Introduction: Silence as a Power
Helen Jaqueline McLaren

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Suzanne Ingram

Silence as Power: Women Bargaining with Patriarchy in Kenya
Glory Joy Gatwiri and Anne Mumbi Karanja

Silencing the Hardship: Bangladeshi Women, Microfinance and Reproductive Work
Faraha Nawaz and Helen Jaqueline McLaren

Mute in Pain: The Power of Silence in Triggering Domestic Violence in Ghana
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Cassandra Star

Silence as a Discourse in the Public Sphere: Media Representations of Australians Joining the Fight in Syria
Tejaswini Patil and Gretchen Marie Ennis

Black Women with Vaginal Fistula: The Power to Silence via Internet Imagery
Helen Jaqueline McLaren and Glory Joy Gatwiri
The idea for this issue cover design began with a dialogue between the editor, Helen McClaren, and myself about how the concept for the cover design could unfold. A few ideas were put forward. I preferred just a white cover with the word ‘SILENCE’ in bold type. Helen reminisced an experience she had living in Coober Pedy when a dust storm came through the town. She said the dust made a distinct line of clouds through the sky on one side and blue on the other. A few days previous to our discussion I had gone for a walk with my camera to photograph the landscape. Whilst photographing on the Mooloolaba esplanade on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, a storm was rapidly advancing over the headlands. A clear line of menacing dark clouds threatened the beautiful blue sky. This image seemed a perfect metaphor for this issue cover, Silence as a Power, as there is always a weird silence before a storm. This idea has often been used as a cultural idiom – ‘silence before the storm’ – describing the act of a quiet or peaceful period before fervent activity or a crisis.

The metaphor for this concept using the landscape was particularly pertinent, as artists have been representing storm and voluminous clouds in their art since early times.

The term ‘landscape’ actually derives from the Dutch word landschap, which originally meant ‘region, tract of land’ but acquired the artistic connotation, ‘a picture depicting scenery on land’ in the early 1500s (Brief History of the Landscape 2000).

Here, the landscape offers a sense of surrealism, as though something ominous is about to occur – a calm before the storm … !

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- title page listing contributing authors, contact details, affiliation and short bio of approximately 80 words
- abstract should be a maximum of 150 words
- three - five keywords.

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Sociological, political and feminist writings most often associate silence with powerlessness, particularly in relationships characterised by power imbalances. The greater the power of certain individuals, the more likely others with less power will experience humiliation and pain, and conclude with silence (McNay 1992; Eriksson et al. 2008; McLaren 2013). Hence, to understand the silence of the subject individual, one could propose that silence is a product of power rather than that of the individual.

Disempowered groups in a given social system likewise become silenced by the greater socio-political powers around them (Chávez and Griffin 2009). In particular, the power structures in some cultural contexts have vested interest in muting the scope and extent of particular social problems; silencing, therefore, may lead to increasing power of authorities and ongoing reinforcement of cruelty towards the oppressed. One significant example is the silencing of the extent, scope and ongoing abuse against women and children in some cultures and nations, which Romito (2008) locates as a deafening silence that persists despite genuine advances in the understanding of gender power and violence.

Those who are silenced send a variety of discursive messages, including that they are weak, passive, powerless or voiceless. Silence may then be interpreted by those with more power as assent to continue the domination, but paradoxically there exists a discourse-power dynamic in which silence is a product, and also a producer, of power (Foucault 1972; Butler 2006; McLaren 2013). This is a complex and ambiguous feature of power dynamics that are intrinsic to silence and this is instrumental in sustaining imbalances in the world. While power inflicts silence, silence also has the capacity to destabilise existing powers and structures of control. This brings to the forefront understanding that silence has discursive power.

In conceptualising silence as an unspoken language or text, it can then be agreed as a discourse in itself. Silence, as a discourse, has power. The power of silence is evident in many forums, including in education to motivate learners (Bista 2012) and in art to induce emotions and sensations among viewers (Stark 1963). In certain cultures silence is used to express politeness and it persuades respect (Shafiee Nahrkhalaji et al. 2013). In government and political systems, silence is often used strategically as a social influence, evident in media reporting on Australia’s ‘official policy of evasion’ in regard to immigration detention (Opray 2014) of refugees and asylum seekers. Government silence on boat people, including children, held on Manus Island detention centre has ‘kept in the dark’ human rights advocates and concerned individuals about violence and a lack of safety in immigration detention centres (Opray 2014). Silence has, in this case, served to ensure that human rights violations are not easily brought to the public sphere, thus minimising the influence of social protest. Finally, some forms of silence in official Australian policy are so powerful that they have endured, such as, for example, the lack of recognition of Aboriginal Australians in Australia’s Constitution. In doing so, silence mobilises particular ways of thinking, knowledges, actions and relationships. Done so without words and without actions, silence significantly impacts on the power differentials between people, groups and political leadership. These power differentials exist locally, nationally and globally.

The first author in this edition is an Aboriginal woman of the Wiradjuri nation. Suzanne Ingram examines the shifts in social justice advocacy in which Western feminisms have historically spoken for Aboriginal women on the issue of domestic violence, often in ways that have rendered Aboriginal women voiceless by both social justice discourses and in their kinship systems. In using the concept of influence, Ingram elucidates the need for Aboriginal women to take a stand against being silenced in their interpersonal relationships, geopolitical contexts and the multiple layers of hegemonic structures.

Glory Gatwiri and Anne Karanja explore the silent protests of Kenyan women who bargain with patriarchy through mobilising silence in the face of oppressive situations. Using three case studies, the authors acknowledge patriarchal dominance and women’s oppression. At the same time, they illuminate how silent protests are enacted by Kenyan women to negotiate existing hegemonic ideology and social organisation. Silence, as a soft power, they propose enables some women to negotiate their relationships within sections of society that are suffused in patriarchal and oppressive cultural practices.

In their article, Silencing the Hardship: Bangladeshi Women, Microfinance and Reproductive Work, Faraha
Nawaz and a colleague draw from an empirical study on microfinance. While microfinance is often argued to empower women by offering visions of alleviation from poverty, many women endure long hours in productive work for small incomes while continuing to endure reproductive work by virtue of being housewives in a patriarchal space. The authors argue that male domination and social respect prevent women beneficiaries of microfinance from speaking out about the double burden. This double burden is reinforced by microfinance advocates who assert it as empowering for women with such vigour that it obscures negative consequences for women. It is possible that powerful silencing of the double burden by key players may serve to increase women's oppression and not their empowerment.

While continuing with the theme of women's oppression at the hands of men's violence, Dora Owusu from Ghana reports on her research into domestic violence. Relevant to this themed edition is how women have become a muted group in Ghanaian society as a direct result of traditional practices, religion and economic dependency on men. Dora argues that many abused women are mute in pain, in silence, as a result of domestic violence and patriarchal dominance that is reinforced by the broader society. Imposed silence upon women, here, is a product of power rather than that of the individual. However, women's imposed silence also serves to silence violence against women in ways that prevent human rights, gender equity and social justice to advance. Dora offers normative and alternative conceptions about the politics of silence, including paradoxes in which silence is simultaneously consequential to power and an instrument of oppression in itself.

The fifth article provides this edition with a distinct shift to political-organisational considerations in the use of silence as a power. Cassandra Star explores the Australian Government's use of silencing dissent of non-government organisations (NGOs), including environmental advocacy organisations, during the era of the Abbott Government. She argues that the act of shrinking, de-legitimising and limiting NGOs' access to judicial systems was a tool of control; this silenced the democratic rights of NGOs, changed the nature of dialogue in the public sphere and undermined civil society. Government manipulating silence through these actions, argues Cassandra, served to shift the nature of Australian democracy.

Tejaswini Patil and Gretchen Ennis, too, draw on how silence is a discursive practice that has substantial influence in the public sphere and social consciousness. They employ a theoretical framework in which to explore notions of what can and cannot be said in the public sphere, including how this is manipulated by media to influence the public mind. Patil and Ennis draw from a media case study and demonstrate the many ways in which dialogue becomes skewed from core issues as a result of media's manipulation of silences. Using as an example the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) television program Insight, particularly the episode Joining the Fight [in Syria], they offer an approach to understanding how discursivity may exist in what is not said (silence) as much as in what is said. Intentional manipulation by media, therefore draws on the overreliance of the public mind on what is said, as opposed to what is silenced. This power dynamic, which is intrinsic to silence, they suggest maintains dominant values and cultural perspectives over alternative views.

In the final paper, I draw from a small study of internet imagery with my Kenyan PhD scholar whose thesis focuses on the lives of African women living with vaginal fistula. On first noticing an imbalance of race represented in Internet images of vaginal fistula, Glory Gatwiri and I continued our exploration of how non-spoken silences may be influential in representations of race. This is achieved specifically with a focus on Internet images and we argue that silence is a power practised in visual forums in ways that may deny concern for lower class individuals and Black nations – thus silence operates at a broader level in regard to black women's health problems.

The contributors to this edition offer a context in which to commence guiding the reader on how silence operates as a power, but the power of silence is not exhaustive. In viewing silence as an intentional act by individuals, society and political players, particularly entities already endowed with power, silence may then be understood as a strategy used by individuals, groups in society and governments to 'get what they want' and to keep the oppressed mute. Using silence in this way to dominate, control and maintain the status quo, as opposed to silence as an end-product of power, is a much lesser theorised phenomenon. Both are elucidated in this edition.

The contributors to this special edition have located silence as power in interpersonal, cultural, social and political spaces, as well as in text (discourse), thus illuminating the role that silence plays within, across and between nations. However, theorising on silence is most often focused on the marginalised person, or persons, who are silenced as an end-product of power. While these mainstream understandings of power in relationships are at the individual and systemic levels, unorthodox dialogues that challenge mainstream thinking are offered here in this all-inclusive theme that addresses Silence as a Power. In building relationships between silence as an act and silencing as an end-product, contributing authors expose how the understanding of silence as a power is critical for the deconstruction of silence more broadly.

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Dr Helen McLaren is a lecturer in social work, specialising in teaching and research related to women, children and community. Particular research expertise and interests are in gender and development, violence against women, child welfare, community development and welfare system reform – primarily with relevance to nations bordering the Indian and Pacific Oceans, with Australia at the crossroads.

Lucretia
It wasn’t sudden, the rape.
For weeks I felt his eyes undressing me
fondling my breasts at his father’s banquets.
I didn’t like it but I could deal with it.
His mind – that was another matter – imagining a pleasure and a power that not even a Tarquin lust could deliver.
Younger sons are often the best liars –
And Sextus was violent.
Prick! Prick! Prick!
Forget Shakespeare’s decorous argument:
he slipped into my bed chamber
came up behind me
ripped off my robe.
I froze.
He hit me
held me down
forced my legs apart
hit me again, spat on my slit
to smoothe his swollen cock’s forced entry.
It hurt.
And again when he rolled me over
split me from behind, he hit me more.
Blood on the marriage bed
for the second time.
I thought I was safe, married.
O I’m undone. Dirty.
I’ll get the sleazy bastard.
Brutus and the boys will catch him,
push a sword slowly up his noble arse,
cut the prick off in his prime.
I’ll get the whole rotten line of them
even if I have to die for it.
Where are you, husband?

Reality haiku
“That woman with the Chinese accent,
She’s hard to understand.”
“We’re all hard to understand.”

MALACHI DOYLE,
MELBOURNE, VICTORIA.

D A V I D G I L B E Y ,
W A G G A W A G G A , N S W
Silent Drivers | Driving Silence – Aboriginal Women’s Voices on Domestic Violence

SUZANNE INGRAM

In 1972, the peak of Australia’s second wave feminist movement, a group of Aboriginal women travelled to Canberra and met with white feminists including Germaine Greer. The Aboriginal women’s delegation discussed their participation in an era when racism, health care, incarceration, education and the call for self-determination were the pressing issues. Signing up to the feminist allegiance, they believed, meant conforming to an agenda that would subsume their cultural identity and solidarity with Aboriginal men. Standing as a people was more important. We’re not against our men is a cantata that Aboriginal women have adhered to strongly. This paper considers the concept of influence in Aboriginal women’s negotiation through layers of hegemonic structures, kinship systems and our own geopolitical contexts to assert self-agency in personal settings, and the cost that has since been borne for the cause. Aboriginal women’s standpoint is imperative to carrying our voice on the pressing and damaging issue of domestic violence.

‘The difference is only that the first voice knows of no others, while the second has silenced them’ - Angela Harris (2000: 262)

Introduction

At what point does silence enter the frame in abusive relationships and the shocking violence against Aboriginal women we witness today? Aboriginal women have long been vocal in the collective call for social justice, yet it seems our communities have undergone a tectonic shift that has disempowered and silenced those voices to such an extent that we now tolerate a rate of violence in our homes and communities that is not only intolerable, it is drastically out of proportion with every other section of Australian society. Hospitalisations from intimate partner violence for Aboriginal women is 38 times as high as for non-Aboriginal women, death from assault is 10 times (AIHW 2006) and head injury hospitalisations due to assault is 69 times the rate for non-Aboriginal women (Jamieson et al. 2008).

Harris’s penetrating comment speaks of dominant voice and of those that claim to speak. Indigenous and black women have written that the ongoing dominant discourse for women’s social justice centres the white middle class feminist speaker position (O’Shane 1976; Behrendt 1993; Lucashenko 1996; Harris 2000a; Moreton-Robinson 2000; Smallacombe 2004) and is maintained on the issue of domestic violence (Crenshaw 1991a; Best and Lucashenko 1995, Lucashenko 1996). I argue that not only is this speaker position maintained in the discourse on domestic violence, it corresponds with an Aboriginal social justice speaker position that is configured around the ‘Indigenous men’s experience’ (Lucashenko 1996: 379, Moreton-Robinson 2014: 339). Together, they feed a confluence of race, gender and social position that consciously and unconsciously cancels out Aboriginal women’s voices that do not find favour within each of these paradigms.

The power asymmetry formed by Aboriginal male-positioned socio-political influence, tied with privileged white feminist ‘capacity to contract’ (Moreton-Robinson 2014: 335), shares a proximity to heteropatriarchal post-colonialist structural power through its mutual gender/whiteness identification that Aboriginal women do not. This confluence presents as the explicit authority in the representations of feminist and Aboriginal knowledges in Australian society. As Crenshaw (1991b: 11) writes, The problem is not simply that both discourses fail women of colour by not acknowledging the additional burden of patriarchy or of racism, but that the discourses are often inadequate even to the discrete tasks of articulating the full dimensions of racism and sexism.

To consider this I look at the concept of influence in the silencing dynamic threaded through the elite discourse (Van Dijk 1993) to the grassroots and dyadic exchanges in our communities and homes. Influence emphasises the significance of Aboriginal women’s voice in these locations.
The Link Between Personal and Social Consequences of Domestic Violence on Social Justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women

Influence is a key element to a woman’s ability to assert voice within interpersonal relationships. Influence impacts on women’s capacity to be safe from psychological and social harm, physical injury and, in far too many cases, death in domestic and family violence conflicts. For Aboriginal women this includes our kinship systems and geo-political contexts as well as the layers of hegemonic structures.

The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences makes clear the repercussive link between violence against women and capacity to influence social justice outcomes:

An often-overlooked impact of violence against women is the role it plays in obstructing the realization of women’s citizenship rights. Violence against women fundamentally undermines the State’s capacity to guarantee the right to development and it significantly limits their capacity to participate meaningfully in the development of their communities (Manjoo 2014: 4).

The Council of Australian Government (COAG) National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2010-2022 appears to have recognised this link under its ‘National Outcome 3 – Indigenous communities are strengthened’ (COAG 2011: 20). Highlighting a focus on ‘local solutions’ that ‘includes encouraging Indigenous women to have a stronger voice as community leaders and supporting Indigenous men to reject violence’ (COAG 2011: 20), the Plan invokes the ‘Close the Gap’ policy in its strategies.

The Plan appears to acknowledge the inherent complexities in realising its ‘Indigenous communities are strengthened’ goal (COAG 2011: 21), which prompts the question: How will this be achieved? Centring Aboriginal women’s experiences in any analysis of the issues that affect them is fundamental. As Almeida and Lockard (2005: 318) point out, ‘White middle class feminism as a mainstay advocacy forum for battered women is conceptually flawed and unsafe for women on the margin’. The predominant characteristic of mainstream women’s business to casually accommodate Aboriginal women’s voices (Fredericks 2010) is accompanied by an inability to adequately appreciate what it means for Aboriginal women to speak up about violence. The Plan’s cause to ‘foster the leadership of Indigenous women within communities and broader Australian society’ (COAG 2011: 21) calls on the drivers that silence Aboriginal women’s voices to be exhumed and examined.

The second wave feminist movement in the 1970s brought ‘the social issue of domestic violence out of the suburban shadows and into the activist and policy spotlight’ (Hunter 2006: 733). Australia-wide attention to the issue resurfaced in 2015 when Rosie Batty, whose ex-partner murdered their 11 year old son at a junior cricket match, was made Australian of the Year. The very public violence significantly impacted on the media and opened an ongoing national conversation on the brutal private reality of domestic violence.

Yet there has been no such amplification in this national conversation of the abuse Aboriginal women and their children are suffering at disturbingly high proportions and ferocity. The muted discourse at the elite level on violence against Aboriginal women exposes the fraught nature of the issue for the feminist-social justice-confluence speaker position.

Whereas the feminist speaker position is inadequate to this task, similarly, Aboriginal social justice struggles to account the distinctive experiences of Aboriginal women as ‘Indigenous sovereign female subjects’ (Moreton-Robinson 2014: 332). Yet this standpoint is vital to Aboriginal women’s lives. As critical race theorist Crenshaw (1991b: 19) puts it: ‘the struggle over incorporating these differences is not a petty or superficial conflict about who gets to sit at the head of the table. In the context of violence, it is sometimes a deadly serious matter of who will survive – and who will not’.

Influence in the Spousal Relationship: Dyadic Discourse

The subject of domestic violence starkly draws out the significance of influence within and beyond the spousal dyad. It is about the deconstruction of the impact of accepting influence between couples. Gottman (2011; 2015) proposes that a critical step in the sequential progression to abuse at the micro-interactional level is the failure of men to accept influence from their partner. Accepting influence is a key relationship skill, which is a crucial finding of Gottman’s and others’ substantive research in isolating relationship power dynamics (Coan et al. 1997; Gottman and Silver 1999; Gottman 2011). The research with thousands of couples across cultural groups including Native American, backs the feminist hypothesis of gendered power in violence against women and suggests that ‘the struggle for influence may be a factor in distressed and violent marriages’ (Coan et al. 1997: 377).

In her study of domestic abuse, Levinson (in Hamby 2000: 657, 655) cited a comprehensive cross-cultural study of 17 Native American communities that found ‘male household decision-making power was one of the most important predictors of rates of violence’ and ‘Societies that lacked family violence were generally characterized by shared decision making’. Coan et al.

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concerns over those of particular subgroups, many 'When movements for racial justice prioritize broad tensions for politicised peoples in intimate situations

Power in the dyadic relationship is distinguished not only in the context of the male partner actively dominating decisions, it also includes passive behaviours such as withholding information, secrecy and deception by omission, and evasion or dishonesty that affect the woman's ability to participate in decision-making. This deceptive messaging raises perspectives on the 'right to information' (Bok 2011: 15). It is at that point when a woman raises an issue in the relationship that the significance of influence becomes apparent (Gottman and Silver 1999; Gottman 2011).

Influence is a marker across typologies. In analyses of perpetrator typologies, Jacobson and Gottman (1998: 82) found that to reject influence men would 'either ignore their partners' requests or become abusive'. Typology research is a growing area in clinical studies for delivering effective interventions in the complex area of domestic violence. As well as perpetrator typologies across three subtypes of abusers (Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart 1994), this continuing expanded work distinguishes different contexts where violence occurs. These include: characterological violence, violent resistance, situational violence, and separation-instigated violence (Friend et al. 2011; Wangmann 2011). Each of these typologies differ in the degree to which men reject influence. Perpetrator typologies are significant in showing that the choice to accept or reject influence is made by men who seek to dominate in the relationship well before any physical injury is inflicted.

