereens.

Head ultimately constructs a paradigm where traditional patriarchy and capitalist patriarchy combine to impose production boundaries on Golema Mmidi lassoing the ecosystem into a slow death by extermination, while the romantic couples Makhaya and Paulina, Gilbert and Maria stare into each other's eyes for comfort behind their newly enclosed lives. In 1966 with Botswana's independence, government authorities wholeheartedly embraced foreign capital paving its way to increased exploitation of resources, diamonds, and an elite tourist industry. Operational farmer and headman Makatse Modikwa discloses to Head, "We built our own dams and our own boreholes—the central borehole in Serowe was paid for with our cattle and the water was free for a long time. Now we pay. Today, after all this hard work no rewards come to the people of Serowe" (*Serowe*

112). While Seretse Khama declared in his 1969 speech that, Botswana did not gain its independence in order to create further divisions between “privileged town dwellers and toiling farmers,” the divide between rich and poor is wider than ever (Vengroff 22). Similar to the political tactics of social relief and donation projects witnessed in Devi’s ethnographic reportage to maintain local government control, Botswana’s local government secures their power through helicopter droppings of relief packages at election time.

In this eco-apartheid of “fatherless children,” and inequitable disparity of sustainable resources amongst indigenous peoples, lessons in survival are imperative for Head’s females, as they represent the impoverished women of the Global South—Spivak’s true subaltern.²² Fatherless children translates to toil and labor for mothers and children who have to work in the place of the father. Sadly, Head’s story is no different. Paulina’s son is sent out to the furthest cattle post to earn much needed subsistence income and ends up dying of malnutrition during the drought—his death suggesting that certainly there must be some “imperative to reimagine” indigenous livelihoods in the Global South. His young tragedy mirrors the death of many children facing poverty and famine, a narrative literariness that demands readers “to be human,” “to think the other” and live “intended toward the other” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 338). It is in the horror of the young boy’s death that Makhaya realizes “that it was only people who could bring real reward of living, that it was only people who give love and happiness” (Head, *Rain Clouds* 158). In her January 14, 1969 letter to Randolph, she observes that “The land was made holy by people’s suffering. Subconsciously the same process is going on in South Africa. That land is being made holy by all the tears of the black man which have dropped on to the soul” (Vigne 75). Similar to Boris Pasternak’s *Dr. Zhivago*, Head constructs an ending that delves into the

inescapable mysteries of life in which unbearable suffering leads to “something big” for those who can endure and love in spite of the unbearable weight of being (Vigne 74). These “giants of the soul” revision the future by connecting to those around them (Vigne 74). Similarly, Makhaya expresses Head’s own realizations: “The white man was a spoke in a slow, churning wheel to make things move. The spoke is painful but only a saint accepts and knows this. The saint too often shuts his mouth, knowing life a little too deeply” (Vigne 130). If “progress” is the ultimate desire, Makhaya must silently step into its spinning machinery.

This is Head’s enigma of life—death, beauty, genius, and loving captured in the ordinary humbleness of human connection (Vigne 74). Makhaya lives deeply, feels deeply and too realizes his true humble commitment when he is told that “If you’ve left no treasures on this earth, what’s there to hold onto except a terrible pity” (Head, *Rain Clouds* 177). These treasures of connection and belonging are the antidotes to human suffering. Spivak translates similar epistemological ruminations when she declares: “To be human is to be born angled toward an other and others, then to account for this the human being presuppose the other” (*Aesthetic Education* 352). It is in Mack’s resistance to the “hate making ideologies” that privilege resources in the hands of the few “while so many starved” that his compassion is awakened (Head, *Rain Clouds* 75).

He dedicates himself to “this robust notion of responsibility” working for Paulina, her children and the poverty-stricken village of Golema Mmidi (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 341). Head asks, “How else are the mighty to be pulled down from their seats except by the ordinary humble people?” (Vigne 75). Makhaya summarily reduces global redistributive justice to one ethico-political strategy in which he recognizes God in himself and all

mankind. In so doing, he is “obliged to live a noble life, where people can depend on him to be truthful in his dealings” (Vigne 91). It will be those wise and generous, those “people with no shoes,” “who shall, one day, unexpectedly, inherit the earth”(Vigne 137).

While Head’s Makhaya has developed a “generosity of soul and of mind,” his psychological gymnastics in self-realization has not awakened him to his own collusion with the patriarchal dominance of his interior and exterior landscape under the guise of “cooperative enterprise”(*Rain Clouds* 119). Three of Head’s “chief horrors” were “totalitarianism, tribalism, and Marxist-Leninism” (Vigne 210). In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, she “works out” her own hypophoric question: “Do you think a leadership of unbridled capitalistic interest is more of a salvation to the country than a Marxist approach?”

The Collapse of “Mud Living” Economies in *Serowe*

Bessie Head’s fourth book *Serowe: The Village of the Rain Wind* is a historical non-fiction narrative in which she collects oral histories of a hundred different members of the village to explore the social reforms within a changing socio-political landscape. Similar to Mahasweta Devi and Margaret Randall, Head excavates the liminal spaces of postcolonial Botswana to uncover the “politics of truth” from the lived experiences and memories of those individuals who witnessed a history different from the historical record of colonial trespassers. Patterned after Ronald Blythe’s *Akenfiled: Portrait of an English Village*, Head’s historical testimonies bare witness to a humble portrait of “mud living” in which in spite of the developmental projects most women and children have few resources and suffer from food and water insecurity. In *Serowe*, I scrutinize the narrative reportage and individual subjectivities to examine how colonial and post-independence capitalism altered women’s reproductive systems and shattered indigenous kinship and family networks. In

exhuming these voices to *listen*, I point to how colonial and post-independence capitalism undermined bride price and polygamous relations and replaced them with gendered production systems, monogamous relations, and Neo-Malthusian notions of planned parenthood that disempowered women and fueled the collapse of traditional family reproductive units. While the last section made use of *When Rain Cloud's Gather* as a case study to examine ecological apartheid and the feminization of agriculture, in this section I bring into conversation the Serowan voices to specifically interrogate the complex intersecting forces that led to the collapse of the kinship structures.

Influenced by a line from Telmaque's poem, "Where is the hour of the beautiful dancing birds of the sun-wind," Head renames "Serowe the village of the rain-wind" (*Serowe* vii). In her romantic pastoral, people live in communal harmony and "time stands still in the long silences" and birds dance through "the deep blue, Serowe sky" (*Serowe* vii). In her idyllic horizon of birds "playing and dancing" Head finds a sense of wholeness; "a feeling of how strange and beautiful people can be—just living" (*Serowe* ix) and "having babies" (*Serowe* xi). Head juxtaposes her initial romanticism of "subsistence living" with the bitter reality reported by her villagers who must endure and feed their children on the "barest of necessities" (*Serowe* ix). Amidst the playful birdsong, Head contrasts how "the breakdown of family life is one of the great debating points of the village. Of all the tribes living in Botswana, none has experienced so much change and upheaval as the Bamangwato. It was as though old securities had clung to were stripped away at one blow during Khama's rule" (*Serowe* 70). In place of traditional kinship systems, elder Serowans carry their Christian bibles and their beliefs in God, while the younger generations live amidst the collapsing family order. Head writes, "Nowhere is this more evident than in the

breakdown of family life in Serowe” (*Serowe* 70). Family collapse affects old and new. Many children are birthed to unwed mothers and absent fathers, many “who will never know who their real father is” (*Serowe* 70).

In an astonishing statistic, Head writes that 97 children out of 100 are illegitimate (*Serowe* 70). Sadly, Head’s statistics and oral reportage provide an archeology of reproductive data testifying to the material reasons behind collapsing family structures. Family breakdown was most felt by the Bamangwato tribe in Botswana when Khama came to power to impose Christianity and “blow away” traditional customs (*Serowe* 70). According to Head, Christianity forced people to either accommodate or “abolish” indigenous beliefs, rituals, and customs, hence denying them of long-established comforts and belief systems which traditional structures offered (*Serowe* xiii). Head points out that the discipline that Christianity imposed was both “internal and private” (*Serowe* xiv). She writes: “People might not have realized this, and this might account for the almost complete breakdown of family life in Bamangwato country, which under traditional custom was essential for the survival of the tribe” (*Serowe* xiv). Yet, Head claims that not one of her interviewees were willing to go on record to hoist all the blame on Khama’s reforms (*Serowe* 70).

It is questionable whether Head’s reverence for Khama as a “grand” “classic” heroic figure of “great gestures” and “lofty God of Mount Olympus, the great Lincoln of Southern Africa” clouded her own reportage (Vigne 177). Coreen Brown posits that because “Khama’s humanity was an exception to the general savagery, abomination and ‘heathendom’ that otherwise flourished in his land, she must claim for all Khama’s people his finer qualities” (137). Head emphasizes how Khama’s “enlightened reforms” shaped

Serowe's past and present with the elimination of indigenous customs and practices that were deemed inhumane by Christian standards, "especially the *bogwera* or circumcision rites in which the death of one of the initiates was obligatory" (Brown 137). Among Khama's many other reforms was the discouragement of polygamous structures and the elimination of bride price (Brown 137). Because "single families often made a nation," in its biological reproduction of lineages, the destruction of these kinship systems had far reaching effects on tribal continuity (*Serowe* 71).

Arguably, one of the advantages of polygamy was for creating cohesive patrilocal and patrilineal kinship systems that fostered relationships of power and reciprocity through "nation-building" (*Serowe* 71). In addition, it secured "every woman in the society of a husband, and that she was performing her reproductive functions under fairly secure circumstances" (*Serowe* 71). In traditional Botswana kinship systems, links of power and authority flow and interconnect through networks of patrilineal ancestries. While male members benefit from patrilineal privilege, the system also functions to provide assistance and welfare for women. Elder mothers of sons particularly benefit from the privileges inherent in this system. In comparing indigenous structures in India and Africa, "Stanley J. Tambiah observes that African women enjoy some degree of personal self-sufficiency. Synthesizing Kathleen E. Gough's work on kinship systems in a Tamil village, Tambiah maintains:

The focus of interest of most African patrilineal systems is the reproductive capacity of woman and the maximum number of children she will bear; that African polygyny and matrification are part of a special kind of patrilineal configuration; and that's because a married women's sexuality itself is not

curbed and because her children's kinship is never in doubt. (Tambiah 415)

The argument that women have been passive objects in a male dominated kinship system, precludes discussions of women's productive and reproductive contributions to the maintenance of indigenous livelihoods. Female productive and reproductive capacities are the most vital forms of agency and resistance—a fact that many feminists are afraid to acknowledge because of fears of bringing into play maligned theoretical notions of “biological essentialism.” While many African Marxist Feminists argue that polygamous structures locate women in passive positions of gendered subordination, it is also true that women enjoy a certain degree of inherent value as producers of children whose reproduction is imperative for the safeguarding of pastoral kinship systems. Children contribute to the functioning of the kinship system through maintaining and in some cases extending the cohesive social unit. Their labor in cattle production and agricultural output are vital to the economy of traditional subsistence livelihoods (Tambiah 415). In *The Pastoral Continuum: The Marginalization of Tradition in East Africa*, Paul Spencer observes that the articulation of polygamous structures provides a “meaning life style to which pastoralists remain committed. The evidence from successful pastoralist cultures in particular suggests an institutionalized complex that adjusted to change” (2). Polygamous kinship structures are strategic interdependent arrangements aimed at maintaining indigenous knowledges needed for survival and adaptation amidst changing and often vulnerable social and ecological conditions. Head reports some extended families had close to six hundred members and the introduction of monogamy has had a devastating effect (*Serowe* 71). Akin to large family run enterprises with vast geographical networks of exchange, loan, and gift circuits, these alliances are crucial in times of severe drought conditions. Although in a different

geographic and tribal location, evidence from my own research with the Barabaig pastoralists in Eastern Tanzania corroborates Spencer's observations that polygamous relationships were (are) necessary in order for indigenous pastoral economies to grow and survive.²³

The patrilocal kinship system was able to sustain itself through an adult royal lineage led *kgosi* who joined in an assembly (*Kgotla*), which acted as a juridical body to hear cases and provide resolution for village conflicts. The *kgotla*'s administrative decrees were distributed and reinforced by male head's of their particular family units, the *Kgotla* overseeing community cohesion. Although land itself was held in common and was distributed by the *Kgosi* through patrilineal structures, women maintained customary land privileges as wives and members of their individual family units.²⁴ According to a Setswana saying "*Kgosi ke Kgosi ka batho*," –The *kgosi* is *kgosi* by the grace of the people.²⁵ Designated with its privileged position by the people themselves, they can remove the *kgosi* for abuses of power not in the interest of the community. Head narrates the checks and balances within the *kgosi* in which corrupt *dikgosis* like Matenge are confronted by the local villagers in *When Rain Clouds Gather*. She further observes the "treasured" meeting places of women who took over the *kgotla* to discuss issues of their own concern.

Head observes that after the end of Bamangwato leadership "a gaping hole" swelled in "the fabric of society. Its main victims are women who now rear large families of children on their own outside the security of marriage" (*Serowe* 70-71). In particular she witnesses the impact of Christian institutions on existing kinship structures:

Marriage in church certainly struck the final deathblow to polygamy but the immense amount of change and strain people have endured seems

unfortunately to have struck a deathblow to the male. He ceased to be the head of the family, and his place has been taken by a gay, dizzy character on a permanent round of drink and women, full of shoddy values and without any sense of responsibility for the children he so haphazardly procreates.

(*Serowe 72*)

Head observes that “All Seowans live with the tail end of the polygamy story” (*Serowe 71*). Many villagers still recall royal ancestry of tribal chiefs and headmen, their family line extending back in history to embrace the vitality of its deep historical roots. Like the “Testament” and “just as sacred,” traditional polygamous structures as well as marriage itself disintegrated with Khama’s reforms (*Serowe 71*).

Head’s oral history taken from 34 year-old weaving instructor Ngoro Sekwati reports on the impact of marriage dissolution. As stated by Sekwati, “Women are no longer certain of marriage but they still have children and have to support them” (*Serowe 199*). Sekwati describes how in the past the only aspiration girls had was marriage; the only knowledge they possessed was that of plowing the fields. “There was no other life for women, outside of that” (*Serowe 198*). Instead of money, the women received food, which she says is “the history of our women from the olden days; they have no other history. Many women still live like this but the one big change that has taken place is that marriage has now become a thing of the past” (*Serowe 199*). Women still have children, but outside the protective kinship network of food security.

One of the many factors leading to the breakdown of the family is the elimination of the tradition of *bogadi*, bride price—“the offering of a gift of cattle by a man to his wife’s family at the time of marriage” (*Serowe 72*). *Bogadi* was “central to the security of family

life” by creating a network of bonds and circulating resources over a geographical area (Serowe 72). Head writes:

It (*Bogadi*) was a marriage contract and without it there was no marriage. All children born of the house of *bogadi* were recognized as legitimate. But its ramifications went deep and stretched out to all the children a woman might bear in her lifetime, irrespective of whether another man other than her husband might have fathered her children. It also had undertones of a sale bargain, as if women were merely a marketable commodity. Of the five principal tribes in the country only the Bamangwato and Batawana have abandoned the *bogadi* tradition, and there seems to be nothing to bridge the ill-defined gap between one way of life and another. No one seems to know what the right sort of relationship between men and women should be, that would be sacred and of mutual benefit. (Serowe 72)

Varying opinions exist on the significance of bride price: According to Radcliffe-Brown’s juridical thesis, bride price is a sort of “indemnity” and remuneration to a family that loses one of its members (qtd. in Tambiah 414). Driberg argues on the other hand that “women were not bartered away in Africa in communal transactions” (Tambiah 414). Attempting to understand the transactional nature of bride price, Young called it a “marriage settlement” that created a sense of equilibrium between the bride and groom’s families (Tambiah 414). Labels such as “‘inequality,’ ‘domination,’ ‘prejudice,’ and male chauvinism,’” were designated to describe it (Tambiah 414). African aphorisms such as “Cattle beget children,” and “We are bought like cattle” fueled theoretical designations as a form of commercial purchase for marriage (Tambiah 415). Polygamy and bride price go hand in hand with securing economic stability amongst kinship relations. As socio-economic and political

transactions, they are interconnected to the reproduction and reproduction of their traditional communities over time.

In *Dismantling Black Manhood: An Historical and Literary Analysis of the Legacy*, Daniel P. Black reports bride price also served as a “form of insurance for the good treatment of the daughter”(29). The “material presentation” acted as a binding agreement tendered for the daughter’s future physical security. If a husband mistreated a daughter, she had recourse, as her male family members would intervene by beating and punishing him “(experientially) the injustice he inflicted upon his spouse” (Black 31). In addition, married women seldom went hungry as husbands who left their wives and children vulnerable to food insecurity were treated with village disdain. Husbands were expected to provide for their family and if they didn’t they incurred the scorn and social ostracism from other village members. “So important was it to provide for one family adequately that, on occasions, a husband would help his wife with female-centered activities, which yielded an economic contribution to the family” (Black 31).

According to the historical observations of Head’s Keitese Lefhoko, “Men used to love their wives in the old days and women were tough to get. Their parents made tough bargains too. I really don’t know what has caused the breakdown of family life because there are so many factors to consider, but I do know that women no longer regard themselves as a prize that has to be won” (*Serowe* 75). In another one of Head’s oral histories, Balebe Olegeng reports, “I don’t know for sure when married life broke down, but by the time I started to notice the world, I could see there was no more marriage here in Serowe. My grandmother had been married and so had my mother but in my time, marriage suddenly went out of fashion” (75-76). She claims that most villagers “grew up” without

polygamy and *bodagdi*. In the past, the dominant question asked was: “Who was your father?” (Serowe 77). “If you had no proper father you were nothing in the society” (Serowe 77). Similar inquiries persist today, and some women are humiliated by conceiving children “outside marriage” and so have equipped their children with a prepared response: “My father was killed by a train” (Serowe 77). Balebe Olegeng insists that she has told her children the honest reality of her situation. “When they asked me who their father was I said: ‘You have none’” (Serowe 77). She asks: “What can we do? You can’t force a man to be a father” (Serowe 77). Both metaphorical and very real, this patriarchal capitalist train has left a mass grave of broken relationships and vulnerable indigenous communities on its path to “progress” and “development.”

Head quotes C.G. Mararike’s short story *Why Marry?* which narrates the escapades of a D.D.’s single beer drinking son B.B., a graduate of the London School of Economics, who “could have married if he wanted to but saw no point ‘in buying a cow if he could get its milk free’” (Serowe 73).²⁶ Mararike’s narrative suggests that among other things, that implicit in sexual relations is a quid pro quo of future obligation if the terms of consideration are negotiated for the whole instead of the parts. He further implies that the failure to live up to these terms is a result of women who willingly breach the terms of their own sexual arrangements by delivering “the milk” without any consideration of future obligations as a the result of the sexual transaction. The consequence is that the system of incentives for men and protections for women entering into sexual relations have evaporated, and relationships that once were “sacred” and of “mutual benefit” has also vanished (Serowe 72).