However, the domestic violence injury and death rates of Aboriginal women cannot be attributed entirely to the diagnosis of all Aboriginal men in these incidents as characterological perpetrators. The tectonic shift named at the outset perceives an insistent and intended use of abuse against Aboriginal women who speak up. Australian researchers Braithwaite and Daly (1994: 222) state, 'When called to account for exploitative conduct, men's responses may be rage rather than guilt, or an amplification of non-caring'. It is these limiting, binary go-tos for dealing with conflict that I call on in this analysis of silencing of Aboriginal women.

Situational violence may explain abuse that happens in those infrequent but persistently occurring conflict settings where life stressors impact. In Critical Race Theory, Delgado and Stefancic (2012: 61) sketch such tensions for politicised peoples in intimate situations 'When movements for racial justice prioritize broad concerns over those of particular subgroups, many needs, such as those of our hypothetical black woman, may end up going unaddressed'.

Refusal to accept influence means that voicing a need within the relationship is met with escalating aggression and therefore plays a crucial role in the build up to verbal or physical abuse by setting the agenda for potential conflict. Some Aboriginal women familiar with these tactics recognise its onset in the words don't start. When a don't start sequence is triggered, it begins a cascade where the opportunity for her influence is gradually and significantly diminished. Don't start opposes women's voice in the relationship and presents the threat of silence or peril. Where these instances do escalate to verbal abuse or physical violence, it refreshes the silencing that serves to exculpate his choice to increase aggression in the interaction.

In their analysis of men's narratives of their behaviour Cavanagh et al. (2001: 696) state that men who cross this line 'attempt to rationalise their violence and use a range of tactics to minimise, deny and blame others, particularly their partner, in order to mitigate their own culpability'. Aboriginal women's influence in the dyadic relationship is vital for its relevance in both partners' ability to safely raise issues, build trust, deal with internal and external stressors, assert mutual autonomy and progress the relationship in a healthy and open way. It is these issues that are at the foundation of the dyadic interaction exclusive of pervasive complicating factors.

Of relevance to viewing domestic violence within the health framework, Gottman and others (Gottman et al. 1995; Gottman and Silver 1999; Denton et al. 2001) produced evidence that perpetual relationship conflicts have measurable detrimental health outcomes, especially for males, who were 'much more likely to die' and have 'chronically higher blood pressure' (Gottman 2015: 165). Persistent relationship distress leads to higher rates of cardiovascular conditions and lowered immune systems, leading to higher susceptibility to colds and respiratory infection. This research provides compelling indicators that the chronic illnesses that contribute to the Aboriginal health and life expectancy gap may be attributed to chronic relationship stress in couples and families compounded by external socio-cultural and economic conditions. This forms a well-founded basis for violence prevention that legal redress, cradled in post-incident criminal justice and defence jostling, simply cannot do.

As the politicisation of domestic violence begins to slowly shift policy attention from legitimacy of the victim to accountability of the perpetrator (COAG 2011; Australian Government 2015), these drivers and the machinations that hide them will begin to be brought into focus for Aboriginal social justice. In negotiating the daily course of their lives, human rights for Aboriginal people is as
true a principle for women as it is for men.

**Kinship and Community Influence: The Grassroots Discourse**

It is at the kinship and community level where silencing is most devastating, inducing an environment that effectively extinguishes the woman’s voice and enmeshes silencing within the social justice discourse.

Centring Aboriginal women’s experiences of domestic violence is fraught with power and control dynamics when the discussion of abuse moves out from the dyadic interaction. Minimisation – an intentional act to deny or downplay abuse – is a common abuser tactic to reject influence and discount the woman’s ability to describe her experience. When minimisation is employed at the grassroots level, it sets the foundation for a compound effect: her voice is not only silenced, it is crowded out by the dissertation of the collective socio economic disadvantage that affixes the system as the abuser.

The ready insertion of the social justice exposition into the void created by silencing has a uniquely destructive effect on Aboriginal women. Dispossessed of her experience she is substituted in the victim/survivor role and her voice is eradicated by invective of her identity as an *Aboriginal person*. This is a silencing dynamic that white women victims do not endure.

Minimisation as a tactic for silencing discussion and deterring reporting abuse is well known in the literature (Anderson and Umberson 2001; Cavanagh et al. 2001; Cripps and Adams 2014; Special Taskforce on Domestic Violence in Queensland 2015). Minimisation is an especially powerful controlling tool in the emotional confines of a relationship: it not only defies a shared definition of abuse, it also defies an *opportunity* to create this shared meaning.

**Definition** of violence for Aboriginal women is a critical development (Russon 2014), and is cited under the UN’s directives to ‘develop an Indigenous woman’s standpoint for understanding and combating violence’ (IIWF 2006: 53). The resistance to this is plain when ‘violent men strongly resist defining their behaviour as *violent* and seek to ‘impose their definitions of violence upon the women they abuse’ (Cavanagh et al. 2001: 697). Minimisation seeds doubt in the veracity of the woman’s viewpoint – beginning with the victim herself – to represent her lived experiences and subverts her voice in the grassroots discourse.

From their review of the literature, Cavanagh et al. (2001: 696) expressed that ‘men’s accounts are riven with evidence of the ways in which they deny, minimise and blame others for their own use of violence’. Minimisation reframes men’s violence as ‘a rational response to extreme provocation, a loss of control, or a minor incident that was blown out of proportion’ (Anderson and Umberson 2001: 362). Atkinson (1991: 6) noted that in Aboriginal accounts ‘… perpetrators of domestic violence blame others, generally the victim, for their behaviour and deny that there is a problem … Abusive partners expect others to understand the reasons for their violence and to comply …’. Cripps and Adams (2014: 400) describe this strenuous denial in the Aboriginal community: ‘Victims and their families often use a language of minimisation when describing instances of violent behaviour as some everyday, innocuous happening … just as violence has become a normal and ordinary part of life, so too has the language’.

The phenomenon of minimisation and its consequences is critical to the carriage of social justice that UN Rapporteur Manjoo speaks of. Anderson and Umberson (2001: 362) note that in addition to committing and minimising abuse, offenders also ‘presented themselves as rational, competent, masculine actors’. One researcher remarked: ‘the extent of a batterer’s denial, minimisation, projection and splitting, his capacity for self-deception, is quite something to see in an otherwise healthy man’ (Jukes in Cavanagh et al. 2001:696). This cognitive dissonance completely recasts perpetrators’ self-concept. In an environment of normalised violence, it recontextualises perpetrators as exemplary characters of cultural integrity and sanctions Aboriginal male authority as the usher of social transformation or spiritual healing. From this juncture forward, controlling context in the discourse is paramount. Hence, the dismissal of Aboriginal women’s survival of targeted violence is vehemently reactive. The *universal* victim meta-narrative is highly valuable for its function to obfuscate and relocate the agents of power and domination in Aboriginal domestic violence contexts. Hence, the annihilation of women’s voice is a necessary prerequisite.

There is no denying colonisation’s violence, nor its ongoing impact on Aboriginal people. There is, however, a need to compassionately distinguish Aboriginal women’s ‘embodied lived experience’ (Moreton-Robinson 2014: 339) in its thrall. The reason to make this distinction is that for an Aboriginal woman victim of domestic violence, what greater minimisation is there than the historical reality and collective experience of the dispossession and oppression of all Aboriginal people?

**Systemic and Political Administrative Influence: The Elite Discourse**

Given such dedication to evading definition, perpetrator accountability (where any is possible) effectively evaporates at the kinship and community level and reverts to formalised systems and institutions. In her discussion on speaking positions on Indigenous violence, Aboriginal woman Sonia Smallacombe (2004: 47) identified that ‘Bureaucratic administration has usurped the community
authority of women and, as a result, women often feel they are not getting the support they require to tackle the issue of violence in their communities.

Leveraging social power through access to platforms is accomplished via structural facilitations (Van Dijk 1983). On the principles of discourse analysis, Van Dijk (1993: 254) argues that ‘special access to various genres, forms or contexts of discourse and communication is also an important power resource’. Agenda setting of the priority issues for Aboriginal Australia in the political landscape is influenced by those deemed by structural power as Aboriginal leaders, many of whom are Aboriginal men who have risen through the bureaucracy. The agenda reflects those issues that leaders choose to ignore as much as those they cite.

The Australian Human Rights Commission’s report on the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women Australian Study Tour asserted that specifically for Aboriginal communities ‘There is a need for the male community leaders to play a public role in addressing domestic and family violence, work with male perpetrators and lead by example.’ (Broderick and Durbach 2012: 38). How does this influence function equitably for Aboriginal social justice when men with practised abusive behaviours rise into positions of power and privilege through bureaucracy and community authority, shepherded and shielded by perpetuating silence?

In the 2009 deliberations for the new representative body that would replace the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), foundational Chair, Lowitja O’Donoghue, broke the silence on the abuse of power by Aboriginal men holding office:

Aboriginal leaders have a major problem with drinking, smoking and using illicit drugs. The other big problem with indigenous men is they womanise too much – they don’t know how to curb their womanising behaviour. It is something they enjoy, and it affects their decision-making as leaders (The Australian 12 March 2009).

O’Donoghue was reportedly backed by human rights lawyer, Hannah McGlade. Adding that her words were intended ‘only for the ears of my people’ (The Australian 12 March 2009), O’Donoghue revealed the hazard implicit in speaking from an Aboriginal woman’s standpoint. Indeed, O’Donoghue stated that she was required to have round the clock security protection.

In 2015, the public disclosures of allegations of domestic violence against North Queensland Aboriginal man and Labor Party politician, Billy Gordon, by two of his former partners provided another critical opportunity to articulate the issue as a social justice priority when domestic violence was high on the national agenda. The two Aboriginal women received an airing on commercial media. Noel Pearson, a renowned Aboriginal figure regarded as ‘the most influential indigenous person in Australian history’ (The Australian 4 August 2007), also from North Queensland, countered on Australian Broadcasting Commission that Gordon was ‘thrown under a very brutal bus’ by his party leadership (Lateline 14 March 2015). As an opportunity to influence the empowerment of women that is imperative to changing social norms and breaking the culture of silence, the Gordon episode did not elucidate further discussion. Consequently, Aboriginal leaders did not elevate the issue of domestic violence against Aboriginal women as an agenda priority in the way that had occurred in the mainstream throughout 2015. The matter died off whilst under police investigation, which subsequently found that Gordon had no case to answer.

Much of Rosie Batty’s influence on the mainstream agenda can be credited to her individual courage to make previously unheard public statements on the issue, labelling domestic violence an ‘epidemic’ and ‘akin to terrorism’ (News Corp Australia 3 June 2015). Australian Human Rights Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick, declared violence against women and their children as ‘the gravest human rights abuse happening in Australia today’ (ABC News 2 September 2015). There has been much political will, major policy overhaul and renewed funding commitment to address inter-familial violence. But the most consistent efforts to bring attention to domestic abuse on Aboriginal women have been made through community legal sector platforms. Predominantly, this is in the form of revisiting statistics and calling for more funding for legal representation. However, these voices have not led to increased focus on the drivers of violence, nor has it led to the allocation of much needed resources.

Viewed through a health prevention lens, a constant annual reduction of 6.67% or two and half times the general population rate of hospitalisations would be required to close the gap between Aboriginal women and the rest of Australia – which is itself at crisis point (see Table 1). This reduction is unlikely within the legal definition of prevention, which requires a victim before prevention measures can be enacted.

**Conclusion**

Forty years on from the freedom fights of the 1970s and in a year unprecedented for public attention to the issue, the social justice discourse has had little traction on the domestic violence that reaches far into Aboriginal women’s lives. While the COAG National Plan indicates some capacity within the feminist paradigm to confront
the issues, social justice discourses continue to wrestle with the imbricating effect of silencing. On behalf of Aboriginal people, the concerns have been prioritised as constitutional recognition, economic reform, Native Title property rights and justice reinvestment. The value of these issues is not in question. Each and every one affects Aboriginal women. The alarmingly increasing rates of incarceration of Aboriginal women has begun to garner attention. However, the consequence of agenda setting by twinned feminist and pan-Aboriginal confluence is deleterious to Aboriginal women’s voice. Aboriginal movement solidarity ideology and populist counter reforms proffer an unassailable alibi on calling accountability on men’s abusive behaviours in our homes – including those who represent us or extend significant socio-political and cultural influence.

In their personal lives, Aboriginal women assert authentic self-agency through an indefatigable strength of will and determined sense of collective purpose, moored by the strength of influence inherited from women before us. Indigenous women’s standpoint means having influence as principal participants involved in our own affairs as fully-fledged speakers from a distinct perspective, not solidarity stewardesses serving a sophisticated silencing agenda. Abuse of Aboriginal women is an exhausting and profound disloyalty to our collective effort to decolonise and to be self-determining. Healthy functioning in dyadic relationships within Aboriginal families is an ample foundation block on which to build sustainable energies necessary to move to a more just society.

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Suzanne’s article in this edition of *Social Alternatives* is dedicated to her two granddaughters: ‘to my granddaughters, Emekah and Nalani. May you never be denied your rightful place in the world as Wiradjuri women’.

**End Notes**

1. Throughout this document, the term Aboriginal includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. This choice reflects current discussions to prefer Aboriginal over Indigenous in the context of where the author is located. The term Indigenous is used where it refers to international discourses. Australian policy refers to Indigenous.

2. These statistics present numbers for combined male and female perpetrators of assault upon Aboriginal women.

3. The author recognises the limitations of heterosexual relations as a/the normative value, however, this is an analysis of male on female domestic violence.
Silence as Power: Women Bargaining With Patriarchy in Kenya

GLORY JOY GATWIRI AND KARANJA ANNE MUMBII

This paper is an exploration of some forms of silent protest used by Kenyan women to bargain with patriarchy. The paper draws in part from an on-going study by the first author and also from existing materials, to elucidate the varied uses of silence as power by Kenyan women to counteract patriarchal dominance and oppression. While acknowledging that silence can be disempowering in the face of oppression, the paper holds that silence can also act as a space of fluid and profound empowering possibilities for women living in oppressive situations. An attempt is made to show how such women mutably employ silence to shift power in their interpersonal relationships. The paper, however, strongly underscores the growing need for research on the subject of silence as a tool of power in feminist discourses.

Introduction

Silence is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as the 'absence of sound' or to 'prohibit/prevent from speaking' but silence is more than the simple non-existence of audible sound. According to Letherby (2003: 109), interpretation of silence is an important aspect of communication. In gender discourses, silence is much more commonly associated with women’s disempowerment in reference mainly to their failure to speak out and/or act against gendered oppressive situations. However, it is the position of this paper that silence can also be used tactfully to renegotiate one's position. Indeed, silence can be and is frequently used by women as a socially embedded tactic to non-confrontationally assert oneself and reclaim lost power. This is more so in situations where cultural norms and values openly and stringently teach otherwise as is the case in some of the still deeply patriarchal societies in Africa. Here, males enjoy unbridled social-culturally assigned power and privilege and constructions of masculinity encourage the subordination and control of women by men. Excesses such as the use of violence and other oppressive practices against women are not only tolerated but also tacitly encouraged, as necessary for ‘putting women in their place’ and maintaining male authority.

The premise of this paper is that even in such situations of extreme male domination and female subordination, women do not necessarily withstand such oppression passively but rather do exercise some form of agency, often in subtle and insidious ways, to counteract the oppression or at least cushion themselves against its impact. It is also argued that this use of power is no less impactful than its more direct uses commonly found in Western feminist discourses. In this respect and by implication, the paper challenges the common conceptualisations found in Western feminist discourses that see non-Western women, especially in Africa, as passive at best in their responses to the oppressive patriarchal structures they live in. This is the position that is ultimately responsible for the perception of the African woman as helpless and in urgent need of rescuing by her more empowered Western counterpart. The paper uses a feminist lens to build an understanding and interpretation of these uses of soft power.

Theorising Silence: A Feminist Perspective

Feminism and other gender discourses basically aim at inspiring women to locate their position and speak out. Feminists like Thiam (1986), encourage Black African women to resist the oppression they face by voicing it. Amongst the many debates in feminist thought therefore, is an interrogation of the myriad of contextualised ways in which women’s ability to speak out against their oppression is silenced. Numerous well known propositions abound, including the fact of the age-old perpetuation of sexist structures (Ogundipe-Leslie 1993). The way feminist discourses are constructed has also been frequently blamed as contributory to women’s silencing. The use of voice as a form of resistance for many women, arising out of feminist prompting, could and has indeed frequently caused a ‘turning up of the heat’ including the intensification of oppression and abuse as well as numerous other forms of patriarchal backlashes. Houston and Kramarae (1991) for instance argue that
silence is dangerous since it instils a double-mind within the oppressor enabling him to validate his own actions as not harmful to the woman. It also surmises that silence as weakness further influences the oppressor, entrenching the idea of women as the weaker sex, thus deserving of his dehumanising treatment. This position is popular in discourses opposed to views of silence as a ‘powerful tool used by the powerless’ to counter oppression and have often led instead to its dismissal as a by-product of the oppressive and disempowering patriarchal structures (Malhotra and Rowe 2013: 224).

In more recent times however, feminist discourses have suggested silence can be used as a source of power and also highlighted how women in some parts of the world prefer and effectively use silence rather than voice to protest, rebel, and challenge oppression. As observed by Campbell (1999), women’s worst fear in situations of intra-sex aggression, including violence, is physical harm. This behoves a judicious analysis of the costs and benefits of confrontation with a majority opting for soft power. Put in context, this may be the best or only available tool of power to such women and is therefore a tool for basic survival and safety.

Indeed, many a Kenyan woman has been heard advising friends to ‘just lie low and assume a submissive demeanour’ and ‘let the man continue thinking he is the boss’, as that affords her the space to do what needs to be done – execute her gender roles especially the nurturing of children. However, it is worth pointing out that such thinking and responses may only bear relevance and perhaps efficacy where identification with gender norms supersedes any other form of identities, which is still largely the case in most parts of Africa. Feminist approaches can be used to explicate the many ways in which women have been repressed, but critically also, how various forms and uses of silence produce significant gendered power shifts.

**Conceptualising Silence as a Tool for Balancing Power**

We often try to stop people from committing acts we are uncomfortable with by just ‘giving them the eye’. In most cultures, mothers also frequently use a glance to stop or re-direct a child’s errant behaviour. Scott (2008) elucidates numerous forms of silent weapons used by the weak, including foot dragging, deception, desertion, dissimulation, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage false compliance or the shirking of work. Moreover, he notes that these are normally not organised or planned but depend for their execution on informal networks and implicit considerations as forms of individual mutual support approaches to safety and survival. In the use of such ‘weapons’, overt confrontation with authority or open political organisation is typically avoided so as not to threaten political expression or interfere with existing norms (Kramarae and Spender 2004: 1850).

Kandiyoti (2005), on the other hand, sees such mechanisms of bargaining with patriarchy as clever tactics by which women may choose to accept seemingly disadvantaging patriarchal norms and gendered roles. She argues that, in this way, women maximise their own power by showcasing their ability to conform to patriarchal demands and at the same time benefit from it. It is easy to dismiss this as masochism or stoicism and hence disempowerment, but in some situations and/or contexts this strategy arises out of a dire need for basic survival in the absence of any other viable option. Ryan-Flood and Gill (2013) suggest that seeing silence only as a form of regression rather than progression can be a narrow way of conceptualising it. To Stone (2002: 19), ‘Silence can also be a means of resistance … and a way of holding one’s grounds against the encroachments of oppression. It can also be a tool of transformation’.