Some of Head's testimonies present a nostalgic reminiscence for the "old days" when men and women maintained kinship obligations. Although Head's seventy year-old Mpatelang Kgosi does not blame Khama for family collapse, he does correlate how the replacement of bride price with monogamous marriage impacted men's decision on when and whom to marry. Age and timing of marriage are now factors of consideration as "men often preferred to marry very young women. Since men had only a choice of one wife, he would wait until the age of thirty, without any contact with women until his wife was fully grown" (*Serowe* 74). His chastisement of restless women who "chase money" from partner to partner never to find peace and men who chase women for sex, suggest a liberated sexual freedom unencumbered by the consequences of child birth and its traditional responsibilities. As stated by Kgosi "...no longer do men care about the position of being a father" (*Serowe* 74). In Head's country of "fatherless children," Kgosi claims that under this new socio-economic arrangement of non-binding sexual relations, children are "encourage[d] to do the same" (*Serowe* 74). In his most revealing opinion of the social changes, Kgosi reports:

It looks as though many new evils have come with the laws of independence. In 1967, the government introduced a new marriage law, whereby once children reach the age of twenty-one they may marry without their parent's consent. The result of this is that we now have a large number of divorces. The new style here is to be married for about two years and then divorce. On top of this family planning was introduced. We can just give it its proper name, which is birth control. At first I did not mind all the adultery and many bad things that were going on because it was producing children. Now the

women have seen that they need not bear children. One day there will be no people at all in this country because women are reluctant to bear children.

(*Serowe 74*)

For those women who do bear children outside the protections of marriage it is an understatement to say that life is difficult. Eighteen year-old Lebang Moremi claims she was influenced by her peers to have sex and began doing so without any information about contraception. She was sixteen when she conceived her first child and discovered “what happens to girls who become pregnant—there is no help for them, not even from the law” (*Serowe 78*). Although the father denied his paternity, the District Commissioner did provide her with some economic recourse of R10 a month for child support, although most women receive little to no child support (*Serowe 78*). Lebang Moremi blames a patriarchal judicial system for women’s lack of protection: She observes that neither the legal discourse at the *kgotla* or the police camp, protects a woman” (*Serowe 78*). According to Moremi, patriarchal collusion between both old and new systems have doubly marginalized women leading to the feminization of survival:

In the case of *kgotla*, from Chief Tshekedi’s time, a ruling was made whereby a woman could claim damages in the form of cattle for the first child. There is no pressure for damages for the second, third, and so on. So a man knows that if he makes a baby with a women who already has a child, the *kgotla* won’t trouble him to pay damages and from then onwards we women get taken advantage of. We have a second appeal for help –to the District Commissioner’s office. This involves money for maintenance, not cattle. There was a new maintenance law passed two years ago whereby the

men are required to pay R5 a week maintenance now. This frightens the men a little. (*Serowe* 78)

Yet even with these laws, most fathers have escape[d] financial social and financial responsibility for their offspring born outside of marriage. For Marambe as well as other mothers raising children on her own, life “it is not a good life” for mother or child (*Serowe* 79). Children observe the behavior of their mothers, “lose respect all respect for her” and commence to follow in her pattern in a Botswana where now both mothers and daughters have internalized a socially prescribed culpability for the breakdown of family relations (*Serowe* 79). In Marambe’s world of patriarchal abandonment, children “run wild,” daughters pattern their sexuality after their mother with “one man after another,” and sons “become thieves,” raiding villages for bare necessities (*Serowe* 79). Women bear the cargo of not only providing physical and emotional security in a world of diminishing resources, but also the psychological toil of children’s behavior.

Head’s reportage of 34 year-old Marit Kromberg, a maternal, child health services and family planning administrator, reveals the helplessness of mothers who frequently experienced the death of their babies from diarrhea (*Serowe* 138) “We were trapped in a vicious cycle from which there was no release” (*Serowe* 138). Similar to arguments made by Jennifer Nelson, Maria Mies, Farida Akhter, Gayatri Spivak, Wendy Harcourt, Pravin Visaria, and others, health assistance aimed at prenatal, postnatal and infant care appears to have been disregarded in favor of family planning policies. Kromberg affirms this proposition as she states, “What I wanted to do was get in on some health planning from the District council and the central government” (*Serowe* 138). Nowhere does she mention she wished to develop solutions to infant death and early childhood death due to diarrheal

disease, malnourishment, pneumonia, and tuberculosis. Given this scenario, Botswana was ripe for Second Wave Western Feminist rhetoric of birth control and the 1968 arrival of a delegation from International Planned Parenthood Federation on family planning to alleviate the cause of infant death—birth.

As stated by Marit Kromberg: “We were able to show them that some of the women wanted it and also to demonstrate that some women feared to plan, due to the high death rate among babies—perhaps a third of any woman’s babies at that time, did not live to the age of five and this made it very difficult for a mother to plan” (*Serowe* 139). The vacuum of human capital development created a desperate need, which Western NGOs attempted to fill with their enlightened notions of western feminist liberatory politics. Rather than understanding the traditional cultural reasons for multiple births to ensure the economic productivity and security of the family unit and establishing policies that addressed the ongoing stability of family production units, the eugenics policy proposes that Botswana women would be better off with birth control developed by transnational pharmaceutical conglomerates rather than suffering the harsh reality of infant mortality.

In order for countries like Botswana to get assistance with their tribal populations who lack access to basic human resources like food and health care, they have had little choice but to enter into unbalanced Neo-Malthusian population control agreements. The government, unable to provide their own social tourniquet to control infant mortality rates, entered into a contract with IPPF to “introduce family planning” in exchange for “maternal health care and child health” (*Serowe* 139). Head’s reportage at this historical intersection chronicles how international, national, and regional politics shape women’s reproductive experiences and family structures (Mullings 123). While I do not deny that the freedom to

engage in sexual activity without the worries of pregnancy has emancipatory effects for women in terms of granting them behavioral “choices,” it is also true that IPPF has created pockets of “stratified reproduction” in which motherhood is discouraged and sexuality encouraged amongst black and brown indigenous populations (Mullings 129).

Esther Wangari problematizes IPPF’s planning policies of impoverished women in Kenya to interrogate the rhetoric of empowerment of reproductive technologies aimed at policing women’s bodies to satisfy the overconsumption of resources by the Global North. According to Wangari, “High fertility rates in the Third World are blamed for lack of economic growth, environmental degradation, and the low status of women, among other ascribed effects” (298). Notions of “choice” and “free will” for women in Botswana appear to be ineludibly restricted and constrained by a similar complicated web of power relations in which the right to choose often excludes “information about possible side-effects and health care delivery,” which she considers to be “blunt racism against the people of colour” (Wangari 307). According to Wangari, their “bodies and families” become “dumping grounds” and repositories for “new and banned reproductive technologies of the West” (308).

As mentioned in Chapter Three, in Tola Olu Pearce’s essay, “Women’s Reproductive Practices Biomedicine: Cultural Conflicts and Transformations,” international interest in population control policies in the Global South is an ongoing concern recently resuscitated with today’s environmental crisis and booming pharmaceutical industry (200). Pierce identifies that “little attention is paid to the disproportionate amount of resources consumed by the developed world” (200). Neo-Malthusian rhetoric proposes birth control as a regulatory measure to restrain unchecked population growth, which exacerbates the

ecological carrying capacity of the region and poses a threat to “world ecological stability” (Pierce 200). Pearce further observes that “With the growing poverty and disease in Africa, aggravated by SAPs, the fear of population invasion and resource consumption by the poor nations may escalate into fears of the health problems spread by poverty stricken nations” (200).

Marit Kromberg reports that the Serowans employed their own traditional custom of family planning and “child-spacing” prior to the arrival of IPPF. They believed that *Serathane* “a condition of bewitchment, will afflict the child if the parents do not observe the customs which cause child spacing; either by physical separation or abstinence” (*Serowe* 139-40). Families were aware of the biological necessity of child spacing for the reproductive health of mother and child. Kromberg recounts how she used the belief in *serathane* as a bridge to “build on” to introduce, motivate, and “now provide mothers with modern methods of family spacing” (*Serowe* 140). What Kromberg did not seem to recognize was that these culturally prescribed indigenous codes of birth spacing, while certainly a method of family planning, is in direct opposition to Neo-Malthusian interest in limiting family size (Pearce 203).

Kromberg also confirms how “In the old days, polygamy also helped family planning because then a husband had an alternative wife” and elder women were given a respite from on-going sexual activity (*Serowe* 140). Pearce observes amongst Africa’s Yoruba population that “women did not always see continued sexual availability to men as a positive development” and considered “culturally imposed terminal abstinence as necessary for a well-earned rest in middle-age” (204). She posits the extension of women’s reproductive activity through the “use of technical solutions” may actually “not always be

welcomed” (Pierce 205). In Head’s *politics of truth*, this might be equally true amongst Botswana’s indigenous populations with its emphasis on polygamy, *bogadi*, and extended kinship lineages.

The rejection by many Botswana tribals to adapt to Khama’s reforms, especially polygamy, has added to the complexity of social relations. While colonialism contributed to the collapse of the family, Ibrahim observes that traditional kinship polygamous relations “thrown into the modern context devastated family structure” (225). Head does not shy away from the collusion of both “traditional” and “Western” patriarchy in constriction of “choices” and the ongoing subordination of women. Her interviews and reportage construct a socio-sexual historiography of the myriad impositions on women’s reproductive systems.

Gendered Relations and Agency in *Collector of Treasures*

In *The Collector of Treasures*, Head fictionalizes the “village tales” she recorded in *Serowe: Village of the Rain-Wind*, narrating the lives of “ordinary people” to examine questions of power and powerlessness and how women negotiate between traditional, colonial, and imperialist patriarchy. Synthesizing ethnographic listening of her Tswana community and African oral storytelling, Head positions herself as a village storyteller at the threshold of a changing world order in order to critique collusive patriarchal systems. Head’s collection of tales particularly chronicles the collapse of the family and women’s sexual-reproductive dilemmas inside and outside of marital institutions. Her complicated subjectivities of female protagonists entangled in a crippling web of capitalism and “development” allow us to witness individual and collective resistance. In two discursive spaces in particular, “Life” and “Collector of Treasures,” I continue my discussion of how the corruption of traditional kinship structures have led to the collapse of kinship structures

and undermined healthy reproductive relationships. In these stories we witness the failure of the agribusiness model proffered by Gilbert in *When Rain Clouds Gathered* and how females have become the victims of “institutionalized poverty.” According to Diana Wylie, at this juncture, “the growth of capitalist property and labour relations undermined, albeit in a slow and tortuous way, the legitimacy of the old patriarchal order in the old Ngwato chieftdom” (223). In *The Collector of Treasures*, Tswana families have fallen into the crevices of this growing cash economy and women deploy their anger and sexual power as a form of agency to resist and rage against the dehumanizing institutions that traditionally once protected them. What arises is a confrontation over social roles emerging within historically changing boundaries as men attempt to impose repressive limitations on women’s reproductive behaviors and women resolve to resist and refuse them (Harrow 169). Essential to Head’s *Collector of Treasures* is this unfolding of a “boundary crisis” of repression and refusal in which the bastardization of traditional boundaries and the usurpation of these inequitable hybridized patri-local structures have provoked visceral acts of domestic violence. As painful, violent and unfathomable as these stories might seem, Head discloses that: “Most of the stories there are based on reality; they’re not inventions. They happened; they are changed” (Ibrahim 174).

An ethico-political reading of Bessie Head’s “Life,” portrays the extreme difficulties of living within the diasporic double bind as hastened by the 1966 Botswana Independence, which required all Botswana nationals in 1963 to return home. Head immediately establishes the connection between family collapse and the global market circuits in which men sought by laboring in the mines. According to Diana Wylie, beginning in 1940 women’s subsistence vulnerability increased “when their men moved beyond familial

control as ill-paid migrant labourers for nine months of the year” (174). Head narrates that “the to and fro” of men working in mines and women working as prostitutes were “disrupted” by this strict border control legislation. Many Tswana traveled to South Africa seeking individual wages and “had settled there in permanent employment” only to be forced back to Botswana (Head, *Treasures* 37). For those people who returned home to their native village, they brought with them “foreign culture” and “city habits,” which was met by the villagers with mixed reaction—in this story murder (*Treasures* 37).

Life who had left her village with her parents to Johannesburg when she was a ten-year old, returns seventeen years later to settle down on her family’s plot in the center of her Tswana village. What is important to note is that even though Life’s parents had since died in South Africa, it is her traditional kinship ties that enable her to reconnect with her family in the Morapedi yard. It is the women in the village who embrace her telling her, “We can help you to put your yard in order,” and that they are “very happy that a child of ours has returned home” (Head, *Treasures* 38). Before Head casts Life out onto the frontier of unbalanced sexual codes and the yawning routine of domestic ennui, she provides a female comfort space for Life to find the compassionate gestures of humanity. Immediately in Life’s front yard, the two worlds collide as Life’s arrival introduces the duplication of her previous life in the “Johannesburg Township,” with all its riot and noise, albeit “on a minor scale” (*Treasures* 40). Along with other “outside” influences, Life breaks “all the social taboos” spreading her motto: “Live fast, die young, and have a good-looking living corpse”—all driven by a cash economy (*Treasures* 40). Her contradictory values grate against the slow space of village life of “thrift” (38) and “honesty” (39). Curious, one female villager asks how Life has so much surplus cash to purchase the endless commodities of “tea, milk,

sugar,” etc. (*Treasures* 38). Life “gay with her *hysterical* (my emphasis) laugh” responds, “Money flows like water in Johannesburg,” suggesting in a Foucaultian sense that her wealth is derived from her sexual problems (*Treasures* 38).

Indeed it is her sexual body that fuels Life’s “varied career” in which she worked as a “beauty queen, advertising model, and prostitute”—options not available in her home village (Head, *Treasures* 39). Wendy Harcourt observes that “women’s bodies are the first place that defines political struggles” in which women like Life unite their body and affective skills to earn a living in which their “social flesh” becomes a “political site of place that mediates the lived experiences of social and cultural relationships” (Harcourt 292). It is Life’s body that becomes not simply “a subject of politics, but an object of political control, and is the exteriorized terrain of public regulation” (Harcourt 293).

We witness this regulation of women’s bodies and livelihoods in Head’s Tswana village, where career choices for women are based on class distinctions: “[f]or the illiterate women there was farming and housework; for the literate, teaching, nursing, and clerical work” (Head, *Treasures* 39). Head characterizes two sectors of the female population—the “first wave women” of conservative housewives, teachers, caregivers and then “a second wave of women,” the beer-brewing fun loving radicalized women “who want to rule ourselves (themselves)” (*Treasures* 39). Life topples the boundaries within the hierarchical class divide by benefiting from the materiality of being a “sexualized subject” and becoming “the first and the only women in the village to make a business out of selling herself” (*Treasures* 39). Village men were lured into the cash market of bargain for sex exchange objects; they were intrigued by the idea of purchasing sex when “they could get all the sex they needed for free” (*Treasures* 40).

With the demise of polygamy and the corresponding rise of prostitution, Marx and Engel's observation seems to be substantiated: monogamy and prostitution developed simultaneously with the rise of land privatization and propertied interests (Marx and Engels 35). The arrival of the "double-edged," "double-tongued," institution of monogamous marriage into the township brought on its tailcoats the most extreme form of human market relations—prostitution (Marx and Engels 35). Head establishes the past parameters of the sexual arrangement:

People's attitudes to sex was broad and generous—it was recognized as a necessary part of human life, that it ought to be available whenever possible like food and water, or else one's life would be extinguished or one would get dreadfully ill. To prevent these catastrophes from happening, men and women had quite a lot of sex but on a respectable and human level, with financial considerations coming in as an afterthought. (Head, *Treasures* 39)

Boyfriends and husbands passed through women's lives, hanging around for a while living off of the resources women acquired for themselves and children. After a three-month period, women would hand an invoice of R2.00 to their boyfriends under an implied contract for services rendered. "Boyfriend," the woman would say. "Love is love and money is money. You owe me money" (Head, *Treasures* 40). The "boyfriend" would in turn leave prior to compensation at which point another "boyfriend" would take his place in a parasitic cycle of unilateral sexual exchange. Life's ability to force the performance of the terms of a clear sexual contract for consideration amused the women who saw a constant stream of men, but "didn't know how" to "extract money" from them" (*Treasures* 40). Head highlights how prostitution generated other mercenary cash businesses "associated with

selling oneself” such as the “first hotel with its pub” and the brewing beer found inside (*Treasures* 40). Life thrived in this free flowing environment of sex and beer until Lesego, a respected cattleman described as death, arrives to sweep her off her feet and marry her, in spite of warnings from his friends that she was unworthy of his pursuit because of her “terrible fuck-about” status (*Treasures* 42). Like Life, Lasego spreads his money generously, unencumbered with the weight of survival. Life associates his “economic gestures” to the “gangsters” she knew in Johannesburg and their masculine ability to wield power and control (*Treasures* 41). Indeed, it is Lasego’s “power” and “maleness” and Life’s “freshness” and “new kind of woman” that join them to their “fatal conclusion” (*Treasures* 41). Within these sexual configurations of double standards, Lasego wields the sexual freedom to copulate his way through the female bodies in the village, leaving a trail of used bodies as he moves on to the next, and then the next (*Treasures* 42).

Mernissi observes that “The link between boundaries and power is particularly salient in a society’s sexual patterns” (qtd. in Harrow 170). Equally true is Mernissi’s observation of the privileged arrangements in which “dividing the parts of society express the recognition of power in one part at the expense of the other. Any transgression of the boundaries is a danger to the social order because it is an attack on the acknowledged allocation of power” (qtd. in Harrow 170). Life’s ability to demand compensation for her sexual services disrupts these dissymmetrical relationship in what Francoise Lionet refers to as the geographies of women’s pain and suffering. According to Lionet:

Her fun loving ways introduce dissymmetry in her relationships with the village people. Life gets power by using her body for money. Money becomes the sign of a disturbing independence for the villager. It’s a

destabilizing force, which undermines the order of things, and she has to be neutralized. Like the money she makes, she become a sign that severely disrupts both the gender and economy and the system to barter particular to that village. (148)

It is Life's power and independent challenge to the "ordinary humdrum" of the village that piques Lasego's conquest of desire (Head, *Treasures* 42). It is the "undertones of hysteria in her," that entices him to her. The only way to squelch Life's threat to patriarchal privilege is to sexually remove her from the marketplace. Head seems to have captured the Renaissance belief that a female uterus could be unbound from its position between the cervix and the fallopian tubes to ramble around the body to cause hormonal chaos and trouble in the village.²⁷ If Lasego marries Life, her power and her ability to receive just compensation for services rendered will be subordinated to the marital institution of patriarchal privilege. While Marx and Engels argued that the "the overthrow of mother right was the world *historic defeat of the female sex*," it is also true that this defeat is tied to sexual conquest and subordination in which the Lives of the world must acquiesce to their husband's "command in the home" (*Treasures* 42). The literal life inside a woman is "degraded and reduced to servitude," as she becomes "the salve of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children" (Marx and Engels 42).