An African woman’s unassuming silent protest may reveal a deep and proactive understanding of her oppression-ridden situation and how it can subtly, but effectively and non-confrontationally, be changed. Kolaawole (1997: 6) argues that African women are visible and have always had voice, albeit of a different form from contemporary understandings. Silence therefore cannot be universally comprehended or used; rather, its use is a function of the peculiar forms of oppression and of the social, cultural, economic, and political as well as physical environments of its users.

**Using Silence Against Gender Oppression in Kenya**

Many women in the world speak the language of silence (Kamau 2013: 121) and Kenya is no exception. Kenya is a British post-colonial state in which the status of women is embedded in the gender constructions of power and authority (Kanogo 2005). From a young age, women are socialised to be averse to intellectual or authoritative expressions, especially around men, and are encouraged to stay silent as a show of respect and recognition of male superiority. Observing silence while in the company of men also purportedly benefits young girls by enhancing their romantic attractiveness to men and thus marriageability. Ebila (2015) observes that ‘good women’ are discursively defined as those who do not challenge authority. Silence is also to be maintained in the face of gender-based oppression (Waithera 2011: 24). In many ethnic groups, the term ‘woman’ in vernacular is interpreted to mean ‘the silent one’, referring to one who stays mute in the presence of men but also in respect to any negative goings on around her. In common Kenyan thinking, such a woman is invaluable to her husband as
a helper in nurturing a ‘stable’ family and home and thus also contributing to the wellbeing of the community.

However, the chief reasons for women’s silence is the acquired fear of upsetting the patriarchal system and the entrenched structure that perpetuates and sustains women’s socio-economic dependence on men, not to mention the highly probable dire consequences of opposing male authority (Kamau 2013; Waithera 2011). Mikell (1997) points to the fact that African women are well aware of the volatility of their social environment and the likelihood of violence and thus rarely dare to challenge male superiority. It then becomes ‘better to live within [the] status quo rather than challenge it’ (Kamau 2013: 121). Silence is therefore employed as a protective measure against ‘the hostile patriarchal gaze’ (Waithera 2011: 24). By this, however, women become vectors of their own wretchedness – actors in their own oppression (Waithera 2011). They become ‘their own worst enemies’ as the popular female accusatory and male excusatory saying goes. To their children, they become effective conduits of the patriarchy-derived, retrogressive, female-devaluing cultural norms and values, thus consciously or unconsciously driving and sustaining patriarchalism. Ogundipe Leslie (1993) has termed this as one of the ‘mountains’ of the African woman’s path to emancipation – herself.

The discourses on silence in Kenya are moreover quite contradictory. Many women, especially the educated, do not at a cursory level consider themselves silenced owing to the fact of having some voice relative to the uneducated. This voice is, however, obscured by the pervasiveness though insidious and covert manifestation of female silencing in all spheres including literature, politics, leadership and workplaces. Kolawole (1997) notes how African women scholars are silenced in literature. Kanogo (2005) has dwelt extensively on the silencing of women’s contributions to the historical recordings of the democratisation and developmental processes in Kenya. Hooks (2000) holds that it is the voice that has authority that gets heard – ‘Men listen to other men’ while ‘women are to be seen and not heard’. It is clear that silence as a tool of both oppression and power exists at the intersections of gender, class, race as well as knowledge. One’s gender or class can therefore ascribe silence as a tool for power or for powerlessness.

Speaking to this, Kenyatta ([1938] 2015: 119) documents the polygamous traditions and practices of the Agikuyu in Kenya. A man would/could have several wives each living in their own private quarters referred to as thingira (house) or nyumba (household) that the man visited on a rotational basis for conjugal activity and other matters. If a wife did not fancy being ‘visited’ by her husband at a particular time, she would place one of her sitting stools face down on the entrance to her hut. Upon seeing this, the husband would understand that he was not welcome until the stool was removed or placed upright (Kenyatta [1938] 2015). This was not only a silent and accepted way of communicating to one’s husband that a wife was not ready for or interested in sex, it could also indicate that she was upset or had herself done something deemed socially upsetting so that he knew he needed to visit the hut not only for conjugal activity but perhaps also to discuss matters. Three forms of silence can be discerned here including the space for silent protest against unwanted sex, the practice of polygamy and that of separate living spaces. These afforded women the much needed break from critical gendered duties and contemporary excesses such as marital rape. The separate living quarters moreover gave women the space and privacy for group bonding activities to plan safe and effective counter-measures against patriarchal bondage. It would also yield some quiet ‘alone time’ for winding down or for interacting privately with one’s children. These arguably empowering spaces are hardly available today, and perhaps the circumstances may not be recoverable or even desirable. However, one cannot but note the hazardousness of today’s mutual spousal over-dependence for the fulfilment of all of life’s needs and aspirations and in much more constricted and shrunk social and physical space. It is easy to envisage this as a major contributing factor to the rampant abuse and oppression in domestic spaces in contemporary times.

Gender Identity, Reproductive Health and the Use of Silence

This section uses three case studies of women from a larger study of 30 Kenyan women living with vaginal fistula, who variably used silence to renegotiate the patriarchal spaces negatively impacting their lives after suffering this health crisis. A feminist lens is used to make meaning of the women’s narratives and to theorise various uses of silence.

If there is hesitation in which I speak, it is because I am surrounded by spaces that are filled with silence. If you want to hear me, listen to my silences as well as my words (Kadi 2002: 541).

This became poignant for the researcher while listening to the instructive and powerful narratives of the women living with a debilitating health crisis in a socio-cultural environment where traditional gender identities for both men and women are still the preferred and practiced norm.

A vaginal fistula is a condition most often caused by obstructed or prolonged labour or any severe injury to the pelvic tissues. Such injury often leads to urinal and faecal incontinence relegating the sufferer to social pariah
husband and coped by: physical, sexual and emotional abuse at the hands of her arising from her health condition. Awino endured daily coping with the difficult psycho-emotional circumstances Awino on the other hand opted to employ a ‘go-slow’ in value of her body and the need to take responsibility for it. that the experience of the vagina fistula had led Akinyi to including the submission to sexual intercourse at the calamity, are continually subject to patriarchal pressures, to sexual intimacy. After the reconstructive surgery she was soon to undergo, Akinyi’s plan was:

... I will talk to the nurse before I am discharged from the hospital so that they can give me that thing you have in your arm [contraceptive]. I will only get pregnant again over my dead body. He won’t know, and I won’t tell. We already have five children that we cannot educate and the last-born baby gave me this problem. It will be my little secret.

In applying silence by withholding information from her husband, Akinyi sought to have ownership and control over her reproductive choices and also protect her body from further traumatic reproductive health crises, which she now was even more predisposed to. However she needed to be very tactful in implementing the strategy, as the inability to become pregnant would further jeopardise her marriage. It is a common patriarchal practice in Kenya, especially amongst the uneducated, that a husband decides on the number of children born to his wife including the frequency of pregnancy. A woman who fails to adhere to this risks dire consequences including violence, banishment and/or acquisition of additional wives by her husband. The plan to have the contraceptive device secretly implanted needs consideration in this light. Akinyi and other women like her, even after such a calamity, are continually subject to patriarchal pressures, including the submission to sexual intercourse at the discretion of a husband. In this instance however, it is clear that the experience of the vagina fistula had led Akinyi to develop a heightened level of conscious awareness of the value of her body and the need to take responsibility for it.

Awino on the other hand opted to employ a ‘go-slow’ in coping with the difficult psycho-emotional circumstances arising from her health condition. Awino endured daily physical, sexual and emotional abuse at the hands of her husband and coped by:

... Every time he hit or insulted me, I refused to cook so he slept hungry. I also refused to wash his clothes and clean the house. On the first few days, things were worse because he told me I was not being a good wife by not cooking for him, but I persevered because I knew sooner or later he would want to eat food at home. One day he came home and I had made some delicious meal. He was shocked. He asked me why I was making him a special meal and I told him it’s because he had not beaten me the previous day. I told him that’s how good things will be in the house if he stopped beating me ... He hasn’t beaten me for six months [smiles].

Awino is using inaction but also a good measure of rebellion to assert her power. In withholding her fulfilment of gendered roles, particularly those used in the Kenyan society to distinguish between a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ wife, Awino was able to express how a bad husband was undeserving of a good wife. Here, Awino is uncannily reinforcing an important but often ignored requirement under patriarchy, which is that each party has to honour their end of the bargain in order to benefit. Though heavily skewed in favour of men, this requirement dictates that they provide materially for their families in return for which they gain unbridled access to women’s bodies for the fulfilment of their sexual as well as progesterone needs. With this act of protest, Awino was able to access masculine space hitherto inaccessible to her, for use in negotiating better treatment from her spouse. This resulted in her enjoyment of a battery-free but not necessarily cordial stay with her husband for six months prior to the interview. As for whether this strategy would continue to work in Awino’s favour is a matter of speculation given the apparent defiant side of her protest that can attract severe forms of punishment from her husband and sometimes the community. As observed by Campbell (1999), in situations where the danger of physical injury looms large, women are judiciously careful to weigh their options tactfully. Therefore, it might be safe to assume that Awino knew well both the situation and her husband’s character so as to arrive at and apply this form of silence.

Moraa, the third interviewee, hails from Gusii land located in the South West part of Kenya. The Gusii are a people deeply steeped in their culture and are especially patriarchal. Moraa’s fistula like Akinyi’s also resulted from a complicated birth, precipitated by having undergone a severe form of female genital cutting (FGC). Though Moraa perceives her health condition and attendant social situation as hopeless, she seems to have made extraordinary decisions concerning the practice of female circumcision, a practice still valued highly in her community. Concerning her daughters who would have had to undergo the ritual, Moraa says:
I think there is nothing I can do for myself now because it’s been many years since I got this disease, but since the doctors told me that my fistula could have been caused by my circumcision I decided that I will not circumcise my daughters… You know before the Gusii would circumcise girls to ensure that they do not have sex with boys… My daughter has cleared class 8 and I have not circumcised her… I lied to her father that I would take her to the next village where her grandmother lives and then I asked her to get into a bus and go to her aunt in Mombasa. When I got home my husband almost killed me when I refused to tell him where she went, but I knew I had done the right thing. It’s impossible to feel anything [meaning sex] when circumcised, so there is no need to take away this [pleasure] from her. That is why Gusii men are not marrying fellow Gusii women because they say that we are like stones. They want to go to women who get turned on just by a simple touch.

Here Moraa is using her silent but risky form of protest to protect her daughter from what she has experienced as a damaging ritual. She chooses therefore to take on the burden of protecting her daughter singlehandedly and that means persevering with beatings from her husband. Such an act is nothing short of heroic in this steeply patriarchal community. We can only but speculate how long Moraa’s daughter will remain successfully cushioned by her mother.

Despite the deep patriarchalism of this ethnic group, Shadle (2003) writes of the not-so-distant past when men made all the decisions concerning marriage including the choice of spouse. The only thing that could come between a man and marrying his chosen bride would be failure to pay the dowry. Yet, women could resist the imposing suitor though not in a vocal or confrontational way. If a girl did not like the man eyeing her for marriage, she would signal to her parents her disinterest by refusing to talk to him during his visit to her parents’ home. She would instead symbolically spit near him and beckon him to step aside as she symbolically sweeps the ground he had stepped on. This would be a clear signal to the onlookers, including the girl’s parents, that she did not fancy this suitor. She could also skip him while serving food to the guests accompanying him during this occasion. This very inhospitable behaviour, though thoroughly untoward in the community, was accepted as a strong signal indicating that she did not accept his offer of marriage. By using this silent power, the family allowed women a say in the choice of partner/husband in order to avoid similar embarrassment from subsequent suitors. It would be interesting to understand the circumstances and dynamics that led to the loss of such power in this community, as these are presently not observable. However, it is possible that with the processes of spousal choice having changed in modern times to self-search as with other communities in Kenya, this specific demonstration of silent use of power in rejecting an unappealing marriage suitor became irrelevant.

Conclusion

This paper has elucidated some patriarchal bargains used by women in many parts of Kenya including women facing a peculiarly debilitating health condition that inflicts serious social and psycho-emotional effects. The paper has also demonstrated that the experiences of Kenyan women vary markedly owing to different local geographies, socio-economics, and cultural norms. The scenarios presented here admittedly raise more questions than answers. This does not negate or deprecate their efficacy. Rather, it spells out a critical and urgent need for more research into the circumstances under which the use of soft power such as silence by culturally marginalised segments of society produces meaningful change to hegemonic arrangements such as patriarchalism. What, for instance, are the long-term effects of accumulated and mutated silent protestations by women and other marginalised groups to the existing social organisation and ideology? What is the usefulness of these strategies in addressing the immediate predicaments of the affected parties such as safety and survival? Do these protestations have the potential to scale up from individual to collective-based or would this obstruct their efficacy as Scott (2008) strongly holds? It would also be interesting to explore the pre- and post-colonial situation in addressing gendered power imbalances and in this respect as an interrogation of the varied influences of Western religious and cultural values on indigenous African cultural gender values.

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End Notes
1. bell hooks, a black feminist author and educator does not capitalise the first letters in her name, as a silent political and academic protest which attempts to subvert grammar prescriptivism. Her position is that language itself is a classist construct that supports racism and sexism.
2. These cases are from an ongoing study by Glory Joy Gatwiri as part of her doctoral research. The Research was approved both by the Social and Behavioural Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee at Flinders University, South Australia and the Kenyan Research Ethics Board. After the approval, the primary researcher was granted a research clearance permit issued by the National Council of Science and Technology in Nairobi. Data collection via in-depth semi-structured interviews took place in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2014. The research was conducted in accordance with human research conventions that include confidentiality, voluntariness, informed consent and use of pseudonyms in reporting.

key
my father lost the key
& the spare
from the garage
in the first year it was put up
so he left his car under a tree
years later a carport appeared
& the tree was cut back
I have just emptied his garage
& laid out a history of neglect
on the verge
a street lived on & bituminised
between race meetings
& Saturday night poker
sometime on Monday
the council will collect
what was picked over
a lifetime
of neighbourhood bargains

Rory Harris,
Adelaide, SA

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Silencing the Hardship: Bangladeshi Women, Microfinance and Reproductive Work

FARAH NAWAZ AND HELEN JAQUELINE MCLAREN

While microfinance may offer women visions of transformation from poverty, we argue that microfinance has not sufficiently alleviated women's oppression nor reduced male domination. We draw from qualitative interviews with women beneficiaries of microfinance in rural Bangladesh where we found that few women work exclusively as housewives; most are in some form of paid work or small business. The women work long hours in both productive and reproductive work; most are silent about this double burden. Due to male domination rooted deeply in society, women's silence is a conscious act to avoid conflict and protect family reputation. These negative aspects associated with microfinance tend to be the subject of silence, as with the negative aspects that are frequently drowned out by the discourses of microfinance advocates. We conclude that multiple forms of silence powerfully operate to increase women's oppression in some contexts, not alleviate it.

Introduction

Women are one of the most disadvantaged groups in Bangladesh and frequently they are the victims of exploitation. This is a country where there is strict control over women's sexuality, gender equality and mobility in the public domain. The principles of property and inheritance are patrilineal, which serves to fortify the social, economic and political privileging of men. Until the early 1980s, less than five per cent of Bangladesh's labour force were women (Feldman 2013), but over the last three decades there has been a rapid rise in women's labour force participation. Despite this, women continue to be discouraged from engaging in income generating activities due to culturally contested meanings of virtuous women in the developing world (Uteng 2011). Defining the level of goodness of women limits their mobility on the basis of traditional gender expectations, such that in Bangladesh women should not venture far from the home or travel in darkness alone to engage in productive work. This confines the majority of women to engage in productive work from the home.

In seeking to alleviate women's poverty and oppression in Bangladesh, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have implemented various women-focused social enterprise schemes. In particular, the introduction of microfinance schemes has enabled poor women with no collateral to access finance to develop small business enterprises. Firstly pioneered by the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh (Yunus 2003), microfinance is now mostly managed by NGOs. It is one such example that is widely argued to have emancipated women's access to productive resources (Akash 1985; Ghafur 2001; Rallens and Ghazanfar 2006; Habib and Jubb 2012; Parveen 2013) and increase women's empowerment as a consequence (World Bank 2006; 2010). While we acknowledge that benefits do exist, contemporary literature highlights that microfinance also has negative impacts on wellbeing and women's empowerment. Of primary interest to this paper are matters relating to the impact of microfinance programmes on women's roles, particularly women's double work burden when they engage in both productive work while still performing reproductive work. In fairness, we acknowledge both the benefits and critiques in the literature.

Literature on Microfinance

The most widely reported benefits of microfinance results from the absorption of surplus agricultural labour, particularly women, from small and inefficient agricultural landholdings into off-farm rural enterprises (Chemin 2008; Khandker and Samad 2014). From a national perspective, microfinance is said to benefit the economy by encouraging spending on start-up projects and increasing household consumption (Chemin 2008). Other benefits are frequently cited: associations between women's increased income and children's higher school enrolment rates (Khandker and Samad 2014); improvements to women's health resulting from participation in health and capacity building activities offered by microfinance providers (Scharmann and Mahmud 2009); and, general wellbeing due to increases in opportunities for women's social inclusion (Ahmed 2009; Khosla 2009; Scharmann and Johnston 2009). In particular, Rahman (2010: 44) proposed that microfinance offers a new paradigm in which NGOs support the empowerment of poor women beyond merely...
providing credit; microfinance offers extended activities that include credit delivery, savings, insurance, training, healthcare and advocacy.

Rahman (2010) views microfinance as a necessary response to increasing poverty created through the processes of globalisation. As mentioned previously, the benefits of microfinance result from the absorption of surplus agricultural labour and this has happened due to the industrialisation of agriculture as a part of economic globalisation. In doing so, women’s membership in microfinance groups has become a tool for strengthening their individual capacity alongside collective empowerment of Bangladeshi women in a changing world (Sanyal 2009: 529).

Shehabuddin (1992) focuses on the Grameen Bank’s economic and social development programmes and influence on the status of its female members, both within and outside their households. She explains how microfinance programmes have an in-built feature that facilitates the mobilisation of rural women and develops solidarity and political consciousness amongst them. She observes a positive relationship between women’s involvement in the monetised sector and power within their households. Similarly, Sarkar (2000: 22) notes that a greater economic role for women served to improve their status in the family. This is because the microfinance borrowers have more money to spend and a greater say in the decision making process involved in spending that money. As a result, she found that most of her study’s participants reported improvement in their status as women.

Sarumathi and Mohan (2011) undertook a study on the role of microfinance on women’s empowerment in the Pondicherry region of India and found that women experienced gradual increases in three aspects of empowerment – financial, social and psychological – as a result of participating in self-help groups embedded within the microfinance programmes. Nawaz et al. (2012) propose the existence of a compounding effect of empowerment. For example, women’s economic empowerment resulting from productive work translates to feelings of greater personal empowerment, in which women experience higher levels of empowerment in the home, and so forth. Nawaz et al. (2012) conclude that various forms of empowerment experienced by the women were the result of microfinance. However, the level of benefits resulting from microfinance are difficult to measure and microfinance is not free from criticism.

Researchers suggest that microfinance has failed to reach the poorest of women, especially when service capacity of NGO programmes causes them to overlook the extremely poor, who make up a significant percentage of their potential clients (Rahman 1999; Datta 2004; Haque and Yamao 2011). As well, some NGOs are known as being new agents for expanding neo-imperialism; Western donors meet their own interests through NGOs and establish patron-client relationships that hinder social revolution (Begum 2003: 77). Others have argued that microfinance has had a limited effect on increasing household income, hence women have not escaped poverty (Karim 2011; Akhter 2014). Furthermore, evidence suggests that access to microfinance increases spousal violence towards women (Schuler et al. 1998; Murshid et al. 2015), particularly when women’s empowerment challenges traditional gender norms in the home and society.

Having done little to challenge Bangladeshi women’s positional vulnerability in a gendered social order that pervades all public spheres, microfinance is alternatively argued to have had limited effect on women’s empowerment (Samanta 2009; Kabeer 2011). In the current study, we draw upon Moser’s (1993) notion of women’s double burden and propose that microfinance has not sufficiently alleviated women’s oppression nor reduced male domination. This status quo is often reinforced by silence.

**Productive Versus Reproductive Work**

Reproductive work involves the care and maintenance of households; productive work refers to the production of goods and services for consumption and trade either in employment or self-employment; and, community work includes the collective organisation of social services, such as ceremonies and celebrations, functions to improve the community, participation in groups and activities, local political activities and so on (Moser 1993). Moser also states that the reproductive work of poor rural communities is labour intensive, time consuming and, in most cases, is deemed the responsibility of women. In Bangladesh’s patriarchal society, little value is placed on the work of women. Women’s work, therefore, is often invisible. Invisibility results from women’s productive work being poorly acknowledged. Women’s reproductive work is often not discussed because it is discursively constructed by patriarchy as the responsibility of women. According to Altan-Olcay (2015), most women are silent about the added burden of continuing all their reproductive work when they take up productive work, because there is limited value attached to Bangladeshi women’s compliants.

While microfinance can engage women in productive work, it has not been too successful in alleviating women’s reproductive work or empowering them. This is because Bangladesh is a patriarchal society that does not value women (Pradhan and Sulaiman 2014). The concern is that NGOs do not sufficiently speak up and address these unintended consequences of microfinance, nor are the women beneficiaries fully informed of the double burdens they will bear. The double burden is difficult to resolve once women are trapped
that links the examination of women’s roles to the microfinance programmes. The majority of women beneficiaries in Bangladesh develop their small business enterprises from home. The double burden is hidden from view and therefore invisible. The undervaluing of women’s reproductive work, together with invisibility, makes it difficult for women to renegotiate their position in patriarchal households (Seguino 2002; Kabeer 2004; Uteng 2011). Further exacerbated by the nature of home-based and other small business enterprises having unstable incomes, women cannot afford to employ others to shift their burden of reproductive work (Altan-Olcay 2015). Having microfinance for productive work can hardly result in women’s empowerment if the reproductive aspect is ignored.

Methods

Primary data collection via in-depth interviews and focus groups took place over six months duration in Bangladesh in 2012 in two villages; Chokkapashiya and Dewyanparaunder, located in the local government districts of Yousulpur and Borogachi Union Parishad. These locations were chosen on the basis of the availability of village-based microfinance programmes, the duration of the programmes and the quantity of women participating in the microfinance programmes.

The research was approved by the Social and Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Flinders University, South Australia. Standard research ethics protocols were applied, including principles that had to do with informed consent, voluntariness, confidentiality and no benefit or disadvantage to participants’ microfinance membership as a result of participation.

Participants were recruited via two NGOs: Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), which is an international development organisation based in Bangladesh; and a local NGO – the Association for Community Development (ACD). Sixteen women via BRAC and 24 via ACD, from a total pool of 80 microfinance beneficiaries, participated in one-on-one interviews, followed by focus group discussions in groups of five. The focus groups were appropriate for engaging Bangladeshi women who customarily prefer collective rather than individual discussions. Discussions enabled women to focus on the impact of productive work on their empowerment, and to compare any life transformations experienced by them as microfinance beneficiaries. While the larger study also interviewed family members and NGO officials, this paper draws from the women’s voices.

Our analysis draws upon Moser’s (1993) framework that links the examination of women’s roles to the larger development planning process. This framework encompasses both the technical and political aspects of gender integration into development. As mentioned earlier, at the heart of the framework are three concepts: the first is the reproductive; the second is the productive; and the third is community work. As defined by Moser, the reproductive work of poor communities is labour intensive and time consuming and in most cases it is the responsibility of women. Women’s productivity is less visible and considered less valued than men’s.

The triple role concept has been the focus of criticism from other scholars. For example, Kabeer (1995) argues that one weakness of the triple role concept is that it fails to distinguish between the three roles (who does what and how) logically. The distinction between productive and reproductive roles is clear. One focuses on domestic work whereas the other concentrates on the production of goods and services. Kabeer argues that it is less obvious that community work is the third type of work (as cited in March et al. 1999: 65). It is important to remember that most resources can be produced in a variety of settings and through a number of relationships and this notion is absent in this three-way distinction of gender roles. In support of Kabeer’s argument, women’s reproductive and productive roles will be addressed in this article. Analysis involves mapping the gender division of labour by asking, “Who does what?” to identify the three key work roles (Moser 1993).

The division of gender roles in community work has a less obvious relationship with women, microfinance and silence. The distinction between productive and reproductive roles is clearer – one focuses on domestic work whereas the other concentrates on the production of goods and services. While Moser’s third domain is acknowledged, the silencing of women’s double role of productive and reproductive work is of primary focus in this article. This is consistent with Kabeer’s (1995) position on reproductive and productive work and it supports the current paper in which we seek to make sense of how women perceive their understanding of their dual roles through dominant cultural meanings, truth and the influence of silence. This includes how patriarchy may contribute to silencing women’s double burden of productive and reproductive work, and the contribution of women’s own silence.

Foucault (1972) proposed that discourses shape how people perceive, conceptualise and articulate their cultural meanings, truths and understandings about the world. He suggested that discourses are socially regulated language forms that become normalised as a dominant meaning and as the truth. These dominant meanings become entrenched in shared beliefs and they are discursive mechanisms that imply people’s talk can be a source of evidence about them, their desires.
and their lives (Cameron 2001). In reading the interview transcripts of the women participating in this study, we identified indications of discursive mechanisms that had become ‘established as strong, real and independent of the speaker’ (Potter and Wetherell 1996: 81). These mechanisms enabled silence related to the double role of productive and reproductive work to be observed.

**Findings and Discussion**

There were two categories of women microfinance beneficiaries who participated in the study; women involved in independent business oriented income generating activities and women who channelled their microfinance loans to their husbands. Some women in the latter group were engaged in productive work and some were not.

Twenty-five per cent of the women beneficiaries were independent in their market and business oriented income generating activities. They were independent because they were able to make their own business decisions including how profits were spent. They engaged in small business activities such as tailoring, poultry farming, dairy farming and grocery shop keeping. Many of these women expressed having good control over their loan utilisation and some expressed discussing their business decisions with their husbands. Either way, it suggests a certain level of financial empowerment was experienced by the women. In comparison, 75 per cent of women microfinance beneficiaries passed either the full amount or a portion of their loans to their husbands. Despite microfinance schemes providing women with greater access to resources, this latter group of women experienced limited or no control over their loan utilisation. Even for those women who passed only part of their loans to their husbands, whether or not remaining funds were used independently or with their husbands for small business activities, the men most often made decisions informing how any profits were spent and this went unquestioned in the family.

The process of transformation for a few women was evident in their access to the microfinance programme. These women’s accounts included becoming land owners, gaining access to household assets, increased wealth and access to resources. Regarding health issues, this included the women’s improved food intake, nutrition and access to medical care. Despite the benefits of financial independence, it failed to challenge the prevailing gender imbalance and traditional division of labour within these women’s households. As a result, an increase in the women’s social and emotional wellbeing was limited. The failure to change division of labour in women’s households was consistent across the two groups of women – those who engaged in productive work and who had full financial control over their loans and businesses, and those who did not. All of the women who engaged in productive work reported enduring the same levels of reproductive responsibilities as they had before. Their husbands did not help with household duties and the women could not challenge this.

**Women Beneficiaries Not Engaged in Productive Work**

Women who handed over the entirety of their loans to their husbands and who did not engage in productive work mostly did not question their husbands’ exclusive power over financial and household decisions. These women conformed to gendered norms that reproductive work was the sole responsibility of women. The following, as a representative example, illustrated how the women drew from deep entrenched views in Bangladesh that privilege men’s power over women’s social, economic and political life:

> I have taken a loan according to my husband’s demand and have given it to him. I never ask questions about the expenditure of loan. I stay at home and do the household chores and my husband does all the outside work. I would never expect my husband to help me doing household tasks.

Microfinance provides women with agency as they take up the loans that may lead their families to experience poverty reduction. The male domination rooted deeply in Bangladeshi society means that women’s subjectivity, as Weedon (1997: 178) might suggest, has become ‘contradictory rather than essential and unified’. This is because microfinance has positioned women in multiple relationships within social structures. For example, on the one hand microfinance posits women as subjects who are empowered when they take up loans available to them and, on the other, it presents a subject who is simultaneously subjected to the gendered discourses available to them – such as when the women in Bangladeshi society unquestionably hand over their loans to their husbands and conform to social expectations informing women’s subservience and silence. This ambivalence, which is prevalent in Foucault’s ([1976] 1980, [1961] 1995) work, underpins many feminist views on the ways in which women who are so subsumed by gender discourse cannot comprehend their own gender and surrender to social pressure, including how their conformity may contribute to their own oppression and subsequent silence (Zannettino 2001; McLaren 2015). This position is shown in the following representative example in which women’s ownership of reproductive work and men’s power over household decisions is expressed in such a way that subordination is paradoxically confused with the women’s own empowerment.
We don’t expect our husbands to do our household chores. This work must be done by a female. My husband is my Lord (provu). Because my husband takes care of me, I always support his decisions whether they are right or wrong.

Likening their husbands to provu is a demonstration of how the women are subsumed by gendered discourses, and subjected to the discursive pressures that privilege men. By engaging in the cultural beliefs and discourses available to them, the women perpetuate their own subordinate position in family and society irrespective of the intentions of microfinance schemes aimed to empower them. If women could speak out, however, deep entrenched patriarchy informs that they are unlikely to attract an audience in Bangladesh that will listen to her voice – silence prevails.

Women Beneficiaries Engaged in Productive Work

Many of the women in microfinance programmes who engaged independently in productive work made comparisons between quality of life before and after, as illustrated in the following example:

… prior to enrolling in a microfinance program I led a very miserable life. Once, my family had to struggle with poverty. We could not eat three times a day. Sometimes my next door neighbour gave us a plate of rice. I had to feed my husband and my son. I had to starve all day long and sleep with hunger. My husband had a serious loss in his business and stopped working … At first I took a 4,000 Taka loan and started a small business beside a village school… I followed a good strategy of making friendship with school children who are my key customers. Now I am selling ice-cream, nuts and puffed rice to the school children and earning 300-400 Taka daily.

This woman described how microfinance enabled her to commence a business, rise from extreme poverty and take over the responsibility to feed her family. Despite her engagement in productive work, and a husband who did not work, expectations of her to do the reproductive work did not change. Notwithstanding the double burden, her silence represents discursive pressures informing women to not question their enslavement to their husbands and family:

Although I have to be outside for my business most of the day, my family still expect me to do all the household chores. I remain silent and try to finish all my work at night and go to bed at midnight.

Likewise, another women expressed economic hardship that led her to join a microfinance scheme and commence business.

I took loans six times and bought cows, goats, hens and ducks with my first three loans. By selling those I made a profit. Then my husband and I set up a business producing and selling dried cakes. I prepared the cakes at home and my husband had to go to markets for selling. We both maintained networks with the buyers group at the market. Although I always have to be busy for our business work, I still have to perform all the domestic work.

This woman attempted to address the issue of the double burden of productive and reproductive work which led to her silence:

My protest against it destroyed our family peace. Therefore I have decided to remain silent to avoid conflict.

Almost all the women microfinance beneficiaries did household chores without help. And while they had newfound earning capacity, it did not reduce the traditional domestic and family roles expected of them. Whether engaged in productive work or not, the women were not alleviated of reproductive work – it was persistently expected of them.

A few women who participated in this study had the support of other females (daughter, sister and sister-in-law) when it was impossible to fulfil their reproductive work due to long hours in productive work. Albeit, the majority of women completed household chores until late at night. It did not matter how much the women contributed financially to the household income, domestic and family work remained their responsibility. Discursive constructs informing gender roles in the family meant that women’s engagement in paid work and self-employment was unable to alleviate women’s gender oppression in the family. While silence helps women avoid conflict, it is also powerful in maintaining patriarchy.

Conclusion

The two categories of women represent the least empowered to the most empowered beneficiaries in terms of loan control and utilisation, income and expenditure. And while microfinance alleviated family hunger due to greater access to financial resources, the majority of women had no control over this. Microfinance programmes offered women access to practical needs, including credit delivery, savings, insurance, training, healthcare and advocacy, and some food distribution via microfinance, but the
traditional gendered division of labour expecting women to continue all the reproductive work has not changed. This is because reproductive work is unpaid and it is not counted as real work, and nor are women valued. It is unlikely in the short to medium-term that Bangladeshi families or society will allow women’s engagement in productive work to replace their reproductive work, especially when one is perceived as work and the other is not. Productive work has, therefore, not sufficiently empowered women in Bangladesh. Along with pressures for silence, it has added to women’s burden.

While some women had small businesses away from the home, most of the women in this study chose home-based productive work. The main reason was due to the lack of alleviation of their reproductive work, which was easier to manage if women did not venture far from their homes. Low financial literacy, unavailability of skills training in close proximity and the need to complete reproductive work meant that there were few choices about the type of work available to them. In consideration of Moser’s (1993) first two roles of women, productive and reproductive roles, microfinance has not challenged women’s social position in Bangladesh. When assessing the level of women’s empowerment, it is important to ask the question, Who does what in the family, with respect to the gender division of labour?

With regard to challenging these divisions, it is important to consider how the power of men’s and women’s silence on women’s unpaid labour serves to render their reproductive work invisible and reinforce the legitimacy of men’s work over that of the women. Speaking out made little difference to the alleviation of women’s double work burden. In fact, speaking out caused family conflict and it was easier for women to endure their work burdens in silence. Those women who had attempted to challenge these injustices by speaking out resulted in family conflict and social disrespect. But paradoxically, women may think it easier to endure their double burden and remain silent to avoid conflict without realising how they are contributing to their own oppression. Until microfinance providers challenge the double burden and advocate more fervently for women engaged in microfinance schemes, one could suggest that the microfinance providers silence is strengthening many of the women’s oppression and not sufficiently their empowerment.

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LEAVING IT

No vultures land on top of the concrete towers around here. So I haven't been able to decide whether I'll be ash or bone & I don't think I'm going to change my mind.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS,
Domestic violence is complex, sometimes elusive, but real. Researchers and practitioners often associate this phenomenon with gender-based power in which men’s physical, sexual and psychological violence results in women’s suffering. This paper reports on research on domestic violence and considers contributing powers of silence in triggering, sustaining and strengthening men’s violence towards women. The study was conducted in Accra, the capital city of Ghana. Twenty women and four key informants participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews. Cultural and traditional practices, religious beliefs and economic dependency of women on men were the main reasons for silence instead of rebelling against the abuse. While these reasons influenced women to endure the domestic violence and to be mute in pain, in silence, this imposed silence was also powerful in triggering further abuse at the same time as reinforcing family and community tolerance of domestic violence towards women.

Introduction

I was heartbroken. I was dying. I was worried about my children as I sneaked out of the house to run away. The images of my innocent children lying on their beds dawned on me. My mind became the battlefield for whether or not to leave. I felt disturbed and I had no idea how I was ever going to come up with strength. But I just ignored all odds, encouraged myself and took a bold step forward. I knew I had to get out of the abusive relationship (Research participant).

Domestic violence towards women is a complex phenomenon deeply rooted in gender-based power relations, sexuality, self-identity and social institutions (Greig and Edström 2012; OECD 2014). Complexity is due to a culture of silence that surrounds domestic violence, which is reinforced because domestic violence mostly occurs in the private sphere – within families, inside homes and out of sight (Oni-Ojo et al. 2014). Such silence perpetuates the menace, particularly in societies where universal cultural practices dominate fundamental human rights.

Domestic violence is captured in the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (UN 1979). Subsequent follow-up has documented the under-reporting and deliberate disguising of domestic violence by both victims and the societies where they live (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs 2008). While the Convention is conceptualised as a global bill of rights for women, it acknowledges regional differences in which culture and tradition are influential. In the context of Ghana, some influences are so strong that they relegate women far into the background. Women are often expected to be ‘seen and not heard’. A woman who experiences domestic violence is duty-bound to keep quiet and anything to the contrary is deemed an act of rebellion against the accepted social order. It is against this backdrop that the international community has developed and ratified conventions and strategies to check and eliminate gender-based violence in all societies.

As an example, Article 3 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948) seeks to guarantee and protect human rights of every human being to life, liberty and security of person. Consequentially, cultural practices denying the rights of women ought not to be entertained. The Millennium Declaration (UN 2000) seeks to protect and promote gender equality and combat all forms of violence against women, including the protection of women who engage in protest and advocacy against the abuses that demand their silence. These two key documents, along with accompanying development plans, acknowledge that violence against women is a universal issue and that social forces demanding women’s silence contribute to sustaining it.

Understanding of patterns and causes of domestic violence are diverse and dependent on culture. As a result, each society responds to international conventions differently. How nations seek to prevent, protect and prosecute domestic violence is a reflection of cultural contexts and they offer insight into the cultural influences informing perceptions of seriousness of issues at the national level. Largely an ignored problem until the

Coker-Appiah and Cusack (1999; Britwum and Cusack 2009) argue that the core issues surrounding domestic violence in Ghana are power and control. The most effective demonstrations of control over women in Ghana, these authors suggest, is the economic advantage that men have over women. Due to women's economic dependence, male dominance and persistence of traditional norms in Ghanaian society, women have experienced limited participation in decision-making in political, reproductive and other realms affecting quality of life.

Despite attempts to address domestic violence in Ghana, under-reporting is high. This is attributed to a number of factors, including the general acceptance of gender roles in which women's submissiveness to their male partners is a persistent, and an agreed belief embedded in systems of socialisation. According to the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (2008), domestic violence is rooted in a history of social, cultural and legal traditions that sanction men's abuse of women. Most domestic violence abuses are reported when the injury is physical or when the victim is at the point of death. In some cases abuse is unknown until after the death.

Following the prevailing silence surrounding domestic violence in Ghana, this paper seeks to address the power of silence in which women, family and community become compelled to participate. This silence further triggers, sustains and strengthens opportunities for men to be violent, but the silence is also sustained through cultural and societal influences. Firstly, theoretical perspectives on domestic violence are provided and this is followed by a description of the study's methodology, then analysis and discussion of the results.

Theoretical Perspectives

The concept of domestic violence has been used over the years to relate to actions conflicting the rights of females, whether young or old (UN 1979). Darko (2014) expands on UN definitions, defining domestic violence as a pattern of coercive behaviours in which perpetrators control and suppress the self-confidence and defence of their victims. Patriarchy, as a construct explained in feminist theories, helps illuminate how control commands its support from the particular cultural practices of a given community.

In her groundbreaking book, Sexual Politics, Millett (1977) expressed how patriarchy has been variously applied to political, materialistic and radical points of view. Radical feminists express patriarchy as a sexual system of power that grants greater economic privileges to males (Eisenstein 2007), asserting that patriarchy pressures females with the least economic privilege to be submissive to men at all times. When men control the resources, women are forced to maintain their submission and be silent in order to be granted some amount of access to those resources. Wilson (2000), however, observes how the interconnected realms of reproduction, sexuality and violence are popularised expressions in radical feminist theories. In arguing that men have control over everything, including sex, radical feminists theorise that patriarchy permits men to demand sex even when against the wishes of their female partners. In Ghana, such perspectives indicate/show that female's relevance extends little beyond their reproductive roles. As a result, acts of sexual violence are seen as an attempt by the male to make the female more relevant to human creation.

Materialistic feminists attempt to equate patriarchy to male dominance in the areas of economic exploitation and control of family labour (Wilson 2000). A married woman, therefore, becomes constituted as a mode of supplementary production instead of being treated as an equal partner. This female is vulnerable to exploitation of her labour in whatever ways may please the partner. This perspective is also relevant to the Ghanaian context. Females often work to feed their families with little or no support from their male partners, financially or with household work. Yet, there is no platform for these women to speak out and complain about their lazy partners.