Seduced by the lure of each other's contradictions, Life gives up "her old ways" to tie the knot with Lasego/Death in which death will triumph. Life assures him she has died to her old ways and is now a "woman," inferring before she was just an entrepreneurial non-being making a living. Immediately, Lasego takes "control of all the money" and is held accountable for all her expenditures (Head, *Treasures* 43). She is moreover admonished that

if she goes “with those men again,” she will be killed (*Treasures* 43). Although Marx and Engel’s observation was intended for middle and upper classes of the Global North, it rings true in this case. Marx and Engels argue: “In order to make certain of wife’s fidelity and therefore the paternity of his children, she is delivered over unconditionally into the power of the husband; if he kills her, he is only exercising his rights” (42). Indeed, Life is throttled by death’s pronouncement, her “hysteria” falling into “the big gaping yawn” of economically and culturally controlled domesticity, while the beer-brewing female spectators watch on (*Treasures* 43). Life’s sexual reproductivity “collapse[s]” into a despairing state of boredom (44), until her epiphany that the monotony of “married life” didn’t suit her and she “made a mistake” (*Treasures* 44).

Life awakens from a state “near death” rebelling against this capital and patriarchal bondage, resisting its shackles and resuming control of her life (Head, *Treasures* 44). Life moves between opposing positions of power and powerlessness, eventually battling to alter victimhood status to enact personal agency and gain control of her “life”; Although the “indifferent” Lesego knives Life to death when he finds her with Radithobolo, Head suggests, the crushing nature of the diasporic female migrant double-bind status.

Victimized, dehumanized, Life is finally made invisible. For as Foucault has pointed out, “‘murder establishes the ambiguity of the lawful and the unlawful’ and can serve, as a narrative catalyst, to reorganize our cultural experiences, and to blur cultural distinctions between arbitrary or relativistic norms of conduct and a truly ethical or universal moral code” (Black 18). In Lasego’s verdict, we witness the collusion of white and black patriarchy—there is no ambiguity when the judicial value of a female life weighs only five years. In refusing to be objectified in Death’s house, Life becomes the misogynist object of

Death's murder. In calm control of his authority in murdering Life, he is sanctioned by the village chorus for his indifferent demeanor. "You have taken a human life and you are cool like that!" (*Treasures* 46). And, albeit it is a "serious crime to take a human life," Lasego knows that he operates in a system written by men, for men, to benefit men—the judicial system exists to enforce these patriarchal arrangements. Women must submit to its logic or suffer the consequences (*Treasures* 46).

Interestingly, Lasego explains the justification of the murder of his wife to a *white* judge. "Lesego knows how to use language as an instrument of power, how to put the judge on his side" (Lioneet 148). Later in this section, Head evidences the arbitrary nature of "customary", laws as Dikeledi will receive life imprisonment for the manslaughter of her husband. In this male dominated judicial system, we witness the patri-local kinship arrangements between male villagers and colonial influenced judicial branches that enforce "customary" laws to the detriment of women.

This is certainly the case in the murder of Life. Lasego calmly narrates to the judge the incidents leading up to the murder. According to his testimony, he had arrived home from a hard day's work at the cattle post and had requested some tea when Life told him they were out of sugar and needed to get some. Lasego relates how Mathata told him that instead of securing sugar for Lasego's tea, Life was in the yard of Radiohobolo. Lasego narrates: "Then a fire seemed to fill my heart. I thought that if she was doing a bad thing with Radithobolo as Mathata had said, 'I'd better kill her because I cannot understand a wife who could be so corrupt...'" (Head, *Treasures* 46). Traditionally the male *dikgosi* established the principles of "customary law," which was then integrated and codified into a discourse of "official customary law" by the British colonizers who recognized traditional

laws, which for the most part afforded more males more power over women. The judge was “impressed by Lasego’s behavior as all the village men” and acting in accordance with patriarchal customary law, delivered a verdict that it is a “crime of passion,” and sentences him to “five years of imprisonment” (*Treasures* 46). Although there were “extenuating circumstances” it is a “serious crime to take a human life” (*Treasures* 46). Yet, nowhere in Head’s exposition do we learn what exactly Life was doing in Radiohobolo’s yard, suggesting that the absence of these details is insignificant as Life herself. There is no evidence of their interaction, nor is there evidence that Radiohobolo was even present in the yard when the murder took place. Life could have been holding a cup of sugar and conversing with Radiohobolo about the weather. If he was there, did Radiohobolo try to fight Lasego off? The absence of these facts underscores not only the insignificance of Life’s life, but also the insignificance of gender abuse and femicide.

Sadly, not much has changed since Head’s narrative. Pursuant to the “The State of World Population 2007,” “domestic violence against women remains a serious problem in Botswana.”²⁸ According to the report, under Customary Law, husbands can “treat their wives in the same manner as minor children” and “may use corporal punishment to discipline their wives, which is common in rural areas” (Kumar, 2009). In “Customary Law and Human Rights in Botswana,” Dr. Rekha A. Kumar observes that “as male power is embedded in and operates within the rules and practices of social and legal institutions” and that “society’s acceptance” of violence against women “is a simple and profound testimony to the unilateral exercise of authority and rights” (79).²⁹ These rights are preserved and protected within the patriarchal institutions that implement, legislate, and enforce them.

Head grants the weeping second wave beer drinking women the last word in this story with their repetitive song choice of American Country singer Jim Reeves' "When Two Worlds Collide," in which the lyrics profess, "My world could never fit in wish it could / Two heart's lie in shambles and though how we'd cried / That's what happens when two worlds collide" (Head, *Treasures* 44). The murder of Life suggests the impending tragedy when the boundaries of these two worlds collapse and collide: First, there is the collision of resistant females who dare defy male authority, and second; the intolerance to Westernized corrupting structures that have individualized female personal agency at the expense of cultural and traditions and patriarchal communal relations.

The inflictions of Independent Rule on the boundaries of male/female relationships are again addressed in Head's "The Collector of Treasures," in which Dikeledi (Tears) refuses to submit to the phallocentric demands of her husband Garesego's rule. Upon entering the text, we are immediately imprisoned within the boundaries of the "long-term central state prison," where other women have been confined for killing their husbands. Expelled from the crumbling social walls of patriarchy, Dikeledi encounters women like herself who resisted and refused male subjugation, tenacious women who had the audacity to challenge their oppressors and fight back. In *Double Crossings: Madness, Sexuality and Imperialism*, McClintock describes the "boundary panic" experienced by men when women desire control over their own sexuality and property (11). When women defy authoritative control, men panic and banish women "beyond the walls of the town" (McClintock 17). Although McClintock refers to "boundary panic," as a crisis for "for the colonials (their collapse of reason and memory)," this boundary crisis can be extended to the Tswana post independence family who lives within the crisis and confusing collapse of these boundaries

(22). Defiant women who refuse to be silenced by physical and socio-economic subjugation are geographically disposed to a territorial outpost of male surveillance and punishment. “Expressions of individual and collective resistance form an intrinsic part of, and are vital to, the reconstitution of marginality (Gunewardena and Kingsolver 296). Within this garrison, women bond and share the circumstances of their imprisonment—the anger and rage that provoked their sexually violent actions.

“I cut off all his special parts with a knife” Dikelidi declares when her husband Garesgo reappeared after years of abandonment to incite a cock fight between a married man he incorrectly assumes to be her lover (Head, *Treasures* 89). Dikeledi is assured by Kebonye who cut off her husband’s offending organ with a razor: “We are all here for the same crime” (*Treasures* 89). The women have all severed the boundaries of “phallocracy at its root, sexual domination, again reminding us of Mernissi’s statement that the sexual patterns of a society reflect the link between boundaries and power” (Harrow 177). Sadly, the desecration of the reproductive body bonds the women to each other. Kebonye muses, “Our men do not think we need tenderness and care. You know, my husband used to kick me between the legs when he wanted that. I once aborted with a child, due to the treatment” (89). It is the dehumanization of their wombs and the fruits of their wombs that fuel their bond and maternal rage; as many women have been forced to fend for themselves and their children without any help from their husband/fathers.

Head is clear to differentiate between the men who tend to their wives and families with tenderness like her ideal archetypal husband Paul Thebolo and the majority of men like Garesego who wreak havoc on society like “village dogs chasing a bitch on heat,” attempting to “gain dominance over the festivities and oust all the others from the bitch’s

vulva” (Head, *Treasures* 91). The aggressive kingpin imagines he is “the only penis in the world and that there had to be a scramble for it” (*Treasures* 91). The privileged penis male recklessly throbs and spurts its seeds throughout the village, accepting “no responsibility for the young he procreated and like the dogs and bulls and donkeys, he also made females abort” (*Treasures* 91). In his wake he leaves what Lionnet refers to as anguished “bodies in pain”—mothers and children struggling to survive on the barest of necessities. According to Head, this type of man “needed a little analyzing as he was responsible for the *complete breakdown of family life* (my emphasis)” (*Treasures* 91). Head connects the privileged penis male to the evolution that emerged over “three time-spans” (*Treasures* 91):

In the old days, before the colonial invasion of Africa, he was a man who lived by the traditions and taboos outlined for all the people by the forefathers of the tribe. He had little individual freedom to access whether these traditions were passionate or not—they demanded that he comply and obey the rules, without thought. But when the laws of the ancestors are examined, they appear on the whole to have been vast, external disciplines for the good of the society as a whole, with little attention given to individual preferences and needs. (*Treasures* 91-92)

Head seems to have moved away from beneficial notions of individualism posited by Gilbert in *When Rain Clouds Gather* to suggest that individualism has undermined community “taboos” and social “rules”—traditional structures that had originally maintained domestic social and economic cohesion. At the same time, she indicts these same traditional structures that “made so many errors” (*Treasures* 92). The dehumanization of women’s reproductive system was in part due to Africa’s independence, which hoisted on

the men “one more affliction on top of affliction[s]...” (*Treasures* 90). Africa’s independence ushered in a new world order, directly impacting and breaking “the old, traditional form of family life” and forever altering the dynamics of male and female regenerative power (*Treasures* 92).

In particular, Head upbraids the privileging of men in “a superior position in the tribe, while women were relegated, in a congenital sense, as being an inferior form of human life” (*Treasures* 92). In her didactic historicization of these privileged boundaries, Head further points to “the colonial era and the period of migratory mining labour in South Africa,” as a further “affliction” which tore family livelihoods asunder (*Treasures* 92). Colonial expansion and colonial exploitation of resources and minerals dehumanized the Garsegos of Botswana disposing them to the precarity of “‘the boy’ of the white man and a machine tool of the South African mines” (*Treasures* 92). In describing the penis male as “hideous” “broken wrecks” degraded by colonial impositions, she observes the bankruptcy of the inner resources needed in order to survive. Head seems to use Tswana man’s “inner emptiness” for the justification of his brutal cruelty towards women as he spins away on a death rampage “in a dizzy kind of death dance of wild destruction and dissipation” (*Treasures* 92).

After earning more money as a “clerk in the district administration service,” Garesego is able to fund his womanizing and drinking habits leaving his wife and three sons—Banabotho, Inalame and Motsomi (all under the age of four) to “their own resources” (*Treasures* 92). Like the other men caught up in an empty cash cycle, Garesego “displayed no interest in the children whatsoever. After Garesego’s initial desertion of Dikeledi and her three children, she took up seamstress work to pay for her son’s school fees affirming

McClintock's assertion that in the "absence of men, women became more autonomous and self sufficient" (318). When Garesego returns after his prolonged absence, he is "entirely wrapped up in himself and thought only of himself and his own comfort" (*Treasures* 102).

The rage against this phallocentric egoism pushes the women to sever its male privilege with methodological incision. Dikeledi specifically moves towards an "unguarded and defenseless" Garesego, his nakedness spread out to territorialize and control the entirety of the marriage bed. Dikeledi had enough with his selfish control and "with the precision and skill of her hard-working hands, she grasped hold of his genitals and cut them off with one stroke. In doing so, she slit the main artery, which ran on the inside of his groin. A massive spurt of blood arched its way across the bed. And Garesego bellowed" (Head, *Treasures* 103). Dikeledi watches on in silence, "speechless" to the anguish, the blood, the desecrated organ that could no longer wreak its havoc on her and her children. Head intimates that the extremes of murder and exile are the only remedies for women within the boundaries of this oppressive cycle. Garesego's spilt blood on the marriage bed becomes a powerful discourse to other men in the village—women's sexual desire and determination must be overpowered before it castrates and suctions male potency.

Rage against male dominion is the common denominator in Head's "long-term central state prison" that both figuratively and literally brings these Tswana women together under one collective vision: shared tenderness and solidarity. Although Dikeledi must serve her life sentence, she is able to transcend the "misery" and find tenderness, love, and "gold amidst the ash" (Head, *Treasures* 91). Harlow refers to "the prison as a meeting place," which occurs as a "historical conjuncture" for re-forming "social relationships" and shared experiences of intense marital conflict (*Barred* 17). It is at this conjuncture that Head's

prison articulates what Harlow refers to as “a critical and disjuncture, a turning point within the larger narrative, that forces a reworking of previous sociocultural paradigms and conduces to new coalitional possibilities” (*Barred* 46). For Dikiledi, it is finally a coalition of belonging and shared defiance of women who courageously refused to be passive victims of their husband’s abuse. The prison meeting place engages the women in these possibilities of treasured meaning. In this specific patriarchal outpost, Dikeledi, the collector of treasures, finds deep human connection that joins “her heart to the hearts of others” (Head, *Treasures* 91).

While these women share a commonality in their sexual exploitation and specific political and regional location, the similarities of their struggles to other female characters in this dissertation cannot be universalized into one size fits all gendered struggle.³⁰ Nandini Gunewardena admonishes “transnational feminists” from overvaluing women’s agency and shared expectations (Gunewardena and Kingsolver 296). Devi, Randall, and Head have warned their readers on how the assertion of agency can easily be usurped by the “corporeal and symbolic regulation of women’s lives” and reproductive systems leaving “little room for autonomy” (Gunewardena and Kingsolver 296). It is therefore imperative to maintain a diverse cross-cultural lens in exploring the politics of place within patriarchal exploitative systems.

In concluding this chapter, I have argued how Head pioneered an indigenous feminist historiography to examine feminist resistance to phallogentric structures. In my analysis, I have unraveled the local kinship structures and colonizing structures of patriarchal institutions and practices. In *A Question of Power*, I demonstrated how Head’s exilic discourse confronts the binary of race, class, and gender politics—between black and

white, male and female, apartheid politics and emancipatory consciousness and liberty. At this critical juncture, Head likens women to “helpless beetles” flaying in the negotiating spaces of good and evil, power and powerlessness. Women who challenge this “world of no appeal” suffer banishment and exile to prison like asylums –admonishments to other women as to the consequences when women dare transgress socio-political taboos (Head, *Question of Power* 63). In Elizabeth’s emancipatory struggle in *A Question of Power*, Head bursts open a poetic space of images and metaphors for a cathartic decolonization of her body, mind, and spirit, which eventually leads to her psychic and cultural integration. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, I employed an interdisciplinary approach to examine the ideological tension between capitalist agricultural and traditional pastoral livelihoods, providing a detailed model of how the merging of these systems produced an ecological apartheid leading to the devastation of ecosystems and women’s reproductive livelihoods. I showed how Gilbert’s schemes, which represent scientific patriarchy intensified inequalities, imposing a “production boundary,” that places women and nature in subordinate positions at each different level of production. In *Serowe, Village of the Rain Wind*, I confirmed how polygamy and bride price acted to secure economic stability amongst kinship relations. As socio-economic and political transactions these arrangements were, and in some African indigenous regions still are, interconnected to the reproduction and reproduction of traditional communities. I pointed to how these systems were usurped by colonial and post-independence capitalism, replacing traditional patrilocal kinship arrangements with gendered production, monogamous relations, and coercive western hegemonic notions of planned parenthood. Acting together these systems disempowered women and fueled the collapse of traditional family reproductive units. In *The Collector of Treasures*, I examined

the female body as a political space to examine the confrontation over social roles emerging within historically changing boundaries as men attempted to impose repressive limitations on women's reproductive behaviors and women fueled by their maternal rage resolved to resist and violently refuse them. I argued that in almost every instance when women acted to improve their material conditions, they were met with patriarchal resistance. The collusion of white and black patriarchy evidences how phallocentric power is preserved and protected within the very institutions that implement, legislate, and enforce them. Women who dare defy the privileged penis male systems are brutalized and banished.

Head's treasuring of the "other" offers another discourse to witness the "politics of place" and a localized framework for "reading otherwise" to examine the questions of power and patterns of resistance and female agency and what Anne McClintock calls the "politics of organization and strategy, which takes into account the myriad differences and loyalties that crisscross women's lives with conflicting passions" (*Imperial Leather* 312).

Notes:

¹ According to Head, the third phase of Brecht's life after he read *Das Kapital* was the most influential because of the nature of his "didactic plays" (*Alone*, Head 125).

² Head writes: "No one can live without the ego. So what I really lived through was death in life" (Vigne 160).

³ "Hysteria" deriving from Greek and a common held belief that permeated the time period up and through the Renaissance is the notion that a woman's uterus had become dislocated roaming throughout the body to wreak havoc.

⁴ Yousaf, Nahem. *Apartheid Narratives*. New York: DQR Studies in Literature, 2001.

⁵ For Foucault Lepers were the ultimate "other" during the Middle Ages and were targets of exclusionary tactics (Boyne 6). See Boyne, Roy. *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

⁶ Italian Communist activist, and political leader Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) proffers the concept of hegemony to explain the persistence of the capitalist mode of production. Hegemony challenges economic reductive determinism; however, he concedes that "for though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity" (Gramsci). In *Quardeni del Carcere*, Gramsci defines hegemony as form of control exercised by a dominant class or "functional group" (SPN 5 n1).

⁷ A protectorate were territories negotiated by treaty between the British and the *dikgosi* (the royal tribal leaders), the purpose of which was to preclude rival Boers and Germans from intervening in British interests. Under the protectorate, Britain was able to secure its own commercial interests by maintaining control while passing the administrative costs on to local leaders. The British Protectorate's land grabbing through land deals and manipulative concessions resulted in large populations being displaced along the eastern borders.