While patriarchal dominance is grounded in cultural practices, Millett (1977) viewed patriarchy as a dominant structure of all societies – bound in institutional, cultural and social institutions and modes of discourse. The ideology of patriarchy invokes perceptions that over-emphasise biological differences between men and women. This is reflected in Ghana where beliefs informing men’s masculine role of dominance against the females’ role as subordinate is normalised and reinforced by family and the church. Many females suffer in silence when their male counterparts perpetrate violence against them. This is because the culturally entrenched and religiously approved male dominance in Ghana renders many women with no place to conceal and voice alternatives. Nor are women able to formally report instances of domestic violence due to intergenerational reinforcing of patriarchy across family systems and society in which beliefs are male dominated, historically entrenched and difficult to shift.
With relevance to women's silence, Muted Group Theory provides some explanation of how people ranked low in a given society may have greater difficulties in expressing their opinions (Chávez and Griffin 2009). As a communication theory used by researchers to explain asymmetrical power-related issues between dominant and silenced groups, this theory highlights how men's domination over language is influential (Benston 1998; Ardener 2005). For example, men's frequent use of abusive words, such as witch, slut and whore, towards women who do not conform to their expectations serves to shame women and demand their silence. Hence, women's subordination on issues that negatively affect them is demonstrated through their refusal to speak out or to act against the abuse (Ballard-Reisch 2010). As a result, women's silence – their lack of words and actions – feeds women's tolerance of their relationships and ensures their continued membership of the muted group. This tolerance is irrespective of the atrocities meted out to them.

Coker-Appiah and Cusack (1999), consistent with Muted Group Theory, argue that domestic violence in Ghana emanates from a lack of power and control by women who are the subordinate group in relation to men. Also consistent with radical feminist views, they express how the most effective control of Ghanaian women is manifested in the economic advantage that men have over women. Due to women's economic dependence and the persistence of traditional norms in Ghanaian society that keep women silenced, women have limited participation in decisions affecting them.

Methodology

The Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GSS, GHS and NPHRL) have started reporting on domestic violence in recent years. However, due to associations between silence and under-reporting of domestic violence, statistics are not sufficiently documented or reliable. Instead, the research informing this paper relies on qualitative data to inform interpretations about potential associations between domestic violence and silence.

Research participants were recruited through snowball sampling, which was deemed appropriate due to the sensitive nature of domestic violence in Ghana and the difficulty identifying research participants among silenced groups. Once a given participant was identified and interviewed, she was provided with the opportunity to introduce another potential participant. The women had often suffered in silence in their families and communities, but many knew of, and had secretly shared their experiences with, other women experiencing domestic violence. While low participant numbers (n=20) is an exemplar of the silence surrounding domestic violence, the women's networking with other silenced women and their ability to speak out through the research process is an indication that some resistance to silence is possible. Some resistance from this sample and the power they drew from being members of a muted group, however, cannot be generalised to all Ghanaian women.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with women until the point that no new issues could arise from the interviews. Five women had left their violent relationship, four were widowed and 11 were living with their abusers. Seventeen of the women had borne children by the violent partner. All of the women had attained some level of education, eight women were engaged in productive work in the formal sector and all others were engaged in some form of informal economic activity. An additional four key informants, comprising a social worker, a church Minister, a marriage counsellor and an opinion leader, were interviewed. Their participation was also indicative of some resistance towards domestic violence.

Research participation was voluntary, confidential and conformed to standard research ethics conventions. Thematic analysis of data, consistent with Lapadat (2010), involved the identification of patterns relevant to the main objectives of the study. This included identification of associations between understandings of domestic violence, experiences of domestic violence and reasons for silence.

Results and Discussions

In this section, results of the thematic analysis are provided. Interwoven with discussion, the potential associations between domestic violence, experiences and silence are elucidated.

Victim, family and community understanding of domestic violence

Most of the research participants expressed domestic violence as a misunderstanding between partners. According to them, misunderstandings usually end with the male partner physically abusing the female partner who is considered weaker. Worden and Carlson (2005) cited physical acts such as punching, slapping and forced sex as the most widely perceived form of domestic violence, which was confirmed by participants during interviews:

*Domestic violence takes the form of raping, booting, slapping and insulting. Most of the people who had contacted us for help usually mentioned at least one of these (Key informant).*

While the four key informants were knowledgeable about definitions of domestic violence, the responses from nearly all 20 women indicated limitations. One woman defined domestic violence as any act in the home that can bring injury, which was reflected in the statements...
of other women. This incomplete understanding may indicate that advocacy efforts, such as the ‘16 days of activism’ annual campaign, school based programs and the launching of State based projects aimed to raise awareness about domestic violence, are not yielding enough power to compete against the cultural constructs that demand women’s silence on domestic violence. The power of women’s enforced silence also seems to inhibit openness to the uptake of broader understandings about domestic violence amongst them.

Manifestations and experience of domestic violence

Overwhelmingly, participants were aware that most married Ghanaian women endure significant, long-term and escalating physical abuse from their partners; often precipitated by other forms of abuse. In fact, Cantalupo et al. (2006) found that one in three Ghanaian women have suffered a form of physical violence at the hands of a past or current partner, which indicates the scale of the problem. One educated and employed woman advised of violence escalation experienced over time:

I have been married for the past 28 years with four children. Eighteen years after a peaceful marriage life he was involved in a motor accident, hospitalised for six months, after which things went bad. All of a sudden I became responsible for the mishaps because I am a witch. Frequent insults and name calling in the presence of our children became the order of the day. Even when I dance to praises in church, I am in trouble. His recent violent behaviour accompanied with pushing and yelling is gradually becoming unbearable (Research participant).

Likewise, another woman shared:

He is a very quick-tempered person, three months after our wedding he started abusing me verbally. Two years later he started giving me dirty slaps, we are in the sixth year and this time he threatens to kill me.

These narratives are examples of variation in the speed of escalation and severity of domestic violence suffered by two Ghanaian women. Consistent with Muted Group Theory, one expressed how her husband had command over language in calling her a witch as an act of abuse and control. While manifestations are different, other women interviewed consistently advised of how patriarchal privilege over language and actions incapacitated their ability to report the abuse until such time that it was out of hand. The problem with delayed reporting is that it provides perpetrators with more power to continue abusing. With respect to sustained violence, a key informant commented:

As far as I am concerned, domestic violence will be with us for [a] very long time. Perpetrators are not ready to stop and the victims are always prepared to keep things to themselves. This is worrying! I think the victims should open up. Silence is killing them – they need to break this silence!

Discursive patriarchal, cultural and institutional control over Ghanaian women enforces their submission and silence in marriage. This not only provides a forum in which men’s violence is free to escalate, but it holds women responsible to keep silent in respect of certain forms of violence towards them. Once the abuse is physically severe, the same women are blamed for not speaking out. In being blamed for their silence, the power of silence therefore triggers and manifests as more silence. The culture of silence in relationships also manifests as a normative practice in communities.

Reasons for silence instead of rebelling the abuse

Interviewees had awareness that domestic violence was generally under-reported in Ghanaian society. As noted by a marriage counsellor, ‘countless number[s] of these cases are not reported’. She rationalised that cultural practices and beliefs, as well as economic factors, contributed to the silence. Britwum and Cusack (2009) suggest that men use violence as a quietening tactic to silence women’s requests for food, clothing and school fees. This, they said, is fuelled by social prescriptions that grant Ghanaian men superior status and authority in the household. Many women tolerate and remain in abusive relationships and do not complain publicly about their ordeals. This is because marital conflicts are considered private in Ghanaian society. Discursive patriarchal, cultural and institutional control over the private-public domain that prevents reporting of abuse also serves to silence potential action being taken against perpetrators.

A popular adage among Ghanaian society that married people should not wash their dirty linen in public, offers a reason for silence instead of rebelling against the abuse. As a matter of principle and for the fear of rejection by society, victims may perceive silence as a better option than to be discarded by the whole society. Throughout the study it was evident that most of the women held in high esteem traditional beliefs that reinforced fear of societal ridicule and therefore their silence. A representative example is provided:

In our society it is not allowed to always report your marital issues to any of the family members. You will even be laughed at so I will prefer to rather pray one day it will be well (Research participant).

Silence is deeply rooted in the Ghanaian tradition and culture, so much so that women who are abused do not desire to report it to the law enforcement agencies. Of
the 20 women interviewed, only one had made a report to the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the Ghana Police. The woman’s mother requested an out of court settlement for abuse that constituted a serious crime under the laws of Ghana. The mother feared the social repercussions of her daughter’s marriage breakdown. The power of discursive patriarchal, cultural and institutional control ensured legal support for the mother’s actions and this guaranteed the daughter’s silence.

According to Nukunya (2003: 55), religion is an integral and core element for Ghanaians and to their worldview. Religion permeates every social sphere of life from family, public, private, political to economic life. For this reason, religious leaders are very influential in matters relating to family, including domestic violence. The Bible, according to Baffour (2012), has a set of principles and teachings that defines gender roles and which reinforce the supremacy of men. Specifically, it states that husbands are the head of the family, women are to be submissive to their husbands and it discourages divorce. These phallocentric views often leave no option for women and their families other than to opt for settlement over divorce, or to silently pray the domestic violence away.

With relevance, one woman explained her silence:

I share the belief that what the Lord has put together, no man should put asunder … It is not right to report your husband to other people and later go back to sleep with him in the same bed (Research participant).

Such religious beliefs, coupled with family pressures and cultures that support women’s economic dependence on men, serve to increase women’s vulnerability to increased exploitation at the hands of perpetrators.

Norman and Mancuso (cited in Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman 1990:120) state that ‘lack of self-confidence, adherence to traditional beliefs, guilt, economic dependence, fear of the abuser, fear of isolation, fear for children are some of the factors that influence victims silence and empower perpetrators’. This is reflected in the following representative quote:

He started beating me [a] few months after our marriage. One day after severe beatings, I run to inform his father … He never talked to me for about a month. During this time he never gave me money nor slept with me. I was unemployed at the time and rather had to beg him to take me back. I had to swallow this nonsense for years until I started working and had confidence to shout for help anytime he attacked me (Research participant).

While some women may be discursively pressured to be silent as opposed to resisting the abuse, all those who were mothers expressed additional fears for their children’s safety should they leave. These fears were influential in the women’s endurance of silence about their domestic violence. At the same time, the women’s power of silence ensured their children’s basic needs.

Hence, discursive pressures ensured the women’s silence and their staying for the perceived sake of their children’s welfare. The following quote helps to explain:

Who would have taken care of the five children in my absence at the house? My youngest child is only five years [and] cannot even bat properly. There are two girls among them. With his incest behaviour my children could easily be victims (Research participant).

Some of the women conformed to notions raised by Gyekye (1996) that an unmarried woman in the African culture is almost an anomaly and therefore abnormal. By implication, this pressures women to perceive that life with an abusive husband is preferable to being single. One woman explained:

These days of economic hardship, only few men are willing and ready to marry. Therefore, it is only a fool who will not protect what others have been struggling to have.

Achieving marriage is an ideal that is so deeply entrenched in Ghanaian society that women will endure and be silent about all forms of abuse from their partners to ensure the social and cultural, including religious, respect of others. When women experience the hard work behind achieving this marriage ideal, many are likely to mute the pain when counterbalancing outward success in the light of others still struggling to achieve this ideal. Such justifications informing the women’s silence and staying power not only increase their vulnerability to further abuse, but it potentially triggers the reinforcement of patriarchal institutional control over all facets of life that insist on silence among women as a muted group.

Conclusion

Domestic violence is prevalent in the Ghanaian society. The menace manifests itself in several forms including physical assault, name-calling and economic deprivation. Interestingly, there is a cloud of silence over domestic violence among communities in Ghana. This silence manifests as further silence; women’s silence often encourages ongoing perpetration of the problem.

The main reasons for the silence are cultural and traditional, including religious beliefs, economic
dependency, protection and perceptions about welfare of children. There is also prestige associated with marriage in Ghanaian society that provokes women’s silence via inaction. Cultural and traditional beliefs informing social expectations of women, which are rooted in patriarchal socialisation, endorse and strengthen male dominance and excessive power over women in all spheres of life. This makes it very difficult for women who are victims of domestic violence to speak out informally and/or to report the abuse to formal authorities. However due to lack of adequate understanding of domestic violence, many women accept the early signs as normal in marriage. This contributes to the silence that ultimately empowers the perpetrators to continuously abuse and escalate abuse towards women.

Ghana is perceived to be a secular state. Despite this, a large proportion of the population professes faith in a Supreme Being and religious considerations permeate all levels of Ghanaian society. Religion is an example of patriarchal institutional control over women and it plays a significant role in supporting male dominance. This study demonstrates the influences of religious practices and beliefs on the experiences of domestic violence experienced by 20 women and their subsequent silence. In particular, the institution of marriage and cultural expectations informing gender roles served to increase the women’s vulnerability to exploitation by their partners, family and community.

In addition, women’s economic dependence on men was an influential feature in their silence. This is intertwined with socially informed gender roles in Ghana in which, most often, men are the bread-winners and controllers of household finances. In the event of domestic violence, the women are disabled from reporting the abuse for fear of losing their daily bread. Fear of economic loss is a significant reason for silence in abusive marriages, along with women’s prestige associated with marriage in Ghanaian society. Along with perceptions about single women, the loss of a husband through divorce attracts disrespect. The alternative for women is silence. These discursive patriarchal forces are embedded in cultural, social and institutional control over women that are historical and stealthy.

Ghanaian policy and law have attempted to increase gender equality, formed in accordance with human rights conventions. Dominant constructions informed by patriarchy are so deeply entrenched across cultural and religious practices in Ghana that appropriate change in accordance with policy directions that might unlock women’s voices as a muted group, in the short to midterm, seems unlikely. In consideration of the strength of religious teachings over family life, it is not until change can be impressed upon religious leaders that women may also be freed from the institutional shackles in Ghana that condone men’s domestic violence and compel women to silence. Women need to be empowered to speak out, particularly in consideration that silence is power – so strong – that it is responsible for triggering further silence and reinforcing it.

References


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The following poem is a collaboration by Steve Brock and Rory Harris.

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**Bali, March 2014**

a man, a boy
& a small plastic

three wheeled bicycle
a typewriter ribbon

of pavement
& not a car in sight

---

**My friend the poet**

lent me a couple of books
by Roque Dalton
and Ernesto Cardenal

I read them on the bus
on my way into work

and then in my office
while I drank coffee

I read them
sitting in the park
and later in my lounge room
over a glass of red

until worn out
by revolution
I fell asleep
on the couch

only to be woken
by the phone

a voice
reached me
through shadows
and static of the tv

stretched and broken
I hardly recognised
my friend
the poet

with news from Chile

*los pacos mataron a mi amigo*
*la injusticia sigue*

*the cops killed my friend*
*the injustice doesn’t stop*

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**Steve Brock,**
**Hallett Cove, SA**
Silencing Australian Civil Society: The Howard Legacy and the Abbott Government’s Remaking of Australian Democracy

CASSANDRA STAR

The notion that the Howard Government (1996-2007) used silencing dissent within Australian civil society as a key tool of political control is not new and has been explored elsewhere. This paper argues that while the Howard Government demonstrated a weakening support for civil society organisations and attempted to delegitimise the role of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) in the public sphere, the Abbott Government displayed some significant differences. Their approach moved beyond this to undermine key elements of Australian democracy. The government attempted to shrink, delegitimise and criminalise the advocacy and democratic purposes of NGOs and civil society. Crucial access to the judicial system for NGOs was limited by defunding of organisations that supported civil society to access legal mechanisms. In this way, the independence of the public service and of universities was challenged and compromised. These actions suggest a waning commitment to a public battle of ideas and a rethinking of the relationship between government, citizens and civil society. In this case, it represents a significant attempt to re-mark Australian democracy.

Introduction

This paper explores the legacy of the Howard era’s silencing of dissent in the conservative Coalition Government in Australia. The paper primarily focuses on the action of the government under Prime Minister Tony Abbott despite the transition to the prime ministership of Malcolm Turnbull in September 2015. The influence of this legacy on the newly formed Turnbull government is as yet unclear.

It is argued that while the Abbott Coalition Government showed evidence of embracing and continuing the legacy of the Howard era, their policies went further. After the demise of the Rudd/Gillard/Rudd ALP Governments, NGOs and civil society in Australia faced a Coalition Government with distinct ideas about public debate, civil society and democracy that appeared at odds with its stated commitment to liberalism. The paper argues that while the Howard Government demonstrated a weakening support for civil society organisations and attempted to delegitimise the role of NGOs in the public sphere, the government of the Abbott era displayed some significant differences. Their approach, outlined below, moved beyond this to undermine key elements of the Australian democracy that included the independence of the public service and of universities, access to the judicial system and the commitment to a public battle of ideas, with the state as impartial referee.

For these reasons, it is argued that the Abbott era will stand alone in Australian contemporary history as one in which the embrace of an illiberal conservatism led to active attempts to dismantle civil society, to influence independent research agendas, to restrict the public service and to challenge the rule of law.

The Howard Era

The relationship between Environmental Non-Government Organisations (ENGOs) and the government during the Howard era and beyond is of interest because of the contrast it represents with the relationship under other governments. During the Hawke era (1983-1991), ENGOs were afforded significant legitimacy and played a key role in public policy debates and political battles of the time. While at least some of this access and engagement was clearly pragmatic, the Hawke Government was taken to and returned to office on green votes (Norton 2006; Marsh 2006; Kelly 2008) and the engagement of ENGOs was more than skin deep. Hawke and several of his ministers entertained high-level engagement and consultation with key ENGOs (McEachern 1993; Haward 1995; Downes 1996) and there was significant innovation in environmental policy and environmental institutional arrangements during this time. A number of key figures in the movement also had influence in the government. Phillip Toyne, then Executive Director of the Australian Conservation Foundation (1986-1992), went on to become Deputy Secretary in the Commonwealth Department of Environment from 1994 to 1997 in the Hawke Government (Toyne 1994). However, the role of ENGOs in public policy in the Hawke era was...
representative of a different approach by the government and the state during this time to engage civil society as a whole, as elaborated elsewhere (Star 2014).

Alternatively, the existence of a frostier relationship between the Howard Government and Australian ENGOs can be clearly demonstrated by looking at two key examples – the funding of NGOs and the Natural Heritage Trust. An early and key move of the Howard Government in relation to civil society was to curtail funding, or eligibility to compete for it, for groups with a ‘political’ purpose. This impacted most service provision NGOs that are reliant on government contracts, but also increased competition for grants and other funding from non-government sources. Amongst ENGOs, this move affected different groups in different ways. Melville and Perkins’s (2003) research identified 142 peak NGO bodies, at least 100 of which were predominantly funded by government. Greenpeace Australia-Pacific, who drew significant funds from a paid membership base, was probably the least adversely affected of all Australian ENGOs, according to the Campaigns Manager for Greenpeace Australia Pacific (Danny Kennedy, personal communication 2005). Conversely, Friends of the Earth (FoE) Australia, who are a relatively small (but very active) ENGO with a modest membership base, was significantly affected and lost one of its few full-time paid campaigners (Stephanie Long, Friends of the Earth climate change campaigner, personal communication 2005). Management of the Natural Heritage Trust, the Howard Government’s key environmental funding delivery mechanism, is another example. The sale of Telstra provided significant funds for environmental projects during the Howard era.2 However, guidelines introduced by the Howard Government precluded groups from receiving funding that had ‘political’ purposes (Peatling 2005; Hamilton and Maddison 2007). This one guideline effectively excluded most Australian ENGOs from accessing this new source of funding, despite their long-running expertise in many of the areas of funding priority.