⁸ Vandana Shiva explored this death logic at a speaking engagement in Berkeley, California on October 20, 2014, entitled "The Rights of Mother Earth."

⁹ Head reports in *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, how "Khama's introduction of the iron-hand plough" replaced the traditional hoe, which later became only used for weeding purposes and which a "clever white manufacturer" took out a patent on its design—one created by the Bathudi.

¹⁰ Some Head Scholars believe that Makhaya represents the voice of Bessie Head herself and her search for belonging.

¹¹ Some critics believe that Makhaya's character blends attributes of Khama the Great who instituted many social reforms including the abolition of *bogera*, the discouragement of polygamy, witchcraft and rainmaking ceremonies (Head, *Serowe* 6).

¹² 45-year old retired midwife Rosemary Pretorius recounts to Head a similar experience in which she was "accused of being the cause of stillbirths" (*Serowe* 136).

¹³ Peace Corps established their presence in Botswana from 1966 leaving in 1997 because of a growing economic sector. They returned in 2003 to provide service for the HIV/AIDS epidemic (THE PEACE CORPS | BOTSWANA WELCOME BOOK [2014, 7).

¹⁴ According to Tegegnetwork Gettu, Director of UNDP's Africa Bureau, "It is a harsh paradox that in a world of food surpluses, hunger and malnutrition remain pervasive on a continent with ample agricultural endowments" (Food security must be at centre of Africa's development 15 May 2012).

¹⁵ See Mathuba's "Review of the Tribal Land Act, Land Policies and Related Issues," 1989.

¹⁶ Head studied food production and "Tropical Agriculture" through a correspondence course according to her January 14, 1969 letter to Randolph. Her narrative is informed by these studies in western agricultural development (Vigne, *Gesture of Belonging* 70).

¹⁷ In Head's March 4, 1996 letter to Randolph from the Bamangwato Development Association, she writes of her experimental harvesting of tobacco for cash cropping (Vigne 28).

¹⁸ See Carmen G. Gonzalez, "Trade Liberalization, Food Security, and the Environment: the Neoliberal Threat to Sustainable Rural Development," *Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems* 14 (2004): 419, 423, 469-70. 419, 423, 469-70.

¹⁹ The enlistment of women to implement male-centered agendas is a common theme throughout this dissertation.

²⁰ Shiva's *Staying Alive: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* provides a detailed source for examining how cash cropping interferes with "staple-food production" (13).

²¹ While living on the experimental farm at Bamangwato Development Association, Head says she envisioned it as a place to "develop drought resistant seeds" (Vigne 47).

²² See Melissa Checker's "Eco-Apartheid and Global Greenwaves: African Diasporic Environmental Justice Movements," *Souls*, 2008, 390-408.

²³ Leveled on top of polygamous structures is another hierarchical stratification based on gerontocracy in which young men and women are dominated by senior elders.

²⁴ See Van Allen, Judith Imel. "Free Women: Kinship, Capitalism, Gender and the State in Botswana." Diss. University of California, Berkeley, 2002. Print.

²⁵ See Ørnulf Gulbrandsen *The State And The Social: State Formation in Botswana and its Precolonial and Colonial Genealogies*, 2013.

²⁶ Printed in the Botswana magazine, *Kutlwano*.

²⁷ In *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Michel Foucault observes that the notion that hysteria was a hormonal induced woman's problem continued throughout the 17th Century and in the 19th century women were incarcerated when their sexual behaviors did not meet prescribed patriarchal standards.

²⁸ See Botswana Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2007 Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 11th, 27. Electronic.

²⁹ See also Maundeni, T., "Wife Abuse Among a Sample of Divorced Women in Botswana: A Research Note." *Violence Against Women* 8. 2 (2002):, 257-274. Electronic.

³⁰ See also Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004. Mohanty argues against witnessing "common conditions" in developing an analysis of women's oppression by a "universal mentality" (111). Print.

CHAPTER FIVE

ETHNOGRAPHIC LISTENING: RAGE AND HOPE

How we live now, only the people who have power, the people in the government, the wealth, there is only a world for them... They've created their bubble, with their family, and the people who are around them, so that they can believe that in Mexico there isn't poverty, that [there] aren't other people who don't have what they have. They forgot that there are other worlds, that there are indigenous people, that there are young people who are against globalization. We are another world. And we realize that it isn't just us, but there are gays and lesbians, indigenous peoples, workers, old people, children, women. So we need to create a world in which many worlds fit, where everything is for everyone.

Ixtab –A 17-year old Zapatista from Cuernavaca

Throughout this dissertation, I have applied an interdisciplinary approach to explore the reproductive experiences, memories, and stories of women's lived and imagined realities. In the works of Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Bessie Head, I have surveyed how reproduction is shaped across socio-cultural geopolitical boundaries, specifically at local/global historical junctures. I have examined local context specific histories from writers who make the complexities of women's real lived experiences the centrality of their narrations. Based on the often times complex and conflicting exchanges of people in real places, their discourses provide a materialist feminist space for understanding reproductive sustainability and for advancing an epistemology that values human life and well-being against economic systems that privilege the market benefits of capitalist patriarchy. These fictional and non-fictional narrations provide a vital entry point to interrogate the complex imposition of traditional and capitalist patriarchal forces on reproductive systems and the inequitable materialist conditions that entangle women and their children in the throes of struggle and survival.

In my examination of these discourses, I have focused on the myriad ways that intersecting patriarchal influences have attempted to control women's reproductive

behaviors and regulate women's procreation. As these stories attest, patriarchal violence against women occurs in almost every local region on the globe crossing boundaries of ethnicity, race, class, gender, and culture. From Serowe, Botswana to Bihar, India, women have been subjected to reproductive control and sexualized violence. In the examination of these discourses, the aim was to interrogate the reasons behind these impositions on women's reproductive systems from diverse and specific place-based locations. As storytellers, reporters, oral historians, Devi, Randall, and Head provide the intellectual discourse to theorize about the socio-historical and patriarchal processes that intersect women's lives. Their discourses provided the method for examining the complexity of women's reproductive experiences in which "knowledge doesn't exist 'out there' but is embedded in people and the power relations the power relations between us" (Potts and Brown 261). Albeit in the analysis of these discourses, little more than rhetorical guidance is offered as to how to implement a politics of reproductive justice; however, by exhuming the plundered, the battered, the raped, and the abused, these writers have opened channels of political and social engagement to participate in processes of cross-cultural dialogues that demand reflection.

The oral histories, reporting, stories, testimonies, and novels—all share a dominant analytical stratagem—bringing awareness to the patriarchal interruption of female sovereignty and the exertion of patriarchal control over female bodies and reproduction. Multiple intersecting forces prey on women's subsistence livelihoods, most notably the invasion of capital and its polarizing effects on subsistence economies and reproduction of kinship structures. In particular, Devi corroborates how *maldevelopment* projects and population control policies aimed at policing female reproductive systems

have led to demographic collapse amongst the tribal populations. Randall's literature of the Sandinista Revolution, witnesses women sacrificing their feminine desires and children for the male-directed collectives of the revolutionary fabled later. Bessie Head's narrations demonstrate how the monogamous nuclear family displaced polygamous kinship relationships, not only disrupting the security of socio-sexual arrangements, but leaving many women and child abandoned by its imposition. Although writing from different regions and contexts, these writers provide tangible evidence of how women across different geographic locations have employed resistance strategies against the privatization and colonization of their bodies, minds, and livelihoods.

Their testimonies affirm the logic of capitalist accumulation in which women are coerced into delivering their reproductive labor to the exploitative service of the patriarchal machine without compensation for labor and services rendered—their wombs virtual cogs in the wheel of patriarchal progress. As they churn out their labor to fuel the machine, female contributions have been decreed invisible by theorists from Karl Marx to Adam Smith. Because women's reproductive labor was never factored into their theoretical equation, Marx and Smith failed to recognize the exploitative nature of procreation and reproductive labor and the subsequent resistance to this subjugation and exploitation. There was no theoretical foresight by Marx or Smith that the women of Devi's discourses could possibly remove their wombs from patriarchal dominion as a form of emancipatory protest and simply refuse to procreate (Federici 49). Yet, I have argued that patriarchal violence against women has contributed to reproductive collapse in which, woman after woman in diverse geographic and ethnic locations has removed her womb as a propertied site of procreation and surplus value in order to save her self

and future generations from violent systematic subjugation. I have moreover argued that the failure of twentieth century revolutionary efforts can be traced to the failure to include an indigenous feminist agenda that combines effective apparatuses to implement the objective of these agendas (Randall, *Gathering Rage* 160).

It is no surprise that women have consistently resisted and that “in all phases of capitalist development, the state had to resort to regulation and coercion to expand or reduce the workforce” (Federici 50). As witnessed in Head’s Serowe, Randall’s Nicaragua and Devi’s tribal territories then and now, women have been pressured into relinquishing their procreative powers and the fruits of their wombs in a world where the state prescribes and “determine[s] which children should be born, where, when, or in what numbers” (Federici 50).

Across the globe women’s wombs are under siege as documented in Ellen Barry and Sushansini’s November 2014 article “12 Women Die after Botched Government Sterilizations in India.”¹ Barry and Sushansini report that twelve women died at a government funded sterilization camp in which poor, illiterate women from the impoverished state of Chhattisgarh were paid 600 rupees as economic incentives to “undergo tubal ligation.” Several factors were attributed to the cause of death including, “methods, rusty instruments, poor infection control, tainted medicines (which it now appears may have caused the women’s deaths), and a lack of follow-up care once the surgery was done.” More importantly, Barry and Sushansini indict India’s “aggressive population control policy,” the same policies referenced in Mahasweta Devi’s reportage. According to Barry and Sushansini India’s population policies:

[s]eems far more focused on the interests of the state than those of the women and their families. Incentive payments that are hard for poor women to refuse, combined with numerical targets and an emphasis on permanent contraception, have added up to a family planning program that's at odds with global norms.

Indira Gandhi's intensive sterilization campaigns in the 1970s have now resurfaced in financial incentive campaigns as a means to control "disposable" populations. According to Indian politician Raman Singh, sterilization was a national program, which "India carried out under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. "There should not be any laxity in such an important program," Singh said. As of a 2011 United Nations Report, 37 percent of the world's sterilizations are conducted in India. Attempting to curtail high fertility rates in tribal territories has been a challenge with some surgeons performing "250-300 operations a day." Similar to Devi's reportage, we witness, yet again, how neoliberal policies and capital expansion in post independence India have divided India's population into human citizens and human waste. Strategies for tribal assistance and concepts of ethical responsibility have been aimed at Neo-Malthusian population control policies rather than the real source of the problem—patriarchal capitalist exploitation of India's resources (Morton 137). Ewa Charkiewicz in "Who is the 'He' of He who Decides in Economic Discourse" concludes that "'the market mechanism,' as defined in economic discourse, is the manager of life and the handler of death" (80). Could coercive sterilization be part of the "new military market" strategies in "thanato-economics," in a system, which wages "war against its own populations"? (Charkiewicz 80). According to Charkiewicz, "the market is about

generation of wealth, (differential) maintenance of life, and the good life (for some) but this is inseparable from the death which comes with accelerated consumption of living nature and entails the disposal of human and nonhuman waste” (Charkiewicz 80). With the hastening expansion of consumer consumption of land and resources, it is sadly no surprise that we also witness the growth of thanato-technologies to control populations of those who are categorized as lacking utility and hence unfit and “redundant human waste” (Charkiewicz 81) These “death worlds” or “zones of social abandonment” are embedded in “economic discourse” and a regulatory death politics that “creates *homo sacer* and *femina sacra*, killing him and her with impunity” (Charkiewicz 82).

I have *urgently* argued that an in-depth analysis of the historical, socio-economic and political objectives of control over women’s reproductive systems is a necessary step to stop gendered rape and violence against all women. This urgency is captured in Randall’s foreword to Julie Shayne’s *Taking Risks: Feminist Activism and Research in the Americas*, in which she writes how even “without professional training” in oral history, she was able to use her own wits and imagination to discover a personal methodology for recording women’s stories. Randall concedes to learning by trial and error, her “natural empathy and developing political perceptions,” guided her on a career of listening, recording, and giving voice to the urgent voices of women “whose stories would otherwise not have found their way into print” (Shayne xi). Challenging the separation of academia and social activism, Randall, the courageous risk taker, encourages women to take risk in their lives, their research, scholarship, and activism. She articulates the importance of interdisciplinary scholarship and social activism to join

in the “rewriting of history” in order to “make something useful to the populations they study as well as to their readers” (Shayne xv).

In this dissertation, I accepted Randall’s challenge to “take risks” in my “scholarship” and “activism” as I believe that interdisciplinary global justice scholarship must synthesize research, theory, and action in ways that bring about reflection and inspire a politics of reproductive justice. Behar reflects that “We need other forms of criticism, which are rigorous yet not disinterested; forms of criticisms which are not immune to catharsis, forms of criticism which can respond vulnerably, in ways we must begin to try to imagine” (175). I have responded to this *vulnerability* to *imagine* the fictional works as powerful case studies employing Laterza’s theory of literature as a form of ethnography and a “sophisticated approach to the description of context-specific subjectivities” (124). In so doing, I have engaged in Laterza’s “ethnographic enterprise” to theorize models of “ethnographic listening” to examine the truth-value of patriarchal and capital’s exploitation of female reproductive and productive spaces.

Julie Shayne and Kristy Leissle posit that “As academics we have privileges and thus responsibility” (Shayne and Randall 311). Personally, I have had the privilege to “travel” across borders and examine the geographical locations of the literature under discussion. I have had the “privilege” to engage in “passion driven scholarship,” and to engage in the type of research that Margo Okazawa-Rey suggests “emanates from our souls and energizes us” (qtd. in Shayne and Randall xxxi). I have been committed to a decolonizing methodology of accompanying those who have traditional grassroots knowledge rather than “learning about” them as objects of research and study.² In the following sections, I accept Randall’s challenge to “take risks” in my “scholarship” and

“activism.” In learning and listening from below I employ the models of ethnographic listening proffered by these writers. I offer my own research amongst the Barabaig of Eastern Tanzania and Zapatistas of Chiapas as analytical terrain to further examine patriarchal control over women’s reproductive bodies.

Reading “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha” Amongst the Barabaig Tribe of Eastern Tanzania

The Barabaig peoples are vulnerable economic and ecological refugees pushed to the farthest corner of the Bosutu Plains of Eastern Tanzania to eek out a subsistence existence amidst encroaching capital and globalizing forces. Similar to the struggles encountered by tribals in Mahasweta Devi’s “Shisnu,” and “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha,” in this section, I offer my own ethnographic research to survey the anguish of the Barabaig peoples who try to hold onto their cultural traditions and ways of life amidst encroaching capital and globalizing forces. Employing Tuhiwai Smith’s decolonizing methodologies of “local theoretical positioning,” and previous models of ethnographic listening, I examine the reproductive terrain of Barabaig women and influential mythohistories in the construction of cultural beliefs and ideologies surrounding reproduction (Smith 186).

In *Imaginary Maps*, Mahsweta Devi writes, “The tribals want to stay in the place which they know as their own” and “Whatever has come in the name of development has spelled disaster for the tribes” (*Maps* xxii). This is equally true for the Barabaig Tribe of Eastern Tanzania who strives to maintain subsistence livelihoods despite policies and “arrangements for extinction” (*Maps* 170). In *Unbowed: A Memoir*, Maathai (2002) argues that the “future of the planet concerns all of us, and all of us should do what we

can to protect it” because if education means anything, it should instill in humanity the respect for the land, “because educated people are in the position to understand what is being lost” (137). Teresa Leal, Cochair of the Southwest Network for Environmental Justice said, “We must throw rocks at the sun” to challenge and resist globalizing forces; and, in Africa, the essentials of life seem more intense, issues of water and food security more demanding (qtd. in Adamson, Evans, and Stein 13). Guided by the whispering of their ancestors and the *anima mundi* (soul of the earth) of the Bosuto Plains, the Barabaig throws rocks at the unrestrained “development” projects that have devoured their people, their land and their resources without mercy.

It is my contention that the Bosuto Plains provides an urgent place-based site for the analysis of indigenous resistance to land displacement, globalization, and environmental degradation. Since April of 2011, I have been fascinated as to how the Barabaig—strong sentient beings—have been able to sustain themselves against what Vandana Shiva refers to as capital’s “creation boundary” of patenting, land-enclosures, and population control policies aimed at subaltern and indigenous peoples and livelihoods. This fascination led to an oral history and participatory action research project to examine the influential mythohistories in the construction of cultural beliefs and ideologies surrounding reproduction. Synthesizing the notion of indigenous eco-consciousness as the mindful other of globalization, this section offers an indigenous model for re-visioning relationships between humanity and nature. My research methodology draws on several sources ranging from fieldwork, personal interviews, videography, telephone interviews, extensive legal research, and analysis of historical documentation.³

First, I must acknowledge that it is difficult for what Trinh T. Minh-ha refers to as an “analytically trained mind” to admit that in the “recording, gathering, sorting, and synthesizing” of these discourses that I have not somehow imposed my own “dualistic structure” and second wave feminist values in my research (141). Similar to Devi’s Puran, I am acutely aware of the inability of language to convey meaning and representation and of the “im”possibility to truly understand the discourses I have recorded as “objects” of study and analysis. I am also aware that these mythohistories and songs are not immutable as they are affected by the changing socio-political and environmental forces that continuously affect daily-lived conditions and by the ethnographer who records, transcribes, and analyzes them. These mythohistories are valuable discursive sites for the examination of reproductive resistance and tribal sustainability to show how “traditional peoples developed rituals and practices that maintained their populations in a balance with local resources” (Merchant 211).

For centuries, mythohistories and songs have been powerful discourses in the maintenance of Barabaig collective tribal identity and female consciousness. Through the collective acts of “speaking, listening,” and “weaving-procreating,” women engage in the processes of retrieval and revival of Barabaig cosmologies of cultural origin (Minh-ha 126). Analysis of the myths and songs about female reproductive livelihoods and procreation demonstrate the importance of women’s labor in Barabaig tribal sustainability, enabling readers to listen and bear witness to the junctures and dis-junctures of women’s lives. These narratives reaffirm relationships and connect the Barabaig to their land and community showing future generations how to live and respect their culture and their traditional connection to the earth. Simultaneously linear and

cyclical they incorporate elements of social life and history in which cultural affectations are transferred and act to inaugurate women's motherhood position in the social relations of tribal reproduction.