There is a continuation of the use of the silencing tools of the Howard era including the ‘political’ purpose. This impacted most service provision NGOs that are reliant on government contracts, but also increased competition for grants and other funding from non-government sources. Amongst ENGOs, this move affected different groups in different ways. Melville and Perkins’s (2003) research identified 142 peak NGO bodies, at least 100 of which were predominantly funded by government. Greenpeace Australia-Pacific, who drew significant funds from a paid membership base, was probably the least adversely affected of all Australian ENGOs, according to the Campaigns Manager for Greenpeace Australia Pacific (Danny Kennedy, personal communication 2005). Conversely, Friends of the Earth (FoE) Australia, who are a relatively small (but very active) ENGO with a modest membership base, was significantly affected and lost one of its few full-time paid campaigners (Stephanie Long, Friends of the Earth climate change campaigner, personal communication 2005). Management of the Natural Heritage Trust, the Howard Government’s key environmental funding delivery mechanism, is another example. The sale of Telstra provided significant funds for environmental projects during the Howard era.2 However, guidelines introduced by the Howard Government precluded groups from receiving funding that had ‘political’ purposes (Peatling 2005; Hamilton and Maddison 2007). This one guideline effectively excluded most Australian ENGOs from accessing this new source of funding, despite their long-running expertise in many of the areas of funding priority.

The effective removal of this and other funding opportunities placed many ENGOs close to financial ruin (for a full discussion of funding issues, see Staples 2006). It also brought into question the legitimacy, expertise, capacity and appropriate environmental ‘know-how’ of the thousands of small community groups and regional organisations across the country that did access the funding. While they had good intentions, there was often little or no expertise or experience to provide these services (for example, see McAlpine et al. 2007; Hajkowicz 2009). NGOs and civil society as a whole were impacted and entered an era with a government that had different ideas about the role of civil society vis-à-vis public policy engagement and political debate, while using fiscal control to enforce it.

Abbott’s Environmental Attacks – A New Era?

This paper outlines three distinct approaches of the Abbott Government to civil society: attempts to dismantle NGOs, efforts to silence and replace independent voices, and challenges to judicial access and action. Taken together, these suggest a substantively different policy approach by the Abbott Government, even compared to the Howard era, about how modern Australian democracy should function, what voices should legitimately be part of it, and an attempt to remake the relationship between the government, the public and civil society.

Attempts to dismantle NGOs and civil society

Firstly, we can see the legacy of the Howard Government in Abbott’s approach to civil society. There is a continuation of the use of the silencing tools of the Howard era including Third Way service provision and contracts that suppress organisations. Limitation of funding for civil society is also present. There are additional elements of the Abbott era that represent an expanded agenda. The new agenda goes beyond the silencing of dissent to the dismantling of civil society via two predominant approaches: legislative restraints and open public attack.

In the ENGO arena, the Abbott Government’s approach to public attack can be observed in the House of Representatives Committee Inquiry into the Administration and Transparency of the Register of Environmental Organisations that was initiated to review the tax deductibility status of Australian ENGOs. It is important to contextualise this review by recognising that decisions made in the Howard era had already removed the majority of funding from ENGOs, resulting in a significantly smaller and under-resourced sector. In the 2014 budget, the Abbott Government also cut the Grants to Voluntary Environment, Sustainability and Heritage Organisations, impacting up to 150 groups which had been supported by both sides of politics since the early 1970s. Removing tax deductibility status would diminish future viability of these groups and further reduce their ability to attract grants and donations. The inquiry proceeded hand in hand with a motion by the Federal Council of the Liberal Party to strip ENGOs of the same rights given to other charities, including tax-deductible donations. In addition, the Re:Think, Better Tax System Best Australia white paper (Government of Australia 2015) also flagged a review of the Not For Profit sector’s tax deductibility status. The review chair stated it aimed to "… ensure that tax deductible donations … are used for the purpose intended and expected by the community" (House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment 2015). However research, including polling by The Australia Institute, shows that the community strongly supports ENGO advocacy and campaigning (The Australian Institute 2015) and thus, their democratic
role. A number of ENGOs reported being audited by the Australian Tax Office and having their tax deductible status questioned by the Department of Environment at the same time (Staples 2014). These attacks clearly attempted to continue the Howard era rhetoric that ENGOs, and thus by extension other NGOs, are illegitimate if they have a ‘political’ or advocacy purpose rather than a service-delivery purpose. This was despite the 2010 High Court ruling that groups with tax-deductible status have the right to participate in political debate and advocacy on issues ‘indispensable’ for ‘representative and responsible government’ – thus reconfirming the democratic role of NGOs.

The second prong in this attack had been the attempt to introduce legal constraints on advocacy and activism. These constraints included gag clauses applied to community legal centres (Patty 2013) and other service delivery organisations that received government funding. Attempts were also made to remove exemptions from section 45DD of the Consumers and Competition Act for ENGOs initiating boycotts against commercial organisations (Taylor 2014). The combined impact of these changes would remove legal protections or activate penalties for NGOs carrying out their public democratic purpose. In addition, Liberal State governments made proposals to delegitimise public protest, including the drafting of anti-protest laws in Western Australia (O’Connor 2015) and The Workplaces (Protection from Protestors) Bill in Tasmania (Richards 2014). In Tasmania, this move has been part of a broader agenda that included ending a peace deal between environmental and forestry groups and the introduction of changes to allow companies to sue protestors.

Collectively, these actions attempt to shrink, delegitimise and criminalise the advocacy and democratic purposes of ENGOs and other civil society organisations.

Silence and replace independent voices

The next step beyond the Abbott Government’s attack on NGOs, their funding and the criminalisation of their activities, was the attempt to defund, restrain and silence other independent voices while installing voices sympathetic to the government’s politics. This can be observed through three prominent examples discussed below – restraint of the public service, defunding of CSIRO and the Climate Council, and the promotion of specific alternative voices.

The public service, providers of independent advice and expertise to Australian Governments and the public, is a key area that suffered under the Abbott Government. While the Howard Government removed 30,000 jobs from the public service, an additional 15,000 jobs were shed in the relatively short Abbott era (Mannheim 2015). In addition, key experienced public servants were removed from office, including Dr Martin Parkinson, former Secretary of the Treasury (Bourke 2015). Parkinson has stated that ‘the blurring of boundaries between the public servant and the political adviser, and the relentless focus on message over substance, results in a diminution of the “space” in which the independent adviser can operate’ (Tingle 2015). These changes remove not only a significant source and space for the exercise of independent voices in our democracy, but they weaken the ability to effectively serve Australian citizens.

In the 2014 budget, CSIRO faced another significant round of funding cuts. A $140 million cut from a $733 million budget was slated (Koelma 2014), which resulted in job losses of approximately 500 including those of internationally eminent scientists (Duffy 2014), despite already having lost 489 staff to previous funding cuts. This led to the closure of eight research sites and significant cuts to environmental programmes, especially those focused on climate change (Dargaville 2014). Approximately $4 million was also lost indirectly with the merging of the Australian climate science programs into the new National Environmental Science program (Smith 2014). These cuts inhibited CSIRO’s ability to undertake research (Duffy 2014). A subsequent 2016 proposed round of cuts has been internationally condemned (Innis 2016). Others have argued that ‘the government is forcing CSIRO’s hand towards [funding] options that are not in...
In tandem with these changes, the government also set about dismantling the Climate Commission. The Commission was set up in 2011 as an independent but government-funded body by the Gillard Government to communicate reliable and authoritative information about climate change to the public. The Commission was projected to cost $5.4 million over four years with an agenda of producing reports, public events and science communication. At the same time, the government also began work to dismantle the Climate Change Authority (Kenny 2013). Environment Minister Greg Hunt argued that the work of communicating climate science to the public would be continued by the Department of Environment (Metcalfe 2013).

In addition to the strategy of constraining and silencing independent voices contrary to its political agenda, the Abbott Government has also specifically sought to fund and legitimise those voices in support of its own position. Of concern, Abbott government Ministers invited proponents of their preferred positions into government briefings. For example, at a pre-Paris The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) conference briefing on climate issues by leading scientists provided to the Coalition’s backbench committee of environment, the Coalition invited prominent Australian climate denialists to present their views for ‘balance’ (Readfearn 2015). Another example of this relates to the government’s repeated attempts in 2014 and 2015 to secure and fund a university-based research centre around Dr Bjorn Lomborg. Lomborg is an internationally known climate-denier turned climate-inactivist. Lomborg aligned well with the Abbott Government view on climate change and its resistance to climate action, both nationally and internationally. The government offered a funding package of $4 million to multiple universities to establish a centre for Lomborg and a commitment to undertake significant public outreach. This was despite Lomborg’s existing funded role on the InnovationXchange committee auspiced under the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. A vigorous public campaign against this continued until October 2015 when the Turnbull government dropped the proposal.4

Grattan (2015) and others suggest that the position the public service once held has been irretrievably damaged by withdrawal of resources, the culture of policing of staff and from the rise of political advisers. Thus it can be surmised a concerted campaign was mounted by the Abbott Government to constrain and terminate independent voices in Australian public life. More than this, determined efforts to replace those voices with

the government’s ideological agenda, can be observed.

Reducing access to the judicial system

A logical next step from the attempts to criminalise advocacy and activism was the government’s moves to deny activists and organisations legal protections and representation.

In Australia, like many Western democracies, legal action is most often the domain of the wealthy or the corporate, due to the associated costs. Access to legal action is particularly challenging for NGOs in the recent climate for two key reasons. Firstly, the stripping of funding under successive Coalition Governments has been significant. Secondly, the funding reductions in the support for legal help from other sources have reduced access to legal advice and action. Funding cuts of more than 20 per cent were made by the Commonwealth Attorney General to prominent legal organisations including the Aboriginal Legal Service, the Legal Aid Commission and Community Legal Centres (ABC News 2015). These cuts especially impacted individual activists and Indigenous communities, given the attempts to criminalise dissent outlined above. In addition, the remaining funding had contractual clauses attached that prevented any commentary on law reform or advocacy on the part of recipients (Seccombe 2014).

Specifically in the environmental arena, the Abbott Government targeted the Environmental Defenders Offices (EDOs). The EDO is a national network of legal centres that provide representation for environment-related legal actions in the public interest. From 1 July 2014, the EDO received no government funding after a cut of $10m in December 2013, resulting in a loss of up to 50 per cent of budget as well as closures of EDO offices (Arup 2013). The EDO provides support for ENGO challenges to government decisions on large and small projects, as well as corporate actors. They have provided legal support to key movement actions such as the Lock the Gate campaign and also in high profile cases such as that against expansion of the coal mine near Bulga, NSW; the case against the Victorian Government for breaking its own environmental laws; and that against Adani’s James Price Point project.

A major reason why removing access to legal representation and the judicial system is significant for ENGOs in the current context is the relationship to changes in their advocacy and activism approach in the post-Rudd/Gillard/Rudd era. Key movement actors shifted their focus and activism away from the government and onto other avenues to prevent particularly climate-damaging activities. The local movement has consciously built capacity for a US-inspired approach. They are undertaking
local community-driven campaigns backed by litigation to stop and delay projects and to make them unattractive to investors. Restricting ENGOs' ability to access litigation hinders this approach, especially given that the Australian legal system is less friendly to activist litigation than other systems.

Therefore, a key element of the Abbott Government’s approach to remaking Australian democracy has been to limit the access of NGOs – ENGOs especially – to initiate legal responses in relation to its decisions, but also the actions of corporate actors. It has achieved this through defunding the network of organisations that had previously supported individuals and NGOs to undertake legal action.

From the discussion above, it is clear that the Abbott Government – while incorporating some similar approaches to the Howard Government in its ‘silencing of dissent’ – worked on a substantively expanded agenda. Beyond the reduction of funding to the public service and to NGOs, the NGO sector was further constrained by the defunding of legal avenues of support, made all the more significant by moves to gag or criminalise their activities. In addition, other independent or expert voices in the Australian democracy were silenced, while the government attempted to displace or replace these with more politically aligned voices, such as in the Lomborg case. Clearly there are adverse implications for Australian civil society and democracy from this period in Australian politics.

The Howard Legacy and the Abbott Agenda

Despite its achievements, a lasting legacy of the Hawke Government’s neo-corporatist approach to policymaking in Australia has been a pattern of NGO engagement with governments, characterised by those that enjoyed insider status attempting to reclaim this status, in the face of continued criticism and resentment from outsider groups. Under a hostile government, such as during the Howard and Abbott eras, such an approach lacks effectiveness. However, NGO groups faced a further difficulty with the Howard government's decisions around funding (or rather defunding) long-standing NGOs, creating a new schism between the ‘political' NGOs and the subsequently funded ‘task-oriented' or ‘on the ground' NGOs. This effectively reinforced ENGO exclusion from policy debates. From its election in 1996, the Howard Government pursued a policy of systematically silencing significant political dissent that was wildly successful (Manne 2004).

However, the Abbott Government has eclipsed the ambition of this agenda. This government moved beyond the silencing of dissent to further defunding NGOs, criminalising dissent while removing funding and gagging those particular legal supports available to NGOs. The government also weakened other independent voices in Australian society, via the targeting of individual public servants, as well as the public service as a whole. In the place of this independent expertise, the government sought to fund, legitimise and amplify the voices of non-experts and non-independents that aligned with its political agenda. It did this inside what had previously been independent forums, such as the public service and within public universities. The conclusion that can be drawn from these moves is a concerted campaign by the Abbott Government to compromise the fabric of Australian democracy through a systematic change to the relationship between the government, civil society and the public service – effectively compromising independent, expert oversight of its activities.

In an era when environmental concerns, especially those represented by groups with ‘political' aims, have been actively excluded from policy dialogue, de-funded and cast as the ‘enemy' of conservative governments, an enduring strength and relevance in public debate is difficult to maintain.

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Government of Australia. 2015 Re: Think – Better tax,


**Flag Fall ... or, Taxi Dancing in Western Sydney**

When he cut me
I jammed my foot on the accelerator
and slumped forward with all my weight
pulling the steering wheel hard to the right
so the cab leapt forward crazily,
like a stallion in the Tumbarumba rodeo
lurching, springing round and round the Civic Square.

Off his face, he’d said “Take that, Cunt!”
as if I was all there was between him and the next fix.
I could smell his winey breath, tobacco,
wondered about blood on the blue vinyl I’d polished that morning.
Would I get to plant my tomato seedlings?
Who would feed the dog tomorrow?
Why did my son never reply to my letters?

I tried to keep my left hand on my neck
where the blade had sliced me.
I could tell he was flung about
like a lanky, round-eyed marionette,
struggling to get out of the careening car.
I thought I would die …
but I’m buggered if I’ll die easily
and I’ll take you with me
you festering arsehole
crashing the car or crushing your legs as I go.

I thought of the guys back in the smoky tea room
before the shift
talking about the night ahead
and our hopes for that magic fare: Werrington to Wollongong,
Blacktown to Byron Bay
but here I was in fucking Penrith
‘doing the rounds’.

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**Author**

Cassandra Star’s research arena is environmental politics and policy, with a focus on the politics of climate change and on the role, actions and influence of non-government organisations. She is particularly interested in the political influence of the movement, but also the formal and informal networks and social learning that occurs between groups in the non-government sector around climate change issues.

**End Notes**

1. While the relationship between the government and ENGOs cooled during the Keating years, I have not addressed that element in this paper – but it is possible to speculate that this was partly due to the difference in Keating and Hawke’s personal leadership styles (for example, see Brett 2009). It can also be partly attributed to the ‘recession we had to have’ (Conley 2004).

2. There has been a significant amount of scholarship about the Natural Heritage Trust and the impact on environmental policy in Australia. In certain ways it does represent a policy innovation in terms of the delivery of funds and environmental services at the local level, however, it also suffers from fragmentation, lack of overview and expertise (Crowley 2001; Head 2005). It also has a focus on environmental ‘clean-up’, including tree planting, waterway rehabilitation and other physical works (Hajkowicz 2009) at the expense of other important environmental priorities.

3. Maurice Newman refers to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as ‘an anthropogenic warming propagandist”(Parkinson 2014).

4. For a detailed account of the Lomborg controversy, see the work of David Holmes (2015).
Silence as a Discourse in the Public Sphere: Media Representations of Australians Joining the Fight in Syria

TEJASWINI PATIL AND GRETCHEN MARIE ENNIS

Literature on media representations of Islamic terrorism predominantly employs discourse analysis as a methodological tool to unpack concepts of power in texts. There is scant literature focused on the operation of silence as a discursive practice in the public sphere. This paper employs Huckin’s (2002) notion of manipulative silences to demonstrate how textual media representations of Australians Joining the Fight in Syria are dominated by identity debates, particularly evident in the media’s act of defining Muslims who engage in the Syrian conflict as bad Australians. We use Joining the Fight on Insight, an Australian opinion-based television program on Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), as the centrepiece of our argument to demonstrate how media representations use manipulative silences. These silences skew dialogue in the public sphere away from the core issue, the role of ISIS in the Syrian conflict, and towards internal politics and nationalistic concerns.

Setting the Scene

Syria is experiencing a catastrophic civil war. Since 2011, government backed and anti-government forces led by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have committed human right violations and crimes (IICISAR 2012) against citizens. Despite approximately 12 million Syrians becoming internally displaced or forced out of their country (UNHCR 2015) most Western nations, including Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom, have stood by and done little other than launch air-strikes against ISIS.

News reporting in Australia has focused on the increasing involvement of Australian citizens travelling to Iraq and Syria to participate in the conflict (Welch and Rubinsztein-Dunlop 2014a, 2014b; Rubinsztein-Dunlop and Welch 2014; SBS 2014). Reports tend to highlight the danger of radicalisation of Australian Muslims and the increasing concerns of security agencies over the number of Australians joining ISIS. The then Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, was reported to categorise ISIS variously as the ‘apocalyptic death cult’ (Hurst 2014) and murderous zealots (Halliday 2013). Despite estimates of 60 Australians joining the fight in mid-2014 (Welch 2014), predominant constructions by news media and politicians centred on the danger these extremist fanatics posed to Australia and more broadly the security of Syria and Iraq.

The literature analyses media representations of Australian Muslims from a number of standpoints, including moral panic theory (Collins et al. 2000; Poynting 2002-03), citizenship and belonging (Aly 2007), white nationalism (Hage 2003), and multiculturalism (Turner 2003). Researchers argue that since September 2001, it has become commonplace to frame debates about Australian Muslims through the lens of values, loyalty and patriotism. White nationalist constructions emphasise the cultural incommensurability of Australian Muslims and, significantly, the harmfulness of abolishing boundaries between the self and the other (Patil 2014). Mainstream media representations are filled with references to Australian Muslims ‘as a potential threat to national security’ (Abdalla 2010: 26). This has the effect of conflating national interest with the terrorist frames (Hirst and Schultz cited in Aly 2007).

Collins et al. (2000) and Poynting (2002-03) assert that media discourse is framed to create racialised moral panics where the terms Middle Eastern, criminals, terrorists, fundamentalist and Muslim become synonymous. Collapsing these terms creates a hegemonic discursive field that silences minority voices. Turner (2003: 413) makes similar arguments using issues of nationalism and belonging to demonstrate that Australia is ‘now overwhelmingly defined by the necessity of exclusion and increasingly marked by the revival of a nostalgic, even sentimental refutation of pluralism that informed the ethics of multiculturalism’. Hage (2003) argues that multiculturalism was an offer of tolerance that white nationalists could withdraw at any time because it was based on unequal relations of power.

Focused on the Australian context, Dunn (2005) examines how contestations over mosques in Sydney.
are intertwined in debates over Australian values, rights and citizenship. He argues that Australian Muslims are considered noisy minorities. Through this labelling they fall outside the purview of trustworthy citizenship. Pejorative categorising of Australian Muslims, therefore, couches them within the paranoid aspects of white nationalism (Hage 2003). Perara (2006), in a similar manner to Dunn, commenting on the Cronulla riots, argues that media representations act as spatial mediators of discursive relations of power in which Muslims are represented in categories of biological racism, discourses of white supremacy and iconographies of exclusion. Whilst acknowledging the racialised connotations in which Australian Muslims are represented, Mumery and Rodan (2007) warn against the predominant binary constructions of Australian Muslims in print media discourse as disingenuous. This is because they reproduce the politics of fear and foreclose possibilities to accept difference in ways that resist engagement in negotiation and discussion.