George Klima writes in one of the only published case studies on the Barabaig tribe in 1955/1956 that the Barabaig Tribe was in the process of cultural assimilation into the larger Tanzanian socio-political structure. The Tanzanian Government had "banned the wearing of the traditional red-ochred toga" and had begun a program to shift Barabaig semi-nomadic herding livelihood to "sedentary horticulturalism" (Klima vii). Yet, my three year engagement amongst the Barabaig women of the Bosutu Plains captures a living testimony of an indigenous cultural pocket of resistance against what Ann McClintock refers to as the "imperial ghosting" of indigenous peoples. Men and women still dress in their traditional clothing and the 1968 Tanzanian government edict banning the red toga has done little to restrict cultural traditions. What the Government did not take into account is the strong macro-religious significance given to traditional cultural and socio-economic practices and mythohistories. Young Barabaig mothers still practice facial stratification and distended ear-lobes, wear beaded strings in geometric patterns and elaborate neck coils. The majority of households still practices polygamy and cattle herding is still one of the major means of subsistence and cultural and existential focus. Cattle are not only needed for biological survival, but also serve to confer social and personal position within society.

The "transformative change" Klima described 59 years ago has been in actuality a dynamic process of cultural and ecological resistance against globalizing forces. In fact, since the 1990s the Barabaig have been able to maintain a modified degree of cultural

integrity and both social and environmental sustainability. This is true in spite of the restructuring of socio-geographic areas in the interest of globalization and the jurisprudential land policies of privatization and villagization, which have systematically suspended constitutional rights and legal protections. The powerful infiltration of neoliberal forces culminating in land and resource grabbing over the last four decades has fashioned a geographical landscape of displaced indigenous peoples struggling to restructure their lives in inhabitable terrain, which for the most part struggles to support life forms.

International business conglomerates acting in collaboration with the economic interests of the Tanzania's nation state, is evidenced in the 1960 decision to cultivate wheat in the Arusha Region of the Hanang District. The United Republic of Tanzania along with the Canadian Food Aid Programme launched the Basotu Wheat Complex securing ten thousand acres of Barabaig land for wheat farming. In 1970, the National Agriculture and Food Corporation (NAFCO) expanded the project developing several large scale wheat farms securing 120,000 hectares of Barabaig pasture land, including homesteads, water sources, sacred burial grounds, and wild life. Sadly, many Barabaig were unaware of the legal maneuvering for their land and first found out about it when tractors ploughed through their homesteads. According to reports and interviews, NAFCO failed to give due process to people living on their land at the time and were deemed to be trespassers on their own property. "We were forced off our own land by gunpoint," recollected one of the elder mothers. Another Barabaig narrates how he was jostled from sleep and displaced:

It was 19th February 1985 around 1.00 p.m. I was returning from

watering my cattle. A NAFCO Landover from the direction of Kate's town pulled up beside me. Mwaigul, NAFCO's Assistant Manager, was seated in the front seat beside the driver. In the back, there were four armed Field Force Unit (FFU) soldiers and a plainclothesman. Mzee Duncan was also in the vehicle. Mwaigul pointed me out. The soldiers threateningly ordered me to board the vehicle. I had no guts to ask questions ... At Waret, the vehicle was driven around the houses of NAFCO managers and white expatriates. More beer was served to the soldiers. The day was wet and chilly as it had rained heavily that day.

It was late in the evening.

'Masikio!' (ears) called out one of the soldiers referring to me on account of my pierced ears. At gunpoint I was ordered to lie down in a ditch and roll in the mud. I began to shiver. Jonas, the Chairman, was called 'Chairman of Wamang'ati' [a derogatory reference to Datooga people] He was also ordered to roll in the mud. Meanwhile women and children from the surrounding houses were watching us and NAFCO staff seemed to be amused and happy. (Shivji 2007)

In the 1981 *Case of National Agricultural and Food Corporation v. Mulbadaw Village Council and Others*, the Barabaig sought legal protection and sued the National Agricultural and Food Corporation (NAFCO) for trespass on their land at the High Court of Tanzania in Arusha. While the High Court of Tanzania (D'Souza, Ag. J.) ruled in favor of the Barabaig Plaintiffs, stating that the Barabaig occupied land under customary title, the Court of Appeal of Tanzania overturned the decision and ruled in favor of

NAFCO stating that “The Plaintiffs/Respondents - Mulbadaw Village Council did not own the land in dispute or part of it because they did not produce any evidence to the effect of any allocation of the said land in dispute by the District Development Council as required by the Villages and Ujamaa Villages Act of 1975” (Peter 2007). In effect, the Village Council had trespassed by entering their own traditional lands: The Court of Appeals ruled that the villagers failed to meet the burden of proof that they were *natives* within the meaning of the law (my emphasis).⁴

Legal analysis of case precedence demonstrates that the Tanzanian government discounted Barabaig collective customary rights, discounted Barabaig tripartite land holding practices, ignored detrimental ecological effects derived from the alienation of pastoral lands, and moreover privileged the privatization and commodification of land and foreign and national interests over local indigenous rights. Carolyn Merchant’s global observation of indigenous dispossession holds sadly true for the Barabaig as “village after village is being robbed of its lifeline, its sources of drinking water, and the number of villages facing water famine is in direct proportion to the number of ‘schemes’ implemented by government agencies to develop water” (179). Political power backed by powerful interest groups proved in this case study that civil law is not the same as global power, and that in the vulnerable world of “nation-states,” placelessness and dispossession is a political consequence of globalization.

While the Barabaig have retained many of their traditional practices, the plains continue to be a dynamic contested space for the exploitation of resources creating a complicated dialectical tension between local people and regional, national, and international spheres of interest; Barabaig mothers continue to face severe threats to their

society and environment, and struggle daily to subsist. Enclosure of common herding lands for Sino-African infrastructure development projects, private farming, private ranches, and conservation wild life parks have placed undue hardship on the Barabaig's ecological environment and its ecosystems. These external forces coupled with their traditional creation myths and songs have rendered women exceptionally vulnerable to the intersecting forces of traditional patriarchy and capitalist patriarchy.

Before I begin, I must mention that Chief Daniel, the chief of the subdivision, had converted to Christianity and since has chosen the youngest of his five wives to live with, while relinquishing all marriage duties to his other four wives who now suffer from food and water insecurity.⁵ The four women are part of the 25 widows with whom I worked. Also important to understand in this patrilineal kinship system is the practice of *dugbadaid*—dowry cattle—which still plays a significant role in marriage unions. In *dugbadaid*, the bride's family gives from 2 to 40 heads of cattle to the daughter, which “will be kept in truth and later redistributed to her sons as marriage and inheritance cattle and as dowry for her daughters” (Klima 10). A woman cannot remarry once she has a son and “the dowry she brings to the marriage will not be returned” (Klima 9). In 1964, Klima writes that “the legal status of Barabaig women is reflected in the jural institution of *girgwagedgadeng* a ‘council of women’,” who gather “to deliberate as a judicial body, adjudicate and enforce their rights, and to impose legal sanctions against men” (12). The council of women is authorized by myth and realized by community support and action (Klima 12). While working with the Barabaig, I participated in *girgwagedgadeng*—always with men present who inserted their own personal requests and opinions. For example, although the chief condoned participatory action in working with the widows to

identify a subsistence strategy for feeding themselves and their children, he too requested similar relief. Thus, in exchange for participating in the acquisition of seeds and goats for the mothers, the Chief desired the same along with an additional request of a cell phone. Similar to Devi's "Strange Children," I have observed layers of patriarchal corruption in many relief-giving processes—in which relief seldom fully and adequately reaches the most vulnerable—the women who are caught in between the complicated and often violent global intersection of traditional patriarchy and capitalist patriarchy. In Susan Hawthorne's essay, "The Diversity Matrix: Relationship and Complexity," she recognizes the complexity of intersecting economic structures (87). These are the similar crisscrossing structures in which the Barabaig presently live as their lives and interactions indeed "takes place across a number of different social worlds," as they negotiate daily between the interaction of social, political, and natural worlds—all vying for scarce resources (Hawthorne 87). Within this complex framework, the Barabaig's central focus is subsistence and maintenance of their existing traditional livelihoods. It is for this reason that in my analysis of their songs and mythohistories on reproduction I apply a theory of complexity economics that recognizes the "interacting relational systems" and "intergenerational sustainability of economic systems" (Hawthorne 88).

The first creation myth I present functions as a "personal myth" for understanding Barabaig collective history and the interrelationships between Datooga Tribes.⁶ In this myth Chief Baba narrates the story of the first Barabaig descendent:

There was a Barabaig named Sedoyeka who was ugly and had a hard time attracting women, yet he wanted to marry. He looked everywhere, but woman weren't attracted to him. Sedoyeka was rejected by every

woman he wanted to marry. He was a wizard with special powers.

Sedoyeka went to a house owned by Ombayega, who is believed to be the first Barabaig. Ombayega had a beautiful daughter with deep rich eyes and skin the color of honey. She was the most beautiful girl in the village.

Ombayega's daughter refuses to marry Sedoyeka. Sedoyeka tells

Ombayega's daughter, 'If you don't marry me, I will make you blind!'

The daughter refuses. Then Sedoyeka blinded the girl.

Sredokeya said, 'If you accept to be married you will see again, and if you don't you will never see again.'

The girl accepts his hand in marriage and receives her vision and is able to once again see.

Sedoyeka's power to make people blind is unknown. One day, after the daughter went to live with Sedoyeka, Ombayega's donkey disappeared.

Ombayega was upset about the loss of his donkey and went out to search for it. He searched and searched everywhere in the forest, in the hills, in the grasses. He searched and searched never to return. Today, the Barabaig still wait for Ombayega's return as the owner of the original Barabaig home.

Datooga is the original and general name of many tribes including the Barabaig, Gisamjanga, Bajuta, and many others; however, Ombayega was the founder and the Barabaig and all Datooga Tribes are all descendants of the Ombayega.⁷

In this creation story, the establishment of the founding father is reinforced along with the tracing of patrilineal descent to establish Barabaig clan identity. This occurs “through a long line of male connecting links starting with the after and up to the father’s father, to the father’s father’s father and so on until the founding father is reached”—all which requires “memorization and retention” (Klima 39). The telling and retelling of the story reinforces the generation rule of the father; albeit, it appears that Klima was correct in his assertion that over time and historical conditions, memory has become distorted.

In addition to determining the rule of the father, we also witness the punishment of women who refuse to obey. In this story, Ombayega’s daughter punished with blindness for her initial refusal to marry Sedoyeka. It is only after the daughter acquiesces to Sedoyeka’s hand in marriage that her physical sight is restored. The integration of female punishment for daring to refuse an offer in marriage into the narration of the first Barabaig descendent reveals a deep-structural mythopoetic function in which the narration collectively unites members of the Datooga tribes and at the same time reinforces women’s reproductive position within its social systems. Moreover, the narration reveals a male reproductive consciousness in which sexual desires appear to be the “prerogatives of the male species” (O’Brien 4).

According to the Tribal Chief Daniel, the “leaders made laws, taboos, and commandments taught in oral stories to teach the community how to live. If these rules are broken, it is a considered a sin, and they will be punished by ancestors,” as in the blinding of nonconforming women. Disciplinary punishment is distinguished at its most primal level in terms of a male/female binary in which male desires are privileged. In addition to framing an epistemological direction, these creation myths explain the world,

guide social kinship relations, and address spiritual yearnings, providing collective meaning and solidarity to the tribal members (Kupperman 186). The myths and songs moreover enable the members to understand and reconcile their historical position in their mythologized community against a vastly changing globalized environment where international interests now vie for their land and resources. The waiting for the “Ombayega’s return as the owner of the original Barabaig home” reinforces the ancestral and legal customary ownership of these lands —albeit they have been challenged in court.

Placing Ombayega as the founder of the Datooga tribes connects tribes across geographical time and space into a traditional cultural collective of similar interests that “give rise to a distinct set of economic skills and values –at once material and ethical” (Salleh 6). The recounting of stories of shared historical roots amongst the tribes promotes the collective regeneration of social networks and the preservation of epistemological knowledges from generation to generation. In addition, within these stories we witness the traditional ethos and epistemology of the Barabaig in which they maintain what Ariel Salleh refers to as a sustainable “metabolic fit” in the way that they “take from nature, digest, and give back in return” without depleting their ecosystem (5-6). The Barabaig are geopolitically positioned at “the humanity-nature interface, taking care of biological flows, catalyzing matter/energy cycles” (Salleh 17). By practicing transhumance moving based on “forage conditions and water availability” and a seasonal deferment system of grazing, they are able to maintain subsistence livelihoods (Lane, “Natural Resource Management 82).

Originally, the Barabaig adapted to the conditions of their landscape by living nomadic lives and migrating with their cattle to perennial streams on the slopes of Mount Hanang and to the volcanic lakes in the Bosuto plains. This seasonal deferment system of grazing was based on rainwater surface collection with rainfall averaging around 600 mm per year during the months of April/May and November/December. Because of the complicated tripartite system of land holding rights, cattle grazing did not lead to the depletion of resources.⁸ In this conservative land use system, the community controls the overall landscape and topographical features, including sacred trees, Mount Hanang Forest, and all water sources, while the clans themselves control farmland, grave sites, water wells, and any abandoned bomas. Individual patriarchal heads of households own their homesteads and the areas surrounding them, including its trees and flora fauna. Barabaig livelihoods achieve the maximum “goal of balancing economic provisioning with intergenerational sustainability” (Salleh 11). Yet, while the Barabaig continue to survive, their subsistence livelihood is not to be romanticized.

In the Barabaig world, women face “the heavy burden of labor” and “bear the brunt of responsibility,” for not only traditional domestic responsibilities, including child-care, walking two hour distances for water collecting, food acquisition and preparation, but other agricultural tasks including wood collection and environmental management (Eriksen, Brown, and Kelly 2005). Men, on the other hand, have more freedom to move and access resources as they are not tied down to domestic responsibilities and can move with the cattle. The daily workload of Barabaig is onerous and from a Western perspective perhaps invokes Zora Neale Hurston’s poignant observation that “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see” (14). On one of the four hour round-

trips from the homestead to the waterhole, most of the women had to carry the water jugs weighing fifty plus pounds on their heads, without the use of the mule/donkey. Indeed the mule characterizes Barabaig women's precarious condition: "worked tuh death," "ruint wid mistreatment," yet strong enough to carry impossible "loads" nobody else wants to "tote" (Hurstun 56). Yet, in my interactions with the women, not one woman complained.⁹ Barabaig women without kinship support because of divorce or widowhood face an even more heightened sense of vulnerability. In addition, gendered restrictions on mobility and access to labor, capital, natural resources have precluded Barabaig women from successfully implementing principal coping strategies.

It is not a surprise then that women's reproductive reality is narrated with little idealization as witnessed in this oral song that is sung by mothers to each other and to their female children. As Mama Paulina explains, the songs remind their children that "mama has suffered a lot" and that pregnancy and childbirth are wrought with pain and suffering. In Mama Paulina's words: "The problems and even sickness and whatever the mother passed through they must remind their children, but the stories turn into songs so they can be a time of happiness but it is a reminder for the children. And those children who have forgotten can remember mama's suffering from the song." She insists that: "The problem of pregnancy baba (father) doesn't know. We know ourselves. Mamas prepare these songs during pregnancy. They take the whole story based on their pregnancy experience." The songs reflect a strong sense of feminine authority about their reproductive experiences.

The following is the song recorded on August 7, 2013.

Haya haya maleshi Goyewda.

Oh Oh Maleshi is Crying.

E semboda Dumda Etu Rukne Hawega.

This song I learned and is Sung by Girls.

Ooh Gebursa yenu Gidetu Seygeda.

Oh Will you tell me where I was seated? You will enable our generation to continue.

Oo Ghemata Bursa Gidahalegheda.

The Mother is tired and the Whole House we're Afraid.

Ooh Gomasew nagheda.

She is Going to Give a Gift.

Oo se Gidaganng'wenda asew nengheda.

Ooh birth is difficult, but it is the way for our generation to grow.

Oo mwalasi Gidabiw Hawega Lemshedi.

Oh, even clever girls will not escape the pain of childbirth.

Aaha Gidabiw halateda rayda Mushati.

No matter how beautiful I am, I must discard everything.

Aah Gwatimban ne ghwadah hagiareda.

Although I am hallucinating and seeing hard times.

Oo Gawnen ghemata sida Risha.

Let you (my child) be the child of mother who can nourish you.

Haya haya maleshi Goyewda.

Oh Oh Maleshi is Crying.

In this song, “reproductive consciousness is culturally transmitted,” as mothers teach their children of the difficult processes of childbirth in which a mother must suffer and “discard everything” to give birth (O’Brien 50). No matter what position a woman is in, once pregnant she cannot escape the pain of childbirth. The acknowledgement of the “seeing of hard times,” coupled with the essentialist performativity as a song “only sung by girls” reinforces the gendered roles of young girls whose primary responsibility is to bear children, suggesting a “reproductive, generic aspect consciousness” (O’Brien 15).

The chorus “Maleshi is crying” acts as collective participation that childbirth affords—as all girl infants cry at birth at the pain they will knowingly suffer as mothers. Still, it is a necessary pain that reproduces continuity over time, the birth and growth of the next generation as well as the tribal need for regeneration. In an appeal to ethos, mothers are tasked to bear the gestational weight of their physical suffering by first considering the welfare of their offspring and tribal community before their own personal needs. The song suggests that the reproductive demands of the female body can never surpass the procreative component.

Haya haya maleshi Goyewda suggests how traditional signs of female potency and lived experiences contribute to this awareness. Mama Paulina explains the song this way, “We have traditions. The thing they know is that when the child is born she will be raised to know all the things about the community about life and to be the person who is trusted in the community. Because it is a shame if the child is not trusted.” The stories and songs create a shared history to legitimize gender constructions in an appeal to tradition and cultural survival. Paulina asserts that “Before going to sleep we teach what

is good and bad and what people need in the community. The story which is how to live in the community in peace, to obey to respect and protect what the community doesn't want and do what the community can do to live in peace."

These songs confirm O'Brien's observation, that "The dialectical structure of reproductive consciousness is reaffirmed in the social relations of reproduction, and thus in female consciousness"(60). Collectively, the mothers agree that the song and others not mentioned here transmit values, mores, customs, and traditions in order to teach young girls how to live and be a Barabaig: "The value which is produced by reproductive labor might be called 'synthetic' value. It represents the unity of sentient beings with natural process and the integrity of the continuity of the race" (O'Brien 60).

The protection of women's "synthetic value" during gestation is established in a set of agreed upon concepts and postulates concerning their rights to be safeguarded from the afflictions of bodily harm from their husband. According to the mothers, some of these offenses reported by Klima are still punishable by the tribal courts. Sanctions against these offenses are called *ghordyod gademg* or the fine of the women. The following offenses testify to the specificity of violent reproductive abuse some Barabaig women have encountered during their childbearing years. A man may be punished for the following:

1. If a husband kicks his wife's cooking stones, his action implies a wish for her death.
2. If a husband beats his wife after she returns from a *werwerik*, a neighborhood mission of sympathy for a woman who has just given birth.

3. If the midwife hears the husband beating another wife during the time when his pregnant wife is about to give birth.
4. If a husband beats his wife during her one-month convalescence after childbirth, the period called *ghereg*.
5. If the husband hits his wife over the head with a stick.
6. If the husband takes away his wife's clothes and sends her away from the homestead in a naked condition. (Klima 90)

Upon looking at these reproductive specific offenses, we are faced with the cruel fact that women have suffered and continue to suffer sexual violence across geo-historical spaces prior to capital infiltration and other acculturating forces. Maria Mies links patriarchal violence in pastoral societies to “a one-sided relationship of exploitation and predation” (Mies, Thomson, and Werlhof 8). She attributes the inequality of gender relations in pastoral economies as a result of: “the monopoly of men over arms and the long observation of the reproductive behaviours of animals. As men began to manipulate the reproductive behavior of animals, they may have discovered their own generative functions” (Mies, Thomson, and Werlhof 84). In the discovery of these “generative functions,” men acted on their entitlement appropriating women's fertility and controlling bodies (Mies, Thomson, and Werlhof 84).

The adjudications of these offenses are held in a collective council of women under the central shade tree in which they convene a “moot” to decide the severity of the situation.¹⁰ The idea that an individual reproductive offense against a pregnant woman is a collective offense against all women's reproductive systems proves the retributive and redistributive power Barabaig women hold within the clan. If a man is found guilty of a

crime against reproduction, women secure jural remedies through the imposition of cattle fines. The remedy of cattle compensation for an offense is an economic deprivation against a man's property and resources and one of the most injurious charges against his livelihood. It is for this reason, Barabaig men often say: "They (the women) are going to 'eat' (consume) cattle needlessly" (Klima 89). While a husband may be present at the council to defend or challenge the allegations of beating his pregnant wife with a stick or stripping her of her clothes and belongings, many times they do not attend in fear of risking the rage and retaliation of the collective council. Mediated by elder women, the proceedings are time-consuming, as friends, family, neighbors—all have the opportunity to speak. If a man is found guilty as charged, in addition to incurring the expense of cattle, he must also submit a young black bull to bare the wrath of the women's rage. As a form of retaliatory retributive justice, women arm themselves with sticks and literally beat the young bull to death, sending a symbolic message to the abusive men of the clan. Beating the symbolic male replacement to a pulp is a visual admonition to all offenders, representing the true sentiments of the women (Klima 91).

In order to verse their daughters in the ways of Barabaig life, mothers also give didactic advice as a way to synthesize and mediate reproductive labor. In *Advice to our Daughters* recorded on August 7, 2013, we witness the suggested day-to-day activities, which girls must perform to contribute to the domestic survival of their family units. The advice is couched in responsibility—responsibility to the mother, to the community, to the land, and to the continuance of tribal continuity. Taken as a whole the advice offers an economic model of cultural sustainability in which living needs are met. *Advice to our Daughters* include the following admonitions:

1. *Sisina Mureda Gwenu e Gemadu.*
Respect me and your Baba and his mama.
2. *Gisisi Mureda Ng'ashega erukni Ghutenyu.*
Respect all my words and what I command you to do.
3. *Nala Gideba Gewaschi Gemadu.*
Know that I am your mom.
4. *Huwa wetenya.*
Be our help.
5. *Huwa sida weta be Fughara aba jeda Emeda.*
Be the wisdom of the tribe.
6. *Bwarinya Fukhaheng'wa e ghwa.*
Love your community and your parents.
7. *Adilehadi ne aduwi gelga sina gadiyeda ghaheng'wa.*
Don't go to another's homes. Stay at your home and do your duties.
8. *Jepta Huda ge ghwanal gew ng'ashega sin ghamwat aba Ghwa.*
The baby and girl must learn to do everything she does in their home.
9. *Una laja Ghwenga.*
She must go to collect wood.
10. *Sina E ghwadang'u.*
She must make leather.

11. *Sina Hang'wekagu.*
She must make her own clothes.
12. *Nala giwoschoda.*
She must know how to cook well.
13. *Weda ne Gidaw buneda Hamita.*
She must help and give the people food.
14. *Ramwa bega.*
She must fetch the water.
15. *Ghawa Dugwa ne Gisajischi.*
She must milk cow and make milk and butter.
16. *Iyeriti Ghana daruda guhuwi ghemata ghwanal Buneda gidebwa gendewi jepta hawega abwa ghwa.*
When I leave the house you, daughter, must be the mother so that the people they know that I have you in this house.
17. *Fura halenjeda I mendani ghwa.*
Protect my property if I am not at home.
18. *Imida gida gasa sida abwa ghwa imendani hiji, adidawi midang'u Denya, geghus ebalola seni. Adidaydi midang'u.*
If there is anything that someone wants from our home, don't give it. It is not yours. It is ours. We have to sit down together and discuss. It is not yours to give.
19. *Isighi Huda gagasa gawa gang'la ghenyi.*

If a girl marries she must go and take care of husband and house.

20. *Inya ne Gisni gida je gwargu siyedang'u.*

Accept and listen to whatever husband tells you to do.

21. *I muy sida ghenyi gibigu ghwa gajeng'uley ne (Gergwech).*

If husband is abusive, girl can return and family will take care of you.

22. *Bwarinya fukhaheng'a e Buneda sen be Datooga*

Love your community, your people.

23. *Heche una sen afkada ghaheng'wa (Ghwa).*

Wherever you go remember your home. (07 Sept. 2013).

Advice to our Daughters details the sexual asymmetrical division of labor and testifies to how a daughter's reproductive labor is an affective source of intrinsic use value that inheres in her physical potentiality, obedience, and industriousness. Women's affective labor is the center of production and reproduction. From producing the laborer-being and the ongoing processes of feeding, clothing, collecting water, hauling wood, and other myriad domestic chores, mothers and daughters are "vital producers."¹¹ They are in Hennessy's terms the "living labor," the living capital through which the "survival needs" are guaranteed (Fires 206). The advice is characterized by ritual, respect, and responsibility embedded in a material complexity. Women invest traditional instruction and lessons in the sustainability of family units in their advice to their daughters. Their discourses are daily reminders of cultural expectations, the aim of which is simply the fortitude and determination of their Barabaig ways of existence in opposition to the external processes of national acculturation. More importantly, *Advice to our Daughters*

reveals a model of tribal subsistence production in which “in the last analysis” is fueled by “female producers” (Mies, Thomson, and Werlhof 91).

What has become clear is that Klima’s 1955/56 assessment that the Barabaig are “present-time oriented” does not hold true for our 25 women who actively seek a survival strategy to live for their future tomorrows. Ideological notions claiming that “cultural flexibility is the key to survival” only furthers the ends of capitalism and globalization and the subjugation of indigenous native peoples (Klima 1970). The Barabaig songs, mythohistories and advice provide insight into the historical realities, and, moreover, sustain and shape reproductive politics and women’s reproductive decisions and productive livelihoods. The mythopoetic function of these discourses is vital to biopolitical production reinforcing an economic system capable of maintaining affective subjectivities and social networks of sustainability and cooperation.

Female reproductive contributions are what fuel and sustain past and present-day survival strategies amidst an ever-encroaching globalized world. Their cultural affects mold the ways Barabaig mothers make epistemological sense of their human existence. Moreover, these discourses provide cultural testimony as to how the traditional Barabaig epistemologies have created a powerful stronghold against Neo-Malthusian policies aimed at subaltern population control. Similar to the adivasis of Mahasweta Devi’s India, the Barabaig have constructed their own mythohistories to “bind the past to the present” in order to explain and understand “their nearly extinct sense of being” (*Imaginary Maps* 178).

“Please just let us be,” requested Chief Daniel.

Although we live in a world where connection to family, people, community, and place is no longer valued, the Barabaig has proven that sacred outposts of sustainable communities do still exist. The Barabaig way of being offers what Wendell Berry refers to as a “sense of wonder that comes from being deeply interconnected in a sacred way” and recognizes the interdependency and reverence of all life forms (Vaughan-Lee 14). Their mytho-historical discourses offer a “sense of ‘locatedness’” to examine social justice and ecological sustainability (Hawthorne 91).

Towards Establishing and Enacting a Feminist Agenda: Some Place in the Jungle.

We are all Marcos?

Engaging in listening is a political enterprise in terms of the choices we make in deciding which voices we privilege—those voices we perceive matter from our individual subjectivities. What matters and whose voices we choose to engage in this dialectic between speaker and receiver shapes and reinforces our epistemologies. In their essay, “Becoming an Anti-Oppressive Researcher,” Karen Potts and Leslie Brown describe the ability to listen without judgment, without expectations, and without assumptions as a form of “political listening” in a dialectical dance of power between varying interpretations and diverse truths (272).

In this section, I carry this political enterprise up and down the twisting tangled roads that wind deep into the Lacondón jungle seven hours outside San Cristobal de Las Casas to attend the *Zapatista Peoples and the National Indigenous Congress* which gathered on August 3-August 10, 2014 in *La Realidad*, Mexico. The people the color of earth opened their homes to the “The Free, Autonomous, Alternative, Or Whatever-You-Call-It Media.” As “part of this “whatever you-call-it-media” I came *to listen* and witness

the efficacy and implementation of the 1994 Declaration of Women twenty years after its declaration to observe what progress and advancements have been made—to see if *zapatismo* has been more effective in implementing reproductive justice and gender equity than the 1969 Sandinista Women’s platform.

To begin this political journey is to start with the intensification of US economic and political interest in Mexico in the 1990s when it appeared that Mexico was moving towards self-determination and autonomous regulation. The response to Mexico’s movement away from US control was the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, a strategy to secure Mexico’s financial dependence and lock it into neoliberal regulations and free trade agreements, which according to Chomsky “are not about ‘free’ trade at all,” but rather a “form of domination” (qtd. in Meyer and Alvarado 17-18). While Mexico was signing NAFTA, indigenous peoples from Tzeltal, Tzotil, Chol, Tojolabal, Zoque and other Mayan communities of Chiapas strategically planned their own revolt against these policies—on January 1, 1994, “the same day NAFTA was officially in place” (Hennessy, *NAFTA From Below* 7). Under the clandestine umbrella of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación* or EZLN), approximately 800 indigenous combatants waged war against the Mexican government by taking over San Cristobal de las Casas and its municipal palace, along with the swift occupation of four major municipalities in Chiapas, Mexico (Varese 268). Claiming they had a legitimate right to resistance under Article 38 of the Mexican Constitution, the Zapatistas declared their opposition to NAFTA and hostility to the “undeclared genocidal war against our people by dictators” (Varese 268).¹²

Indigenous communities considered NAFTA a “death certificate” to its peoples and livelihoods foreseeing the corporate takeover of the food supply. The overall agricultural economy in Mexico has declined 40 percent since NAFTA was implemented (Wolfwood 148). Of equal concern was the modification without judicial transparency and civil due processes of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, the legacy of Emiliano Zapata. Article 27 afforded legal protections of common lands and resources in order to prevent privatization, exploitation, and monopolization by private plantation interests. While at the end of the 1990s over half of the Mexican farmland was owned as *ejidas*, this rapidly changed with the modification of Article 27, which permitted the “privatization of indigenous and peasant collective and communal lands” (Varese 268). The impact on indigenous livelihoods has been destructive and demoralizing as one indigenous farmer put it: “To take our land is to take our life” (Varese 268). As I have argued throughout this dissertation, women and children bare the lived reality of land and resource dispossession. Comandanta Ester’s 2001 declaration in Mexico City succinctly affirms how women are caught in a complex gendered, socio-economic triple bind, “because we are poor, because we are indigenous, and because we are women” (Klein 140-41).

This has certainly been the case in which redistribution of common holdings and resources to private interest and the intensification of multinational foreign interests have invaded previous communal spaces and collapsed family livelihoods. NAFTA opened the countryside to agribusiness conglomerates like “American Cynamid, Chevron, Monsanto, and De-Kalb-Pfizer Genetics,” introducing “genetically modified seed, agricultural chemicals and the biopiracy of plant life” in their wake (Hennessy, *NAFTA From Below*

7). Hennessy observes that NAFTA's ruinous clutches have spread throughout Mexico, strangling its peoples and ecosystems:

In different ways, both regions have lived the violent impact of neo-liberalism: the invasion of foreign investment, increased production for export, unemployment, migration, increased militarization of communities, the infiltration of drug trafficking, and rampant violation of human rights. And in both regions NAFTA has intensified the scramble for survival. (*NAFTA From Below* 135)

In an informal gathering of delegates from Global Exchange and Sipaz in San Cristobal de las Casas on August 5, 2014, Miguel Picard, former advocate for the Center for Investigation and Popular Education, spoke on the impact of NAFTA remarking that NAFTA and neoliberal policies have destroyed local peasant and indigenous farmers who cannot compete with US agribusiness who introduce their products on the market at surplus "dumping prices."¹³ The result is that local farmers cannot compete and consequently cannot sell their crops. This has indubitably been the case with US subsidized corn, which has wreaked havoc on local corn farmers forcing many to switch from corn, a traditional staple to other crop production, entangling women in the daily struggle to feed their families. The outrage against the takeover of indigenous lands and livelihoods precipitated by 500 years of exploitation and expansion fuels the Zapatista Movement and their concerns for ethnic self-determination, sovereignty, and autonomy. According to Miguel Picard, Zapatistas have successfully secured a geo-political and conceptual space to live and move forward outside the dominant neoliberal paradigm. He repeats similar rethoric earlier to Hennessey, remarking:

Because the government has only brought cooptation, corruption, weakening of our autonomous native structures. We have to cut ourselves off from everything. No, we are not going to let ourselves be bribed with a subsidy, with some tin roofs for our homes. No, we have to cut ourselves off from all of this because we know that it is destructive of the independent movements. (Hennessy, *NAFTA From Below* 165)

The rhetoric against corrupt government systems that suffocate indigenous self-determination and autonomy is still the armor worn by the Zapatistas who face relentless attacks by the government and paramilitaries turning some parts of Chiapas into oppressive police states. Although on February 16, 1996, the Zapatista and the Mexican Government reached an agreement in The San Andrés Accords stipulating to some of their demands for self-determination, self-autonomy, recognition and promotion of Indian peoples and their knowledges, the federal government has failed to live up to its part of the agreement. The efforts of the Accords birthed the National Indigenous Congress bringing together a wide spectrum of indigenous peoples to share their common independence outside governmental structures, its central focus to facilitate the government's specific performance of the San Andrés Accords. In 2001, Comandante Esther, acting spokeswoman for the Zapatistas, demanded adherence to The San Andrés Accords leading the *March the Color of the Earth to Mexico City*. Comandante Esther delivered a speech detailing the lived experience from childbirth to childrearing, a daily 20-hour workload of laundry, cooking, and hauling water from water sources three hours away (Ruis 216). While Esther emphasized how women's "daily actions—carrying, caring, and resisting—had transformed them from being victims to leaders," women's

concerns have still been submerged in the rhetoric of *neoliberalismo y capitalismo* (Ruis 216).

At the Inauguration of the First Exchange of Indigenous Peoples of Mexico with Zapatista Peoples on August 3, 2014, Comandante Tacho of the EZLN, rearticulated the original struggles set forth in 1994, which the Accords attempted to address:

We come to share our suffering and pain caused by the Neoliberal system. But not only this. We also come to share valuable knowledges, our experiences in struggle and organization, and our goals and challenges. We do so in the face of the neoliberal capitalist invaders that have done us so much damage. These invaders were not satisfied with the theft and looting carried out by the conquistadors in 1492.

Comandante Tacho rallied indigenous peoples from Amuzgo, Mixe, to Chontal and Huarijio to respect shared knowledges and lived experiences. Pointing to the causes of their shared afflictions he declared:

We as originary peoples were ignored, deceived, forgotten, exploited, and enslaved in their dominion for more than 500 years. And now, through the rise of the neoliberal powers, the machine of destruction appears once again to disappear our peoples. They have made it bigger and more modern, supported by laws and bad governments, in order to invade us once again. It has a new plan of dispossession, dispossessing us of our mother earth using the machinery of the power of money, looting the riches that mother earth has held and kept safe for millions of years. With this machine comes the death and destruction of our peoples and our

mother earth. (Tacho. Declaration from the *Inauguration of the First Exchange of Indigenous Peoples of Mexicio with Zapatista Peoples*. Aug. 2014)

Later that week during the National Indigenous Congress, similar rhetoric was delivered to the alternative press of which I was a part. At the Zapatista Declaration on August 10, Subcomandante Moises delivered a rousing speech against the 520 year war against indigenous peoples in which “thousands and thousands” of indigenous peoples were “assassinated, disappeared, and imprisoned” for defending their families, their traditional communities and their culture” and “life itself.” For the Zapatistas, among other atrocities, *capitalismo* is to blame for bloodshed, dispossession, starvation, crop failure, and exploitation, “massacres, death and more death.” Today, neoliberal policies are the new “war of conquest” in a world where indigenous peoples of the Global South “die” and “live every day, collectively, like the corn.” Yet, like the adivasis, the Barabaig, and the Zulus, the people the color of the earth “continue being.” Their persistence to “continue being” in spite of this “war of conquest” enralls me, gives my life pause, and demands me to *listen*.

In 1996, Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano emphasizes listening as a powerful tool for social change when he describes Subcomandante Marcos as a non-indigenous outsider who “came from elsewhere.” He recalls how Marcos spoke to the indigenous peoples, but “they did not understand. Then he entered the mist, he learned to *listen* (my emphasis) and was able to speak. Now he speaks from them: His voice is the voice of voices” (Hayden 48). Galeano captures the importance of listening as a powerful ideological tool for understanding, social advocacy and change: “That same mist that

prevents one from seeing is also the window that opens onto the world of the other, the world of the indigenous[s]...” (Hayden xxii). This “mist” is similar to Margaret Randall’s call to look into the mirror and see the “other,” identify with the “other.” José Saramago suggests looking in the “silence,” to “learn to listen,” in order to “finally be able to understand” (Hayden xxii). It is here in the Mexican Southeast Mountains surrounded by Nahuas, Mazahuas, Zoques, Wixarikas, Tepehuanos, Cocas, Mayos, Triquis, Choos, Tzotzils, Tzeltals, and other indigenous mothers, fathers, and children, where the jungle continues its mysterious embrace, I *listen* to the voices from below. Marcos describes this world of *zapatismo* as the “underground” or subterranean,” “underneath institutional movements” (Hayden 303).

In a “Poem in Two Beats and a Subversive Ending,” Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos writes: “It was words that created us. They shaped us, and spread their lines to control us.” Educated in the art of rhetoric, Marcos now Galeano, is politically mindful of the power of words and the battle of ideology.¹⁴ A student of Althusser, he writes: “The war for the word has begun” (Ponce de León xxv). I have argued that the battle of ideologies and the articulation, re-articulation, and dis-articulation of these ideologies are crucial in understanding post-revolutionary and post-independence gender specific violence and gender inequity.