Whilst a majority of the research on media discourse analyses the discursive construction of Muslims, there are studies that analyse how Australian Muslims respond to these characterisations. Aly (2007) notes that overwhelmingly Australian Muslims feel that the media represents Australian and Muslim as mutually exclusive modes of being. However, Muslims are pushing back against this narrative by disengaging with the victim identity and reengaging with the broader community as equal citizens. Consistent with Aly’s (2007) work, Kabir (2008) argues that Australian youth feel there is media bias in reporting. As a result, Muslim youth are renegotiating their identity by engaging in Arabic and Western music in the public sphere to assert their own bicultural identities.

There is broad agreement among scholars, despite the different theoretical frameworks used to analyse media, that Australian Muslims are predominantly constructed within the discourse of othering. Aly (2007) notes how the media discourse has shifted from representing Muslims as culturally incompatible to a culture of threat. Using an episode of Insight, an opinion-based program on Joining the Fight in Syria, we locate how manipulative silences were created in the ‘framing’ of topics and subtopics by the moderator. Through our analysis we suggest that identifying manipulative silences in the production of talk and text provides an alternative approach to further analyse the construction of Australian Muslims.

The remainder of the article is presented in two parts. We discuss Huckin’s (2002) methodology and how it influenced our choice of the data sample. We then discuss our analysis, organised into two themes, namely connection to Australian values and the opinion of so-called moderate Australian Muslims. We discuss the implications of the findings in relation to Huckin’s (2002) notion of manipulative silences as well as the current scholarship on media discourse surrounding Australian Muslims.

**Huckin’s Methodology and the Selection of the Text**

Huckin (2002: 348) defines silences as the ‘omission of some piece of information that is pertinent to the topic at hand’ and goes on to categorise various silences into taxonomies. Huckin (2002) notes that what is not said and/or written is discursive and equally powerful because of the ideological role it plays. Within this paper we discuss manipulative silences in texts by applying the concepts of contextuality, intentionality and deception. Contextuality refers to the producers of text who develop an idea based on the topics and subtopics that are located within overarching fields of discourse in which interpretation and meaning happen. Huckin (2002) argues that intentionality of the silences can be identified by unpacking the topics and subtopics that were chosen and comparing others that were omitted, based on the genre. Such an intentionality is deceptive because it is dependent on the listener/reader not noticing what has been omitted.

An application of Huckin’s (2002) schema involves the following stages:

1. Contextuality suggests that the moderator and the programme producer select a set of themes and sub-themes to manage the discussion on the programme.

2. The selection of certain topics and subtopics to the omission of others suggest that the moderator in the selection of themes and sub-themes are ‘representing thematic streams that run across the corpus and constitute the public discourse’ (Huckin 2002: 356).

3. Analysis of the instantiations in the text discussion produced by the moderator and locate them within the broader socio-political context of discourse analysis.

We acknowledge that various production processes, such as programme editing and the role of the moderator in managing alternative/counterpoints, are not value-free. Our focus is on the socio-political dimensions of the discourse used in the topics and subtopics formulated by the moderator, and the manipulative silences in their application. Our intention is not to analyse contextuality, intentionality and deception as cognitive manifestations nor the reactions and responses of the audience. Rather it is to find manipulative silences in the framing of the topics and subtopics as produced, managed and controlled by the moderator.
**The selection of the program**

The text we analyse is drawn from an opinion-based program, Insight, that broadcasts weekly discussion and is moderated by a well-respected journalist, Jenny Brockie. The episode Joining the Fight was broadcast on 12 August 2014. The episode was recorded and originally broadcast in the context of increasing media reporting on Australian Muslims travelling to Syria to join ISIS. The programme included experts and special guests who were Australian Muslims. They were purportedly sympathetic to ISIS and/or currently in Syria or Iraq. The studio audience consisted of lay participants, including Australian Muslims.

The process of analysis involved viewing the broadcast, reviewing it at a later date and downloading the complete transcript from the broadcaster’s website prior to each researcher independently coding it using Huckin’s (2002) methodology. Dominant hand-coded topics were compared and a process of consensus engaged, which assisted achieving inter-rater reliability (Pope et al. 2000). This process is below.

**Describing the Episode**

In describing the episode, we focus on how the producers of the talk and text set up the programme and managed and controlled the discussion between the lay participants, experts and special guests. We break up the discussion into themes, namely connection to Australian values and the opinion of so-called ‘moderate’ Australian Muslims.

**Connection to Australian values**

The moderator begins the programme by stating that there are a number of special guests who are sympathetic to ISIS and other rival organisations, such as Jabhat-al-Nursa (the official affiliate of Al-Qaeda). Addressing one of the guests, she asks, ‘Abdul Salam Mahmoud in Syria, you’re an Australian citizen … why did you want to go to Syria?’ He notes that he chose to go to Syria to do humanitarian aid work and assist with medical treatment of families and children. Then the moderator asks him further questions about his background in Australia, which group he supports in the Syrian conflict and which group he thinks wants to establish justice in Syria. Abdul Mahmoud states that there are a number of groups working in Syria but names Jabhat-al-Nursa, the branch of Al Qaeda in Syria, as the most effective in providing education, medical aid and food to families. The moderator then asks, ‘So you support them? So it sounds like you support them?’ to which Mahmoud answers, ‘I don’t, I don’t support them. I don’t have a group that I belong to’.

The moderator uses the same structure as above, asking other invited guests why they want to go to Syria and what is their background in Australia. Mohamed Zubhi, introduced as a dual Australian-Syrian citizen, is questioned about what made him leave Australia and who he supports in the Syrian conflict. The moderator raised doubt about Mohamed Zubhi’s own personal values by prefacing it with questions on why he supports an Australian listed terrorist organisation. This pattern was repeated when the moderator turned to an invited guest in the audience and introduced him by saying, ‘Okay Abu Bakr, you’re 19, you were born here, you grew up in Sydney, what do you think of Australians going over to fight with ISIS and I see you’re wearing the ISIS flag on your shirt?’. The moderator further asks what connection Abu Bakr feels with the flag and Iraq. And then, ‘do you feel connected to the values here in Australia?’.

The moderator discursively shifts the debate by introducing the subtopic of the values Islam espouses and, more significantly, what it says about Australian Muslims and their connection to Australian values. The question to Abu Bakar is followed by video footage of ISIS fighters randomly shooting and killing people. Since Abu Bakr makes no comment, the moderator throws the discussion open to lay participants and shifts the discussion to examining the nature of Islam. One of the participants argues, ‘If they (ISIS) are so concerned about human rights … why is it that the only people that they’re talking about are Muslims? … they are killing non-conforming Sunni Muslims that doesn’t agree with their belief?’ To this response Abu-Bakar retorts, ‘Firstly, it says in the Koran, yeah, if you kill an innocent life it is like you have killed the whole humanity’. To which one of the participant says, ‘You cannot say that they are following the Koran’. One of the participants who introduced himself as a spokesperson for the Australian Muslim Youth argued that ‘Christians in Iraq are slaughtered’ and questioned what kind of values the Koran espouses when it is ‘kicking people out of their houses’. The moderator, referencing Greg Barton as an expert on terrorism, asked him to reflect on the views expressed on the programme. He noted there is growing concern about young Australians … getting caught up in that [fight and] their families back here in Australia risk being hurt’. Another expert agreed and said family and community help should be at the forefront in preventing young Australian Muslims going to join the fight in Iraq and Syria.

The moderator introduced another subtopic by introducing the issue of radicalisation and the hatred and anger it elicits among Australian Muslims joining the fight in Syria. One of the members of the studio audience, Mohamed Tabaa, noted that Muslims feel the ‘discourse is not always about Muslims; it’s always about Muslims as a problem … How do we manage Muslim anger? How do we control them?’ The moderator asked the representative of the Imam Council to comment. He said that they are working with the government and working with the youth to stop the radicalisation.
The moderator couched the discussion on connection to Australian values by focusing on subtopics namely, whether Australian Muslims feel connected to Australian values; what values does Islam espouse; and, Islam's links to radicalisation. In couching the debate in these themes, the moderator set up the discourse that tacitly suggests that these people (Australian Muslims) are not like us (Australians). And more insidiously, the religion they follow is dangerous, incompatible and radicalises its youth.

So-called, 'moderate' Muslims

The moderator interspersed questions posed to participants who were sympathisers of ISIS by eliciting opinion of representatives of the Imam Council and/or other Muslim organisations. Aimed to elicit a moderate opinion, this was tainted due to many invited guests being radical. An example was when the moderator opened the discussion about radicalisation of Australian Muslims. Mohamad Saleem, a representative of the Imams Council, was asked to respond to some of the opinions expressed by the participants sympathetic to ISIS. Mohamad Saleem said they wanted to 'open a dialogue with the government … while at the same time they have a duty to Australians Muslims'.

Another technique the moderator employed was to invite members of the audience who formerly lived in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime. Basset Safi, an audience member, noted, 'So what you see in Iraq today, it was basically the same thing there. We lived under the Taliban movement for six year[s] doing the same thing'. Dianna, another audience member, added, 'The acts that are happening in Iraq and in Syria. There is nothing Islamic about it whatsoever and, especially, I'm an Australian Muslim youth myself. I've come here with my team because we're here to promote that. We're here to promote the peace that Islam teaches us'. To further extend the binaries between so-called 'radical Australian Muslims' and 'moderate Australian Muslims', the moderator applied a discursive tactic by throwing at one of the invited (ISIS supportive) guests, 'Where do you get your views from?' and, 'Who do you listen to?' 'If you don't listen to the Imams, and if you go to an Islamic centre what do they do there and how are they different from the mosques then?'. As the discussion unfolds the moderator returns to the Imams and other voices that counteract the views expressed by the invited guests. The Imam criticised Australian Muslims travelling to fight in Iraq and Syria and said wistfully, 'in the Day of Judgment probably they will ask, "Why did you do this?" … I'm not judgmental on that but at the same time for people in Australia, help them … That is also Jihad'.

The moderator further questioned the Imam council representative, 'Why aren't young people listening to what they are saying?'. The representative argued 'I have no idea. There is a very small number of people, if you would appreciate, who are not listening'. Continuing with contrasting moderate Muslims in Australia from the so-called radical Muslims who do not espouse Australian values, the moderator asked Dina (who migrated to Australia) to comment. Dina agreed with the view of the Imam and said they are preaching humanitarian acts, but that a lack of education of some Muslim youth is causing them to go to Iraq and Syria.

To summarise, the moderator framed the main topics by eliciting opinion from so-called 'moderate Muslims' and/or experts who critiqued the values espoused by some of the invited radical guests. This discursive tactic helped in juxtaposing the so-called radical, un-Australian Muslims, from the moderate, peace loving Australian Muslim migrants. Paradoxically this contributed to so-called moderate Australian Muslims distancing themselves from those few Australian Muslims who are not like good Australians, Muslim or otherwise.

Analysis and Discussion

Using Huckin's (2002) model of contextuality, intentionality and deception, we divide the implications of the findings into three categories:

1.Contextuality: the role of SBS in the national imagination
2.Intentionality: Muslims don't belong here (in Australia)
3.Deception: don't treat all Muslims as one – radicals are a small minority.

Contextuality: the role of Insight in Australian imagination

The role of SBS as a public broadcaster with a special mandate to ‘reflect Australia’s multicultural society’ and ‘increase awareness of the contribution of a diversity of cultures to the continuing development of Australian society’ has come under severe strain (Roose and Akbarzadeh 2013). Scholars including Hage (2003) and Turner (2003) have argued that there has been a retreat from the core values of multiculturalism, which is acute in the way issues around Islam and Australian communities have no idea. There is a very small number of people, if you would appreciate, who are not listening'. Continuing with contrasting moderate Muslims in Australia from the so-called radical Muslims who do not espouse Australian values, the moderator asked Dina (who migrated to Australia) to comment. Dina agreed with the view of the Imam and said they are preaching humanitarian acts, but that a lack of education of some Muslim youth is causing them to go to Iraq and Syria.

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Using these dominant themes, the moderator ignored other aspects of the topics, such as the role of the international community in the rise of ISIS, anti-terrorism laws introduced in Australia, and the humanitarian context of the conflict. In setting this context, the discussion between the moderator, the invited guests, experts and the studio audience had what Huckin (2002: 354) calls ‘a certain slant’. Most of the discussion centred on invited guests being questioned about their values, if they feel a connection to Australia, what prompted them to leave Australia, and if they are radicals. This slant, scholars (Morsi 2014) have argued, is predominant in the way topics concerning Australian Muslims are presented in broader media discourses. Hussein (2014) notes that the media pretends to conduct mainstream rational debate by featuring, ‘Muslim psychos’ in heated debate. This was predominant in the Insight discussion, and part of what Huckin (2002) terms deception in the use of manipulative silences by the moderator of the programme.

**Intentionality: Muslims don’t belong in Australia**

The aforementioned analysis suggests how the moderator used contextuality in maintaining silences. The moderator used a number of strategic manoeuvres to reinforce these silences by using intentionality, evident in the way the discussion topics and subtopics were selected, presented and managed during the programme. The main topics centred on whether the invited guests professed Australian values and their feelings of connection to Australia. In choosing to frame the debate predominantly around values, the moderator ‘deliberately created textual silences that serve to manipulate the casual reader’ (Huckin 2002: 367). The way the topics were presented focused the debate on the un-Australianness (Mummery and Rodan 2007) of the participants and invited guests. The questions stoked fear and demanded loyalty to Australian values (Morsi 2014) and emphasised the cultural incommensurability of Islam (Aly 2007).

Our analysis suggests that the moderator used other discursive tactics to position Australian Muslims, particularly the invited guests, by juxtaposing their views with responses from terrorism experts. The moderator used what Mummery and Rodan (2007) call the ‘not being Australian’ technique by purportedly asking experts on terrorism what they thought about the views expressed by some Muslim others. This strategic manoeuvre in shaping the discourse aimed to make clear the identity parameters of being, or not being, Australian. That is, they were not radicalised, they did not feel sympathy for the ongoing conflict in Syria and Iraq and they expressly did not articulate their faith in Islam.

The next strategic manoeuvre in the way the Insight moderator framed the discussion was to highlight the cultural incommensurability (Aly 2007) of Islam with Western values. The moderator pressed invited guests to articulate their vision of Islam, how they defined *jihad* and what they thought about ISIS and other organisations using Islam to further their causes. The intentionality of the moderator is laid bare when a respected political analyst, Yasir Morsi (SBS 2014) who was part of the studio audience, noted the focus should not be on Islam and the Koran but on the role played by the international community in the Syrian and Iraqi conflict. However, this opinion was not further explored and was largely ignored by the moderator. Other topics pertinent to *Joining the Fight*, such as anti-terrorism laws introduced by the Howard and Abbott Governments, were not discussed.

The other discursive manoeuvre employed by the moderator was to show highly emotive and provocative images of ISIS activities in Syria and Iraq to raise the spectre of radicalisation of Australian Muslims. This, Huckin (2002) notes, is intentional because it privileged a construction of deviancy that is primarily represented in media constrictions of Australian Muslims. Scholars (Dunn 2005; Perera 2006) using localised and/or everyday contexts analyse how space and power is used effectively to label Australian Muslims as noisy and radical. In juxtaposing evocative images with purportedly ‘radical Australian Muslims views’ it is discursively possible to label minorities as unworthy of trustworthy citizenship at best (Dunn 2005) and to categorise them through the lens of iconographies of exclusion at worst.

The moderator combined this strategy with seeking the opinion of experts, perceptibly of Caucasian background. The analysis revealed that the experts disagreed with the views expressed by many invited guests who were purportedly sympathetic to ISIS. The experts argued that radicalisation of young Muslims is a major issue for the Islamic community, the families and security agencies. Morsi (2014, cited in Hussein 2014) labels this strategy as indicative of positioning ‘white people as experts and the brown Muslims as the problematic warring mass’. This suggests the moderator framed the topic within the Australian context with no attempt to discuss the more complex and fraught nature of international radicalisation. This strategy, Jalbert (1994) suggests, is intentional because in many instances, ‘the unsaid … involves many factors which influence information purveyors’ tacit ‘decisions to report on this or that matter in this or that manner’.

**Deception: the moderate Muslim as model migrant**

The discussion reveals a number of discursive manoeuvres used by the moderator to allow for the ‘model Muslim migrant’ discourse to emerge. The representative from the Imam council, a representative from the youth organisation
and other Australian Muslim migrants who are grateful to be in Australia are used as discursive mediators. This discourse of ‘ distancing’ from the ‘few’ radical Australian Muslims is a form of covert binarisation (Patil 2014). This is analogous to the discursive constructions made by many conservative columnists (Bolt 2012), as well as those advocating for Australian Muslims to assimilate and become model migrants; that is, just like us but with some exotic recipes and an occasional festival to share.

The moderator, by concurrently juxtaposing provocative video images and opinions from invited guests with those from representatives from various Muslim organisations, allowed the discourse to be centred on differentiation of the so-called radical Muslim from the moderate Muslim Australian. Kolig (2003: 40) argues that Muslims feel the need to project Islam as a ‘moderate, tolerant and rational faith, disinclined towards flamboyant, specular and extraordinary forms of belief’ and this perhaps explains the enthusiastic distancing by senior Australian Muslims as well as those migrants who lived previously in the Middle East or Afghanistan. While the role of the moderator in constructing these manipulative silences might be deceptive (Huckin 2002), ultimately and significantly, Australian Muslims in their keenness to project a moderate view of Islam are paradoxically denying recognition and agency of other voices.

Through applying Huckin’s (2002) idea of contextuality, deception and intentionality, we argued that the moderator framed the debate about Australian Muslims fighting in Syria and Iraq within two main topics; whether Australian Muslims connect with Australian values and the so-called ‘moderate’ Muslims. In using only these topics the moderator created a ‘certain slant’ that can be labelled as manipulative silence. Other counter-arguments or subtopics, including the role of the international community in Iraq and Syria and the humanitarian crisis in Syria were completely ignored. Consequently, this created intentional manipulative silences. Our analysis presents an alternative approach as well as the potential to look more critically at ‘silences in discourse’ rather than only what is said.

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Yokozuna

A magician referee in persimmon robes, black hat, conjures them through the centuries, his reedy voice nuzzling the raked stadium:
Hakuho...., Asashooryuu...

Baby giants, the Mongols are birthed from their stables, surprised, indifferent. They face each other across the pounded clay of the dohyo, throw salt, for purity and the ancestors, crouch, glower, bound together for the moment until one falls to the ground or outside the thick rice rope.

Hakuho, tall, boyish, seems an unlikely hero, caught up in dreams of fatherhood, against the troll-like, disgraced Asa, filmed playing soccer back in Mongolia while supposedly unfit to play anything.

Suddenly they are leaning together, breathing heavily, wandering islands momentarily stalled in an ebbing Sargasso.

Hakuho’s long reach grips his rival’s belt but Asa, wily, lifts the younger wrestler two feet in the air, says the bilingual newspaper, like a tree or a tooth pulled out slowly by the roots.

But Hakuho twists, bends, tipping the heavier rougher man off-balance cartwheeling him to a new defeat

DAVID GILBET, WAGGA WAGGA, NSW
Black Women with Vaginal Fistula: The Power to Silence via Internet Imagery

Helen Jaqueline McLaren and Glory Joy Gatwiri

Internet imagery is a powerful tool in which representation of people perpetuate discursive constructions that may invariably rank individuals according to race. The research informing this paper involved searching for Internet images associated with vaginal fistula and an analysis of racialisation in representations within. The data set consisted of photo images, drawings and diagrams of vaginal fistula. Observations were that photo images were predominantly of black women and drawings and diagrams of non-black women. This asymmetrical representation of vaginal fistula, we argue, locates the deservedness, worth and concern for women according to race – Black women as curiosities, dirty and/or deviant; non-Black women as clean, with dignity and worthy. We propose that these constructions serve to silence certain women and their health issues on the basis of race.