Philosophy graduate and former university professor Rafael Sebastián Guillén, Marcos is well versed in Althusserian theories on how ideology articulated, re-articulated, and dis-articulated functions in exercising socio-political control.¹⁵ He approximates Lacan and Althusser’s of an “imaginary order” to argue that the capitalist ideology does not “reflect” *la realidad* and the “real conditions of existence.” At best

capitalism can express the "imaginary relationship" of indigenous peoples living in an "imaginary order," which is one step removed from the Lacanian Real. Marcos's didactic rhetoric attempts to liberate indigenous women from capitalist ideology that constructs "*concrete individuals as subjects*" (Lenin 116). According to a February 11, 1995 Nation/World Report, Marcos visited the Sandinistas in Managua, Nicaragua and "returned to Mexico in the late 1980s to lay the foundations for the future Zapatista National Liberation Army." Marcos who allegedly took on the name *El Mejicano*, disputes this account claiming to have already been in the jungle at this time.¹⁶

In 1995, Alma Guillermoprieto recognizes that "Marcos's preoccupation with symbolic language is certainly worthy of a student of Althusser" (Hayden 37). The name Marcos itself is said to be an acronym for the villages and towns the Zapatistas overtook on January 1, 1994: Margaritas, Altamirano, La Realidad, Chanal, Ocosingo and San Cristobal (Hayden 378). This symbolic tactic of extending agency to the indigenous poor of these communities embraces them into the "ideal" of the collective struggle in which people from *La Realidad* to *Ocosingo* can claim: "We are all Marcos."

Guillermoprieto correctly observes how the symbolic usage of political imagery of "the Revolution, the peasant's unending struggle for dignity and recognition, the betrayed Emiliano Zapata," along with his epistolary rhetoric interpolates women into a subversive ideology resistant to capitalism. When Marcos admonishes that "the capitalists had us believing this idea ... that women are not valuable," he is asking women to wake up from their subject place of *capitalist* interpellation, so that they do "not (*freely*) accept " their " *subjection*, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'" (Lenin 123).¹⁷ Similar to Hsu Kuang's

recognition during the Chinese Revolution, Marcos understood that women needed the revolution and the revolution needed women. Marcos set forth the “objective conditions” that needed changing enlisting feminine subjective forces as agents to consciously recognize their capitalist enemies—*zapatismo* the crystallization of these forces. Advancing and gathering the subjective factor was instrumental in launching the Zapatista Movement.

The construction of capitalism as the primary enemy of indigenous women’s subjugation enabled Marcos to “interpellate” and hail: “Hey, you there!” to the poorest of the poor, the poor and hungry women, the rich color of soil. “Hey, you there”; gather your rage (Lenin 118). Marcos gathers the rage, but not against traditional *machismo* behaviors that too have kept indigenous women in a complicated subordinate status for centuries, but against *capitalism y neoliberalismo*—the death-sentence to all indigenous livelihoods. The rhetoric of *zapatismo* targets *capitalismo* for the 520 years of female subjugation as it “was born of the blood of our peoples and the millions of our brothers and sisters who died during the European invasion” (Aug. 10, 2004). This Althusserian strategy reinforces that both indigenous men and women are “always-already a subject, even before he (she) is born, is [...] the plain reality, accessible to everyone and not a paradox at all” (Lenin 119). The power of *zapatismo* to divert the responsibility of traditional *machismo* for the persistent subjugation of women is noteworthy. The fact that women do not charge traditional patriarchal structures for their individual oppressions demonstrates the power of *zapatismo* to construct ideology, and the power of ideology itself. Indeed Rafael Sebastián Guillén, Marcos, Galeano or “Or Whatever-You-Call-It Media” Machiavelli is correct in his assertion that “ideas are also weapons” (315).

It becomes apparent that the Zapatista and Sandinista's ability to interpolate women by re-articulating feminist ideology of gender equality was a masterful strategy to recruit women into the revolutionary fold and attract both indigenous and Western support. Elena Poniatowska argues, that Major Susana in fact established the first feminist agenda in March of 1993 when she was tasked with recruiting women into the revolution (Hayden 55). Comandanta Susana and Comandant Romona traveled throughout the communities and villages to dialogue with the women and appeal to women's real needs. In Major Susana's battle cry for gender justice she asserts: "We do not wish to be obliged to marry someone we don't love. We want to have as many children we want and can care for. We want the right to a position in a community. We want the right to say what we think and have it be respected. We want the right to study and even be truck drivers" (Hayden 55). The demand for gender women's rights became part of *El Despertador Mexicano, Organo Informativo del EZLN* (México, No 1., Diciembre 1993) and then part of the 1994 Women's Revolutionary Law.¹⁸ Appealing to women's concerns, the Zapatistas purported to provide a new reality of respect, dignity, and protection from gender violence for indigenous women. M.A.R.C.O.S. re-articulates the collective feminist rhetoric voiced by Major Susana: "Here in the Zapatista Army, the penalty for rape is death. A man who rapes a woman is sentenced to death by firing squad. Fortunately, we have not yet had to send anyone to be shot. Zapatista women can choose the man they want to marry. Before, they were the ones chosen. They have the right to control their bodies, and use a variety of methods of contraception[s]..." (Hayden 381).

Unfortunately these feminist declarations have done little to change how “Macho Mexican justice deals with women, especially poor women who have had not access to an education” (Hayden 57).¹⁹ Pontiatowskwa notes how women have been braced in a borderland position between Cortez’s mistress, Malinche and the Virgin de Guadalupe. *Machismo* existed before capitalism as according to feminist journalist María Victoria Llamas, “Mexican women still struggle for respect. Even the guerilla women in Chiapas are victims of their men’s macho’s attitudes” (Hayden 55).²⁰ *Zapatismo* claims to position women at the center of its political agenda and articulates *The Participation of Women in the Autonomous Government* in the ten points of the Women’s Revolutionary Law. Yet, implementing these points “... *nos ha costado mucho*—it has been an uphill battle and the success of their feminist agenda has been mixed.

Indigenous feminist scholar Sylvia Marcos July 2014 report on “The Zapatista Women’s Revolutionary Law as it is Lived Today,” suggests that *zapatismo* has kept an “emphasis” on its feminist agenda as it is delineated in the Revolutionary Law. However, there is substantive testimony from Zapatista compañeras that suggest women still struggle within a patriarchal paradigm of subordinate positions. In Sylvia Marcos’s analysis of “Participation of Women in Autonomous Government: First-Grade Textbook for the Course “Freedom According to the Zapatistas,” the Women’s Law escapes any rigid framework. It proposes and resolves some practical feminist demands, such as women’s “empowerment” and the advance of women’s “reproductive rights” (07/2014). Her assessment infers that women’s “sexual and reproductive rights” have been transformed “under the aegis of Zapatista autonomy,” and “permeated by collective identity, interdependence, and inter-relatedness” (07/2014). After reading these similar

testimonios, it seems that Sylvia Marcos's analysis represents a similar ideology of *zapatismo*: "We are equal because we are different." Sylvia Marcos argues that "It broadens all referents, expands them, transgresses them, and joins them "illogically" with its practices of inclusion[n]..." In this "illogical" transformative process, which "transgresses" all logic, Sylvia Marcos advances a new direction forged outside categorization; albeit, she admits *zapatismo* shares Platonic essences of "...[r]eproductive rights, and sometimes like an elaboration of gender racialization in all its complex theorizations." Female Marcos appears to be rearticulating male Marcos's interpretation of "Zapatista women's history" in which he argues that, "...all categorical options are a trap... The answer is neither here nor there. It is better to make a new path that goes where one wants to go" (Marcos).

On further interrogation, it seems that this postmodern rhetoric itself is a trap to ensnare indigenous women at the precarious precipice of the "here" and "there" forever hanging in the rhetorical air. In this social media-manipulated world, Zapatistas are drilled in the rhetoric of the atrocities of *capitalismo*—a reductive red herring to maintain machismo privilege.²¹ In other words, casting the sole blame for women's subordination on capitalism and neoliberalism, two words I heard uttered over and over as if it were a mantra during the 2014 Indigenous Congress, reifies what it proposes to condemn—oppression. This one-dimensional approach overlooks the sale of Coca-Cola, water bottles, *chickles*, candy, chips, Zapatista tea shirts, and other food and goods that were sold during the event. Nor does it consider the deployment of children as young as two years of age selling their *curios* during the Congress. "The oppression of women, after

all, did not begin with capitalism. What began with capitalism was the more intense exploitation of women and the possibility at last of their liberation” (Dalla Costa).²²

Note the observation of Eloísa (Former Member of the Junta de Buen Gobierno. MAREZ San Pedro Michoacán), “When we were under the rule of our fathers they did not give us that freedom to go out well the machismo that was lived before was great. Maybe is not because the compañeros wanted it to be like this, but because they had the idea that capitalism itself or the system itself put in our heads” (“Participation of Women in Autonomous Government” 6). Eloísa rearticulates that indigenous women’s reproductive subjugation under machismo is/was directly linked to Spanish colonization and the introduction of private property interests, without acknowledgement of preexisting traditional patriarchal systems of subordination. Hillary Klein’s *Compañeras*, makes a slight reference to this as “a historical oversimplification that patriarchy and its sexist practices were introduced into their communities by colonialism, and are not an intrinsic part of indigenous culture” (3600). Yet, it is precisely because *Zapatismo* and *Sandanismo* did not and does not include indigenous patriarchal oppression in its revolutionary rhetoric and analysis of existing gender relations that women still face systematic oppression. The euphemistic language of “oversimplification” to investigate female subordination and scrutinize privileged patriarchal agenda furthers a distorted factual accounting in the recording of historical memory. While it is true that capitalism and neoliberalism have wreaked havoc on women’s livelihoods heightening oppression and gender violence, it is crucial to recognize traditional patriarchal systems are one of the most prominent constitutive factors in the present subjugation of women’s

reproductive systems. According to Isabel's testimony to Klein in 2003, male privilege is still a dominant factor in Zapatista communities:

Maybe there's resistance and men don't want to change. I won't say that men don't take women into account— they do. But it's as if men have set a limit, 'up to here.' When a woman makes a decision, if it's not in the men's interest, they will override her decision. It's their way of saying, 'You're not really in charge— we're still in charge here.' If the women in the community suggest something and it's convenient for the men, they will agree to it. But if the men don't like it, they will put a stop to it. They continue on with their own plans, with their own rules. They rip our ideas apart and throw them out, and do whatever they want. We are left standing to one side, like spectators, watching to see what the men will do, and feeling like they don't want something that is truly fair just, and so— there we are! With no power and with the men still in charge. But when they need us to be part of the struggle, for example to confront the soldiers or some other danger, well, then they have to accept that they need us. They call us and say, 'We need you to do this.' (3631-33)

Klein's own research and testimonies provide concrete and convincing evidence of how patriarchal agendas enfeeble women's emancipation. The restrained political commentary to condemn traditional patriarchy for persistent sexual abuse and reproductive control is clear upon listening to the voices of other Zapatista women who struggle to reconcile the gap between the *1994 Declaration of Women's Rights* with *la realidad* of their present reproductive conditions. For example in describing the domestic

division of labor, Nabil (Member of the Autonomous Council. MAREZ Tierra y Libertad) observes how women with large numbers of children have a difficult time “when in the family the *compañero* did not take the responsibility of caring for the children in the moment which the *compañera* left and went to realize the work” (“Women in Autonomous Government” 9). Yolanda (Education Promoter. MAREZ Magdalena de la Paz) from Oventik, Caracol II, notes that women have not achieved equal domestic contributions in her zone. According to Yolanda, “I think that in all the five caracoles, still this is not being fulfilled because we have still not been able to achieve that there be a wage within the organization, there is not” (“Women in Autonomous Government” 25). In a discussion between the *compañeras* of Caracol IV, Morelia, an unnamed *compañera* describes lack of “moral support from her *compañero*” (“Women in Autonomous Government” 57). She describes the difficulty of leaving her family to attend meetings:

The *compañera* has to make tortillas so that she leaves it for her child, she has to get tortillas to take it where she is going, and we see that the little children are those who eat more; if you go four days to the meeting and you leave two baskets of tortillas it is not enough for the child, worse if they are very little they eat more, every while they eat; the youth eat less because they go out to work and carry their *pozol*, but the children no, it is very different. It is worse still if it is that the *compa* does not support per se, the *compa* arrives, the *compañera* just arrived, she is still cleaning their house, she is making their fire, food for the *compa*, and what if the *compa* arrives already angry. ‘Give me my food quickly,’ he arrives to say to the

compañera who just arrived from doing her work. (“Women in Autonomous Government” 57)

Conceptually, *zapatismo* promotes the idea of women’s participation in the various levels of autonomous governance. The Revolutionary Women’s Laws establish equitable relations between men and women, granting women access to participate and rule in the *Buen Gobierno* (Ruis 215). Yet, the empirical evidence suggests that women who do participate come home to a second shift of domestic demands from both children and husband. In order to participate, women have had to make gender adjustments “small changes that are enacted” in their specific locals and situation (Hennessy, “Gender Adjustments” 183). Within the shifting context of government participation and domestic work, *compañeras* have had to revise their daily routines in order to participate.²³

In reference to the “Exercise of the Revolutionary Women’s Law” concerning gender violence, although some strides have been made, it appears that this declaration has also come short of its complete eradication. Declaration Eight states: “No woman will be beaten or physically mistreated by family members or by strangers. The crimes of attempted rape or rape will be punished severely” (“Women in Autonomous Government” 27). According to Guadalupe an education promoter from the Monterey Region, from Caracol Oventik, “We say that it has not been completely fulfilled because physical violence is not the only thing that takes place, there are other types of mistreatment” (“Women in Autonomous Government” 25). The other type of violence Guadalupe describes is physical battery and rape both outside and inside the Caracol “by the party- members” (“Women in Autonomous Government” 25). Ana (Education Trainer. MAREZ El Trabajo) from Caracol V, Roberto Barios, explains that “there are

case(s) which still happen in our communities because is the bad custom that there is in one's head, that it is contaminated, *machismo* exists still. 'I am stronger and you have to respect me,' those words still exist many times with our support base *compañeros*' ("Women in Autonomous Government" 69). Several other *compañeras* suggest that the gender violence is still persistent.

Such case reported by Marisol entails a "huge fucker" with two wives who hung one of his wives "by her feet upside-down and he beat her there, the same together with two more of their children, and we had to see that arrangement" ("Women in Autonomous Government" 14). In this case, apparently the *compañeras* were granted a divorce and the "fucker's" goods were divided up. The *compañera* asked for separation, "so we did it dividing up the goods of the man," which is how they "gave it solution" ("Women in Autonomous Government" 14). Although in the telling of this story redistributive justice was meted out similarly to the stories presented in Bessie Head's *The Collector of Treasures*, the "fucker" apparently did not receive retributive justice for the violence committed.

In terms of reproductive rights, and the Third Declaration that "Women have the right to decide the number of children that they can have and care for," Yolanda from Caracol II observes that "We see still that it is not being fulfilled much, we are fulfilling it a little, there are some families who already decide how many they can take care of, how many they can have. In these points we are advancing a little, a little is still lacking, there are women who have a ton of children still" ("Women in Autonomous Government" 25). Yolanda acknowledges that reproductive choice has a political element, as "it is through the politics that the regional representatives give us" ("Women

in Autonomous Government” 25). In discussing family planning, Marisol clarifies the family planning agenda in that it “does not mean that they are not going to have children, but that within the couple they plan how many children” (“Women in Autonomous Government” 12). Marisol expresses the concern of some of the *compañeros* and *compañeras* that choice is not about the prohibition of children, “but really they are being told to plan, that is why it called planning” (“Women in Autonomous Government” 16).

Ana (Education Trainer. MAREZ El Trabajo) acknowledges that family planning caused great consternation between some of the community members, as especially there “were some *compañeros* who did not like this. Why am I going to decide? Why is she just going to decide how many children I am going to have? What God sends is what I am going to have” (“Women in Autonomous Government” 67). Some of the *compañeros* voiced concerns about the procreation of children to maintain “militiamen” and “students” (“Women in Autonomous Government” 67). They perceive forced planning as a blight on educational development pointing to government preschools whose buildings “are empty, there are few students with them because they are forced to plan” (“Women in Autonomous Government” 67).

Under the 1994 Declaration “women have the right to decide the number of children they have and care for.” Women in the caracols are taught about feminine hygiene and contraception and according to Marcos’s May 11, 1994 interview “somewhere in *la Selva Lacondona*, “The *compañera* not only has the right to terminate pregnancy, but the organization has the obligation to provide the means for to do it with total safety.” Marcos’s platform on women’s health care is one of the motives behind women’s participation in the revolution. “Participation of Women in Autonomous

Government: First-Grade Textbook for the Course “Freedom According to the Zapatistas,” there is not one mention of abortion—its rhetorical absence a powerful indicator of its implementation within the Zapatista health clinics. Instead, abortion seems to be replaced with family planning rhetoric of spacing births out every five years.

The Oventic, Chiapas sharing of the five councils of *Buen Gobierno* held six sessions in December 30 to January 2, 2007 to address among other topics women’s reproductive and health issues. According to a compañera on the panel, “The practice of abortion is neither endorsed nor condemned in Zapatista territory, but arises in situations that are best avoided by preventative measures and education. ‘Women don’t practice [abortion], nor do they search it out. Moreover, it is more a matter due to the circumstances that result in spontaneous abortions’” (Villarreal).²⁴ Ginna Villarreal’s 2007 observation rearticulates *zapatismo* and its perceptions of reproductive justice in “that some of the main hurdles to women’s health remain set by a system of patriarchy left as inheritance by a Spanish conquest” (Villarreal). According to Chiapas Sipaz official Marina Pages’s statement regarding abortion:

We don't know if they practice it in Caracoles but the fact remains that in Chiapas as a whole abortions are prohibited and illegal unless the pregnancy resulted from rape, if the fetus has a malformation, or the life of the mother is at risk. So, if they practice abortions, they won't mention it publicly giving to the State yet another reason/pretext to harass them. As far as we are aware of, you can obtain abortions legally only in Mexico Federal District. Regarding birth control yes there are programs in all the Caracoles as far as we are aware of. (October, 2014)

As the Zapatista women testify, reproduction emancipation is still a daily struggle. Linking persistent reproductive subjugation to *solely* Colonial Conquest is a form of ideological subterfuge, which suppresses and overpowers honest discussions of indigenous patriarchal systems that privilege masculinity. Now deceased Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos is correct: “It was words that created us. They shaped us, and spread their lines to control us.”

In comparing the ability to sustain a feminist agenda within the Sandinista and Zapatista Revolutionary movements, it is hard *not* to question whether or not women have reverted back to previous reproductive control picking up their previous domestic roles in tending to family demands without the help of their male counterparts. Devon Hansen and Laura Ryan argue that “Women's involvement in the movement increased their potential for equality, but it could not wholly overcome deeply embedded gendered beliefs that women were abandoning their true womanly calling of needing to care for their families” (11).

While it is true that Marcos's knowledge, vision, platform, and ability to engage the media enabled the people the color of the earth to say “We are all Marcos,” instead of “We are all Marias,” it cannot be denied that his inclusive ideological hail to the people from below inspired a successful revolutionary movement. It is also true that contradictions and unresolved tensions remain between rhetoric and practice. Marcos's acknowledges these chronic contradictions in his 2004 communiqué “Two Shortcomings,” remarking that “Even though Zapatista women have had a fundamental role in the resistance, respect for their rights is still, in some cases, just a declaration on

paper” (Klein 3720). Honest in his communiqué, he concedes that he doesn’t have “a positive report to share with regards to women— in creating conditions for their development, or in a new culture that would acknowledge women’s skills and talents, ones that are supposedly exclusive to men” (Klein 3724).

Implementing autonomous good government is complicated and raises the questions: Autonomous for whom? Have declarations of autonomy changed women’s lived experiences and reproductive rights? Although I have argued that gender equality has been privileged in early revolutionary rhetoric to “hail” subjective forces (especially women) to pick up a gun and join the revolution, they have been subsequently subordinated to other ideological mandates. While EZLN’s rhetoric recognizes how cultural patriarchy is “heavily ingrained in indigenous society,” women still struggle against its impositions and “since the initial uprising in 1994 little has changed for women outside of the intimate circle of EZLN leaders” (Hansen and Ryan 2007).

While Michael Hardt observes that Zapatista “politics does not rest on a fixed identity,” it still appears that *machismo* is as fixed as ever (1261). Hardt’s notions of “antimodernity” and “altermodernity” are still framed in patriarchy, tradition or otherwise. Until Zapatista notions of “altermodernity” include an *implemented* feminism of reproductive equality, then “antimodernity” and “altermodernity” are one in the same: female subordination.

Arguably today, *Zapatismo* engages in self-reflection to examine its contradictions. *Zapatismo* openly discusses the gaps between political ideals and social practice. Women’s spaces for discussion have commenced to reflect and contribute discourses on the fissures in which many women still stumble. Critical reflection of

whether previous political declarations on gender equality have been achieved is a crucial step towards reproductive justice. These female spaces open pathways for positive change. Still, more must be done.

Unless indigenous women can extricate themselves from the ideological rhetoric that *solely* blames gender violence, inequity, and reproductive subjugation on *capitalismo* and *neoliberalismo* conquest, and colonization, subaltern women will continue to be ruled by the will and right of the indigenous father. Women must embrace their historical memory and acknowledge the sexual division of labor and the traditional ontological principles that existed in indigenous communities before conquest and colonization. Moving beyond the mestizo-indigenous binary will enable women to open spaces for true revolutionary change. Gender equality must be more than rhetoric “hails” to justice, and certainly more than a two decade long continuous dialogue. Active engagement of the equal distribution of political power must be met with social action. (Randall, *Narrative of Power* 200).

Postscript: In Subcomandante Marcos 2013 admission communiqué for students to the Little School, he asks of prospective students:

Would you attend a school taught by indigenous teachers, whose mother tongue is typified as “dialect”? Could you overcome the temptation to study them as anthropological subjects, psychological subjects, subjects of law or esoterism, or history? Would you overcome the urge to write a report, interview them, tell them your opinion, give them advice, orders? Would you see them, that is to say, would you listen to them? ²⁵

These same political ruminations need to be taken up by M.A.R.C.OS. in examining the dialectical dance of power between political listener and political receiver in which listening is a reconceptualized and transformative process of redistributive justice and meaning making for all (Randall, *Narrative of Power* 272). *Political listening* to examine women's revolutionary agency within the combatant trenches of the Sandinista and Zapatista Revolutions has the rhetorical power to unveil the gendered structure of patriarchal institutions that obstructs gender equality and reproductive justice. Perhaps it is here on a localized regional basis, one female combatant's voice at a time, that women voices can rise in *equal* global unison to maintain sustainable and equitable indigenous livelihoods.

Conclusion: Raging Bull

In *Gathering Wombs: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Decolonizing Reproductive Labor and the Female Body*, I have mapped an historical cartography of context-specific patriarchal control, abuse, rape and reproductive violence across varied geographical and ethnic terrains. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, I have explored the literature of Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Bessie Head to examine the gendered politics of reproduction and production and the historical and economic realities that shape women's reproductive behaviors. Focusing on the womb as a place of hegemonic contestation, I have examined the literature as a form of ethnography to examine how indigenous women's traditional reproductive livelihoods have been displaced by colonial, neoliberal, and global forces and how women have strongly responded by developing strategies to resist these forces. In developing this analysis, I have argued that the women's body politic across different time, space, and

region is strained by the violent struggle for reproductive justice; therefore, women's reproductive justice must be central to any and all arguments for social justice. In order to truly promote social justice, we must move away from Neo-Malthusian concepts of overpopulation that seek to control women's reproductive systems in the Global South; rather, we must acknowledge and redress the inequitable consumption of land and resources of the Global North.

While the majority of this analysis has focused on literary fiction and non-fiction, I have also included my own observations and fieldwork with the Barabaig Tribe and Zapatistas along with contemporary regional events that testify to both the ongoing gender specific violence against women and to the persistent enactment of women's resistance and agency. Throughout all these texts and contexts, women have never stood idly by as receptacles of patriarchal abuse and object-venues for masculine power plays. I have proven that women have resisted and continue to resist patriarchal impositions in four ways: biopolitics, patriarchal politics gendered politics, and socio-juridical agency. Head's women strike back physically at the phallocentric roots of oppression; Randall's revolutionary women take up arms; Devi's women use their sexual bodies to challenge male dominion. Women in these texts and contexts are resisters, activists, heroes of their individual struggles—each act of resistance—a meditated and affirmative strategy to decolonize the patriarchal institutions that strive to control their wombs. It is in the collection of their “treasured” stories and female alliances, and through the remembering, telling, and retelling of women's stories to each other that the power exists to create feminist solidarity in different locations. Imagined communities of reproductive justice are birthed in these struggles.

The Zapatistas and Sandinistas have proven that rhetoric is not action. While rhetoric may create platforms for intercultural dialogue and spaces for social media interaction, enacting justice requires just that—*inactare*—acting, putting into concrete practice the rhetorical agendas proposed. Ontological events of love in the commons may bring Head’s treasured “gestures of humanity” to the fields of Spinozan production “and seek to repeat and expand our joy,” but in the history of humanity it has not brought forth any lasting collective solidarity for earth’s multitudes (Hardt 2005-97). While the writers have proven Hennessy and Hardt’s proposition that “love is a historical discourse that is suffused with affect,” it is also a socio-political construction deriving from its historical subjectivity and cultural positioning. Love’s motivation is as fickle as its subject holder. Wars, rapes, genocides, femicides—all can be claimed to have been waged in the name of love. “It names an emotion freighted with norms that shape desire and direct attachments to objects, relations, and pleasures” (Hennessy, *Fires* 205). As such, love can operate as a political freight train displacing and dispossessing populations on its quest for its determination, more material manifestations of love: gold, water, oil, land, people the color of the earth. The horrific collision of “subjectivities and “singularities” in our commons has taken its most cataclysmic toll on women and children.

The idea of love leading to “utopian hope” as a byproduct of affect culture seems fantastical idealism considering the disparate interpretations of its very meaning. In light of the January 7, 2015 slaughter of 12 journalists at the satirical publication *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris by three Islam extremists, one shouting Allahu Akbar," it seems naïve of Hennessy and Hardt to suggest that “love in the commons” can create a shared political value of love. Love for Muhammed or love for freedom of the press are two distinct

political concepts both encountered “in the commons,” but produced in subjectivities shaped by different material circumstances; perhaps, a better aphoristic platitude should be “love for the commons” or “love for humanity” in which human beings place the love for each other and earth’s living systems above his/her own religious, political, academic or social agendas. This too is radical idealism, or in Spivak’s terms “quixotic moralism” in which theorists have assigned ontological concepts of love as “the strongest mobilizing discourse in the world” to banish evil and alleviate human suffering (*Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 383). According to Spivak, What deserves the name of love is an effort—over which one has no control yet at which one must not strain—which is slow, attentive on both side[s]...” (383). Hardt, Negri, Hennessy, and Spivak agree that it is a “collective effort by love,” that will create love in the commons (*Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 383). In order to move past idealism, we need to institute a political project that according to Spivak recognizes the subaltern “disenfranchised woman of the diaspora,” and her “access to civil rights” and enables women to speak (*Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 400). For Spivak, this involves an “ethical singularity,” a profound engagement between parties, which (flows from both side[s]) (*Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 384).

From India, Nicaragua, Botswana, Tanzania, and Mexico, in each and every text and context in this dissertation, we have witnessed women suffer the arbitrary persecution of male juridical bodies at the local, regional, national, and international level. In order to get out from under the might and rule of the father, and break free of these interlocking patriarchal apparatuses, we need to put forth our radical hope into a “political project” that institutes a complete restructuring of our local, regional, national and global judiciary systems. Women’s inability to receive equity and justice in systems

of “free market democracy” will occur only if there is a rigorous restructuring of these juridico-political systems that includes gender parity and focuses on delivering rights back to the ordinary people—not corporations. In *Making Peace with the Earth*, Vandana Shiva observes that corporate personhood is not only hijacking the world’s food supply, but hijacking democracy and quashing human rights on its path towards commodifying everything in its reach. By transforming “biodiversity into ‘intellectual property’” patriarchal corporate structures have cast a wide net over the resources of the commons, from the rivers to the air and “carbon in the atmosphere” (Shiva 259).²⁶ These legal maneuvers have undermined protections and obliterated regulations that previous generations had instituted to safeguard the commons against capitalist inclinations to exploit its people and resources (Mies, *The Village and the World* 262). In order to protect the most vulnerable—women and children—“the cost free, or worse-paid service providers” of our globalized democracy, sustainable policies must be at the forefront of legislative local and global juridical agendas. Since women are the main food providers, their sustainable livelihoods must be protected against the globalized laws of commerce (Shiva, “Globalization and Poverty” 58). Women must have a voice in the development of these agendas, as there is a direct correlation between globalization, neoliberal policies and gender violence and food and water insecurity (Mies, *The Village and the World* 279).

The 2011 U.N. Women reporting of 27 percent representation of female judges worldwide is dismal. Worse is the reporting by Inter-Parliamentary Union that women only make up 20.2 percent of legislators (Doherty 3). As of July 2014, The International Criminal Court, reports, “333% more men than women” were appointed to higher level

decision-making positions revealing a widening gender gap of representation (*Women Initiative for Gender Justice* 271).

The survey of literature reveals that a gender balanced juridical body will promote reproductive justice and women's empowerment (Doherty 3). The 2011-2012 "Progress of the World's Women" report informs us that gender parity is a key factor in women accessing due process of law and equitable and fair decisions (61). It is also a key factor in enforcing violations against women and decolonizing the female body from the systematic apparatuses that have bound them. Randall is correct in her assessment that "women must claim and inhabit the room we need, the room that patriarchy has usurped through so many constricted lifetimes" (*Gathering Rage*, 83). "Inhabiting the room we need," demands juridico-political representation. Epistemic change can only be successfully produced through a renegotiation of power structures and the inclusion of "indigenous feminist discourses" and the development of feminist agendas (Randall, *Gathering Rage* 160). Renegotiation, however, must include the reorganization of women working, adjudicating, and legislating within these local, regional, national, and international juridical bodies to implement and enforce these agendas. It is only through an ethical commitment of engagement to create a dialectic of collective decision-making in which women voices are equally represented that meaningful change will arise.

In concluding, Mahasweta Devi, Margaret Randall, and Bessie Head have provided humanity with valuable discourses and models of ethnographic *listening* that enable us to *listen* to and *learn* from the indigenous voices from below. Head reflects that "My personal feeling is that people, when faced with a power structure that attempts to destroy their humanity, find ways and means of keeping their humanity in tact" (*Alone*

124).

It behooves us to gather our rage across the indigenous cartography mapped throughout this dissertation and *listen* to women's stories of power and resistance; *listen* to how collective councils of indigenous women secure jural remedies against gender specific violence. Perhaps, in "being haunted" by the aboriginal way of keeping "humanity in tact," we can heed the advice from the Barabaig women and arm our selves with sticks to finally beat the patriarchal bull into submission.

Notes:

¹ See Barry, Ellen and Raj Suhasini's "12 Women Die After Botched Government Sterilization in India." *Asia Pacific NY Times* 11 November 2014.

² Gayatri Spivak refers to this as "learning to learn from below."

³ Fieldwork took place on three separate occasions between April 2011 and December 2014.

⁴ In "The Time of Sacred Places," Winona LaDuke observes the tragic irony of "settlers and intruders" determining native status and the bitterness many indigenous tribes feel towards this adjudication (88).

⁵ This is an alias name, so as not to cause any undue hardship to the mothers.

⁶ Three of the widows attempted to tell this myth, but they couldn't remember the full story, so they requested the Chief to narrate the story.

⁷ Joshua Sumari helped with all the Barabaig to English translations.

⁸ Garret Hardin's "Tragedy of the Commons" posits that overuse of the commons leads to environmental devastation.

⁹ On one water tour, Mama Happy was more concerned with why my 30-year old daughter did not have a husband or children.

¹⁰ The meeting place for most all communal discussions and moots is held under the central tree adjacent to the brick school building.

¹¹ While recording the advice, a young six year old carrying a burdensome bundle of wood returned from completing one of her many chores of the day.

¹² Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution bestows public power with the original peoples, in which the right to change their government structures lies with the people (EZLN 50).

¹³ Miguel Picard also spoke informally about the impact of the World Bank and the International Money Fund as well as the devaluation of the peso as contributing factors.

¹⁴ According to Marcos, he died and is now resurrected in educator Galeano, José Luis Solís López, who was killed in May of 2014 by paramilitaries.

¹⁵ I take Antonio Gramsci's idea of "disarticulation and rearticulation" as a confrontational process of disarticulating an idea to rearticulate it into another social formation.

¹⁶ "Mexico Unmasks Guerrilla Commander Subcomandante Marcos Really Is Well-Educated Son Of Furniture-Store Owner." *Nation/World*, 11 Feb.1995.

¹⁷ The masculine pronoun usage is yet another form of subjugation.

¹⁸ Revolutionary Laws of the Zapatista Women (*written someplace in the jungle, March, 1996*) Taken from Lea Clayton, Prism Mexico correspondence. "These laws (excerpted) are designed to be enforced inside the rebel communities as a semi-official working code to enable the liberation of the indigenous woman:"

1. The women have the right to be respected within family life and within the community.
2. The women have the same rights as men in the community and municipality.
4. The married women have the right to use family planning methods-natural or artificial-whichever they decide. The man has to agree with her decision.
5. The women have the right to participate in meetings and in the decision-making process, without criticism. The women have the right ...to hold office....
7. The Revolutionary Law strictly prohibits the sale, cultivation and consumption of drugs, marijuana, poppy, cocaine, etc.
8. The sale and consumption of alcoholic drinks in our towns and communities is strictly prohibited because we are those who suffer most the bruises, poverty and misery as a consequence of this vice.
9. The women and their children will have equal rights to the men in the health, clothing, expense, etc. and the maintenance of family economic resources.
10. We, the women, have the right to rest when we really need it, be it because we are tired or sick or because we need to achieve other tasks.
11. We have the right to defend ourselves verbally when we are offended or attacked in words by the family or others.
12. We have the right to physically defend ourselves when we are attacked or aggravated by families or others, and we have the right to punish the men or person who aggravates, abandons and insults the women.
14. The women have the right to demand that the bad customs that affect our physical and emotional health are changed; those who discriminate against, mock or abuse the women will be punished.
15. The Revolutionary Law prohibits the abandonment of one's spouse without reason...or uniting with another man or woman when there hasn't been a normal divorce.
16. The Revolutionary Law prohibits a man to have two women because this practice hurts the wives' feelings, violates her rights and injures her dignity as wife and as woman.
17. The Law reclaims and considers valid indigenous societal norms. It is prohibited for some member of society to have amorous relations outside of community rules. In other words, men and women may not have relations without being married because this carries as consequence the destruction of the family and is a bad example to society.
18. No woman will be mistreated, insulted, or physically abused by her husband for not having male children.
21. In case of marital separation, the land and all family possessions are divided into equal parts between husband, wife and children.
22. Women have the right to punish men who sell and take alcoholic drinks and drugs.
23. Single women have the right of being respected and considered as a family.
25. The woman has the right to support from the husband when she is organizing, and when women go to meetings, men will watch and feed the children and tend the hearth.
31. The woman has the right to demand the eradication of prostitution in the communities.

¹⁹ Feminist journalist Maria Victoria Llamas says this on the occasion of the trial of Claudia Rodriguez who shot and killed a man who tried to rape her. She served only a year and 11 days for this crime.

²⁰ Daisy Zamora details similar experiences in Chapter Three on Randall.

²¹ From August 9-August 10, I heard the word the capatalismo repeated innumerable times.

²² Jon McGee and Belisa González explore traditional gender roles and cosmology in the Lacondon jungle paying particular notice to Gary H. Gossen's work with the Tzotzil speaking Mayans. In these indigenous spaces women's "work space" is limited to a home in which she "sits on the floor while the men and boys in her family sit on small stool[s]..." (179). The Chiapas Tzeltal Maya further practice gender divisions within their reproductive and productive structures. Stereotypical gender roles are reinforced by Lacondon cosmology and mythology (180). See McGee Jon R and Beliza González. "Economics, Women, and Work in the Lacandon Jungle ." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*. 20.2 (1999): 175-189.

²³ I have argued in Chapter One, that many of these "gender adjustments" have placed a tollsome burden on women—the term itself being euphemistic for the myriad ways women have had to "adjust" to more and more work.

²⁴ Villarreal supports my own findings that Zapatistas are reluctant to discuss reproductive rights. From my conversations with Sipaz, Zapatista women can have abortions, they simply are not offered in Zapatista clinics, nor is birth control for that matter. Therefore, if a woman wants an abortion or contraception they must travel outside the Zapatista Community and Chiapas to Mexico City to get it. This is not an easy feat, as transportation is almost impossible for many of the community members.

²⁵ See Molina, Marta. "The Zapatistas' first school opens for session." *Waging Nonviolence*, August 12, 2013.

²⁶ See *Citizen United v. Federal Election Commision* and *Dartmouth v. Woodward*.

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