Introduction

This paper originates from an unintentional finding, which extended to a small research project in itself, when searching the Internet for images to support a presentation on vaginal fistula. Our initial Internet observations were of differences in the way vaginal fistula were represented in what appeared to be racialised images: Black women’s images took the form of photographs; non-Black women’s images took the form of non-photo images such as drawings and diagrams. In extending our observation to the current project, we conducted a Boolean search of the Internet using both tracking and non-tracking search engines; going through each image of vaginal fistula and the associated websites one-by-one to analyse the racial themes surrounding them. Searches confirmed our initial suspicions that vaginal fistula was exemplified in Internet images according to race. In this paper we theorise the racialisation of these images and consider how the racial themes identified may accordingly and adversely impact on the women represented.

Vaginal fistula is an abnormal communication between two or more epithelial surfaces, usually the vagina and bladder, or vagina and rectum. These types of fistula lead to the escape of urine or faeces through the vagina and cause women to live with extreme indignity. While the causes of vaginal fistula are many, the majority develop during prolonged labour in which pressure on the vaginal wall severs the blood supply, causing necrosis of the tissue and subsequent formation of a cavity (Donnay and Ramsey 2006; Wall 2012). Females in the developing world, predominantly Africa and Asia, are vastly more susceptible to vaginal fistula (Wall 2006; Cowgill et al. 2015). This is thought due to the prevalence of child marriage/child pregnancy, poverty and lack of access to appropriate health care (Wall 2012; Hilton 2016). Irrespective of the variance in racial representation in Internet images of vaginal fistula, there are relatively few images when compared to the substantial prevalence rates of the condition, particularly in the developing world (Adler et al. 2013; Bellows et al. 2014; Mehra and Magon 2014; Lozo et al. 2015; Maheu-Giroux et al. 2015). This becomes evident in the later presentation of our results.

In this paper, we draw upon the findings of our search for Internet images of vaginal fistula. We use the results to support theorising of the ways in which images may powerfully contribute to the promotion of and/or silencing of women and their health issues according to race. Various perspectives from literature are considered, including discourse theory and writings on medical iconography. In doing so, our concern in particular is how Black women with vaginal fistula become represented in Internet images as deserving of medical concern or alternatively, as deviant, diseased, abnormal or as curiosities. Photo images, we suggest, attract among viewers a morbid entertainment as a type of medical pornography in contrast to white and/or non-Black women in drawings and diagrams that are represented with medical concern, explanation and worthy of cure. These asymmetric representations associated with vaginal fistula are a ‘complex variable function of discourse’ (Foucault [1969] 1972) that become reinforced by repeated visual texts operating discursively in the making of truth claims (McLaren 2009) among the Internet’s lay viewers. While
discourses on women, race and vaginal fistula long predate the Internet, we propose that Internet images powerfully reinforce discursive myths as truths.

Many authors write about the visual imagery of close-up shots of the genital organs of abject bodies, suggesting that such images in visual media are modern day versions of the archaic freak show that seek to make entertainment out of human imperfections for the benefit of normals (Gamson 1998; Cecala 2011; Richardson 2012). Hester (2014: 56) makes reference to the television show Embarrassing Bodies to illustrate how close-up shots of genital organs relate to medicalised contexts and are not aimed at sexually arousing the viewer. However, she explains, these images have summoned the term medical pornography because they seek to induce some other form of intense affective experience among the people viewing them. Despite the distance between pornographic images for adult sexual entertainment and the genital organs of abject bodies, both texts “trigger the itching, voyeuristic desire of lascivious curiosity” (Hester 2014: 122) and similarly pleasure can be found by the viewer in transgressive acts whether sexual or non-sexual in character.

In Cecala’s (2011) content analysis of the freak show as a new genre on television she finds that hegemonic perspectives feature significantly in the framing of visual texts. She argues that there is no neutrality of the photographic gaze; instead, visual imagery of abject bodies are created, contained and exploited through hegemonic politics that reinforce stereotypes of race, gender and disability. Her analysis is consistent with the critiques of Richardson (2012), on freaks in the visual texts of popular culture, who argues that the deviant and marginal people in society are actively highlighted as a means to regulate normative ideals. Williams (2012) argues that representations of deviancy in these visual texts induce feelings of relief among viewers that the diseased individual is the carrier of stigma, not them. This does not translate into compassion or altruism towards the deviant other, particularly when the images of the genital organs of abject bodies have more regard for the wellbeing of the spectating normal than the subject individual.

One could question what freak shows or the notion of medical pornography have to do with the Internet images of women with vaginal fistula and, in particular, race. Marketing researchers, Baker and Gentry (2007: 329), advise from their social analysis that ‘people are lumped into categories and often not recognised for their uniqueness’. The authors propose that visual images are intended to play upon socially constructed categories that recognise consumer and societal vulnerability to dominant discourses, including well-established discourses that define what is normal as opposed to deviant. In this world of difference for the normal audience, Schroeder (2006) offers that visual imagery is constructed with the intention of making the normal audience feel safe from the ‘othered’ through accentuating their difference. This is done so by lumping together visual imagery of all those who are racially, sexually, physically or medically different ‘with others, especially black women’ (Schroeder 2006: 316). This plays into and reinforces cultural stereotypes of race, gender, disability and illness. Gordon (1997) argues that these representations reflect upon and contextualise the status quo of a racist world – but do not challenge it.

Authors frequently describe how visual imagery promotes social class and racial difference as a marker of human value (Kane 1994; Keifer-Boyd et al 2007; Kaptan 2014; Sealey-Ruiz and Greene 2015). In our exploration of the visual images of vaginal fistula on the Internet, we seek to understand how racial representations render Black women as ‘other’ and silence them, particularly women of low-income, developing or third world Black nations in comparison to their Western and non-Black female counterparts.

**Methods**

Boolean searching of the Internet was conducted during September 2015 using the keyword criteria fistula and vagina. It was expected that a broad Boolean search would capture the range of images aimed for, or likely to be found by, the lay audience; specifically images associated with the medical conditions affecting women across various classifications of genito-urinary or recto-vaginal fistula. The search was confined to images, particularly since the focus of our enquiry was to understand how Internet images of vaginal fistula were represented in terms of race. The Boolean search was conducted via the Google search engine. Because Google is influenced by the searcher’s geographical location and with tracking of search preferences, we repeated and compared the Google Boolean search via two non-tracking Internet search engines. Ixquick and Startpage were chosen because they did not appear to use quantity limiters (for example some non-tracking Internet search engines provided only the first few pages of results).

Of particular interest to this paper were the photo images, drawings and diagrams representing vaginal fistula. The inclusion criterion was for colour images that sufficiently showed outer body skin colour for determining Black and non-Black racial parameters. Websites for each photograph and diagram were viewed to ensure they were related to vaginal fistula and, if not, images were excluded. Remaining images were sorted into three categories: photo images of vaginas with fistula, drawings.
and diagrams of vaginas with fistula, and part- or full-body photo (non-vagina) images of women depicted as having vaginal fistula. Each category was further sorted according to whether the bodies appeared to be of, or representative of, Black or non-Black races of people.

Analysis of representations of vaginal fistula were considered from the perspective that vaginal fistula is discursively projected to the viewers of Internet images to cultivate perceptions of racial social order. We theorised how the Internet images, that is photos, drawings and diagrams representing vaginal fistula, were exemplified in discursive representations. Further, we borrowed from Foucault’s toolbox (McLaren 2009) to blend together ideas from his *Histoire de la Sexualité* ([1976] 1990) and the *Archaeology of Knowledge* ([1969] 1972) when evaluating the constant intersection of anatomo-metaphysical and techno-political discourses, and the prominence of one over the other according to repeated visual texts in the types of images that our Internet search located.

We acknowledged the limitations of our Internet search due to image searching via the English language and with the use of non-medical terminologies. The search was specifically only for photos, drawings and diagrams – not videos or slideshow presentations. Despite this, our search and findings do provide rich insight into racial representations inherent in the Internet images of vaginal fistula.

**Results**

Initial Internet searches using the stated Boolean criteria returned 752 images via Google and 713 images via both Ixquick and Startpage search engines. The two non-tracking search engines captured many of the same images. The results for Ixquick and Startpage are reported synonymously as non-tracking search engine results. While Google identified many of the same images, it also located other matter not relevant to our enquiry and this may have been due to user preference tracking by Google for advertising or other reasons.

Upon checking websites associated with each image, 523 images were located via Google and 502 images located via the non-tracking search engines. Images excluded were either repetitions, showed no outer body skin colour to enable observable representations of race, photographs of medical personnel as opposed to the women affected, or the images were of unrelated matter. The remaining 229 Google images and 211 non-tracking search engine images were sorted according to representations of Black women's, or non-Black women's bodies. Because many of the images identified were consistent across the search engines, a comparison of Google identified images and non-tracking search engine images is provided, along with an average of the two (see Tables 1, 2 and 3).

The photo images of vaginal fistula located on the Internet, in which skin colour was observable, indicated that fistula was vastly a Black women’s problem (see Table 1). While this is consistent with the literature informing that vaginal fistula is a poor woman’s issue in the developing world (Wall 2012; Hilton 2016), Internet representation does not account for the high prevalence of vaginal fistula in other nations, such as in non-Black Asian nations. The prevalence of Black women’s bodies in Internet photos of vaginal fistulas, therefore, is indicative of how the ‘other’ gets lumped (Baker and Gentry 2007) together with Blacks who are already well established in discourse as deviant.

**Table 1: Photographic images according to representation of race**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photographic images of vaginal fistula</th>
<th>Google (n=88)</th>
<th>Non-tracking (n=65)</th>
<th>Average (n=76.5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black women's bodies</td>
<td>89.8% (79)</td>
<td>86.2% (56)</td>
<td>88.2% (67.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White or non-Black women's bodies</td>
<td>10.2% (9)</td>
<td>13.8% (9)</td>
<td>11.8% (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite representations in photo images locating vaginal fistula as being a Black women’s problem, drawings and diagrams of vaginal fistula predominantly delivered imagery of skin colour that appeared to be of various white tones (obviously non-black). While this may locate vaginal fistula as equally a white or non-Black women’s issue, we suggest that the domination of medical diagrams representing non-black bodies projects to the lay Internet community a more dignified concern for non-Blacks. An average of 5.6 per cent of drawings and diagrams coloured the outer body skin colour as black, as opposed to an overwhelming 94.4 per cent of drawings and diagrams presented as visually non-black (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Drawings and diagrams according to representation of race**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drawings and diagrams of vaginal fistula</th>
<th>Google (n=89)</th>
<th>Non-tracking (n=90)</th>
<th>Average (n=89.5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black women's bodies</td>
<td>6.7% (6)</td>
<td>4.4% (4)</td>
<td>5.6% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White or non-Black women's bodies</td>
<td>93.3% (83)</td>
<td>95.6% (86)</td>
<td>94.4% (84.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The small quantity of photo images located on the Internet that illustrated part- or full-body photo (non-vagina) images of women were nearly all of Black women (see Table 3). These photo images show Black women standing over urine-sodden ground to represent an uncomfortable life with fistula, or sitting with the tubes of urinary catheters coming from under their skirts into buckets while they undergo treatment of the less prevalent variety of vesico-vaginal fistula. The majority are sitting on the steps of shanty buildings, on logs in rural settings or on bare earth and this depicts fistula as a poor women’s disease. Others are in the hospital beds of overcrowded wards. Each woman is depicted in such ways that the viewer is positioned as being better than the woman represented in the image; the affect for the viewer is in relief that ‘she is not me’.

Table 3: Face, full and part-body photographs according to representation of race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photographs of clothed women depicted as having vaginal fistula</th>
<th>Google (n=52)</th>
<th>Non-tracking (n=56)</th>
<th>Average (n=54)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black women</td>
<td>90.4% (47)</td>
<td>94.6% (53)</td>
<td>92.6 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White or non-Black women</td>
<td>9.6% (5)</td>
<td>5.4% (3)</td>
<td>7.4% (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alternatively, the five part- or full-body photo (non-vagina) images of non-Black women were valorised in normality through their clean attire and the hygienic surroundings. The women in all of these images (Table 3) were observably white. The contrasting racialised representations of women with fistula across all three categories of Internet imagery equates with Foucault’s ([1976] 1990) ideas on the surveillance techniques, including the power of knowledge and Western medicine, to constitute discourses affecting subjectivity.

Ann Stoler (1995) and subsequently others (Liberman 2014; Attwood et al. 2015; Dolezal 2015) may draw on the language medical pornography to explain – some of whom have also used Foucauldian informed feminist discourse analysis to consider socio-political control and manipulation over the imperfect female body. In drawing on the notion of power, our observation of the visual representations of vaginal fistula indicate that representations of race pervade Internet imagery – Black women are clearly the dominant subject of photo images and non-Black women in drawings and diagrams. Our analysis, therefore, confirmed that discursive variations between anatomo-physical and technical-political representations of women with illness pervade ideological regularities via the Internet imagery. Due to traditional medical iconography being reserved for medical professionals, as opposed to counter representation in medical pornography- or freak show-type images for the lay Internet audience, these divisions remain an influential factor in the promotion and/or silence of human regard and dignity towards women, their medical needs and appropriate concern for their health issues on the basis of race.

Discussion

Medical iconography, inclusive of photo and non-photo images, used in representations of health, illness and disease has traditionally been reserved for the use of medical professionals in the business of healthcare. The medical profession, particularly that of Western societies, has become somewhat fixed as the official place for visual rhetoric contributing to representations of illness (Lupton 2012; Williams 2012). Being that the official medical discourse is Western, and mainly prefers technical drawings and diagrams over photographs, it may help to explain why the drawings and diagrams of vaginal fistula are predominantly of white and/or non-black bodies.

However when vaginal fistula, which is a developing world health issue, is depicted in drawings and diagrams represented by white women’s bodies this may powerfully shape the mental schemata about vaginal fistula in the minds of medical professionals and also lay Internet audiences. In doing so, this has the potential to silence in visual terms many assumptions around the taxonomy of illness that is needed to fully understand the multifaceted nature of vaginal fistula, particularly for Black women, such as the causes and symptoms that are medical, psychological, social and political. Representations of non-Black women in drawings and diagrams, in which the intended purpose is for the medical care, may also disguise and silence the greater healthcare needs relating to vaginal fistula of Black women.

The photo images of vaginal fistula are vastly of Black women. The accessibility of these photo images now extends beyond medical professionals and the business of healthcare to lay Internet communities. It is the Internet that has located these photo images of vaginal fistula in the public sphere. The close-up photo images, in particular, constitute for both the media professional and the lay Internet viewer a source of morbid and exotic entertainment from viewing Black women’s diseased and deformed genital organs. Without coincidence, these close-up shots are of Black women’s vaginas. They are positioning Black women without dignity. While the accessibility of photo images on the Internet may at least highlight vaginal fistula as an issue for Black women, it does so in a way that is demeaning. Non-Black women are not subject to the same form of public exposure, freak show and representations of deviancy.
As Schroeder (2006) might suggest, these Internet images become categorised together with cultural stereotypes of race, gender, disability and illness and thereby reinforce deviant constructions among them. Whether or not the close-up images of the genital organs of Black women with vaginal fistula are intended for viewing by medical professionals or lay people, each are subject to the same socio-political influences that are weighted with discursive subtexts, affective associations and racialised assumptions. The discursiveness of the Internet photographs, particularly of close-up photographs of Black women's genital organs, are constructed in stereotypes that Black women are dirty, unclean and are carriers of uncivilised bodies that are out of control (Lewis 2011; Tamale 2011). Because of the way Black women's bodies are portrayed, all human dignity is removed. These women become the disregarded caricatures of entertainment and curiosity – the subjects of internet pornography. The complexity of the social, cultural, economic and political circumstances surrounding the women's vaginal fistula is therefore silenced and disregarded. This serves to reinforce discourses informing the lesser worth of Black women, even more so Black women who have vaginal fistula.

In terms of the representations of women with vaginal fistula in part- and full-body photo (non-vagina) images, there was a distinct contrast between Black women in hospital settings, and those with sad faces, going about daily life in what appeared to be third-world rural settings. There were photo images of women standing over wet ground as representations of urine leakage via their fistula. The way the women are represented is a significant finding for considering the silence surrounding it. Moreover, the construction of stereotypes through these visual texts influences the way in which illness and the patient are treated by others. The occasional medical diagram representing a Black woman's body could be argued as enjoying a modicum of power as a form of resistance to the official arbiters of both medical and broader social discourse in Internet imagery. The occasional medical drawing or diagram representative of a Black woman's body aims to re-frame dominant discourses within visual texts that influence discursive racial representations influencing concepts around illness and healthcare, albeit these representations are limited and evidently silenced.

Conclusion

The characteristics of Black women with vaginal fistula portrayed in photo images constructs them as being abject, different and deviant to Internet viewers of images who are assumed to be mostly non-Black. Researchers frequently describe how visual imagery promotes social class and racial difference as a marker of human value, which influences regard and compassion towards the subject individual (for example, Kane 1994; Keifer-Boyd et al. 2007; Kaptan 2014; Sealey-Ruiz and Greene 2015). Visual images thus become discursive frames inscribed in the lived bodies of the humans represented and, depending on what images are posted on the Internet, they have the potential to project which individuals are more or less worthy of concern – who are heard, and who are silenced. Markers of human value serve to promote and/or silence particular discourses and the needs of people associated with them.

In our findings, promotion of women's worth in the Internet images associated with vaginal fistula is noticeably biased in terms of race. The majority of Black women's bodies represented are of close-up photographs of their vaginas, in which anatomo-metaphysical discourses void them of human identity and dignity. Other part- and full-body photographs representing Black women with fistula are techno-politically discursive – and are mainly presented as pathetic, pitiful and dirty. The contrasting representation of non-Black women's bodies in part- and full-body photo images is clean, fully clothed and dignified. Such representations of non-Black women promote and reinforce deservedness in contrast to Black women who, although their plight is exposed, are paradoxically silenced in terms of equitable worth. This asymmetrical representation silences concern for Black women. This is irrespective of the fact that vaginal fistula is overwhelmingly a condition experienced by women of the developing world, who are predominantly Black. Thus, our premise is that Internet images representing women with fistula are not neutral.

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Lucid

the dreams are two days ahead
then two months, seasons, decades
before their time
a waterfall from the future
is crashing down
cascades
known waters
spectres ripple
float past
gulp

Sarah St Vincent, Canberra, NSW

52 Social Alternatives Vol. 35 No. 1, 2016
As part of expanding the philosophical horizon in contemporary global times, this paper discusses globalisation and tradition as an attempt to understand cultures. I begin with asking some fundamental questions: What is meant by global life? Is it an opposite of locality? Can we divide ‘we’ and ‘they’ as a disjunction in the exclusive sense? Is there any stable homogeneous tradition or culture which is unique? What would be the nature of a nation or state in the process of globalisation? Does the everyday practical tradition of local inhabitants giving way to global market products by itself define global culture? Can the essential role of market economy for global cooperation be labelled ‘globalisation’? Or, is the tradition and culture something deeper which can resist all externalities and cultural heritages while traditions can be used creatively for contemporary changes? Answers to some of these questions are explored in this paper.

Generally, ‘globalisation’ refers to the process whereby the world is becoming ‘one place’. The globe has compressed into a locality so that other localities are neighbours with which we must necessarily interact, relate and listen. Here the assumption is that the density of contacts among nations will itself lead to a global culture (Featherstone 1990). In this case the notion of a global culture must be distinguished from the one which is modelled on that of the nation state. Rabindranath Tagore, when opposing a nation-state model and advocating internationalism said, ‘I am not against one nation in particular, but against the general idea of all nations’ (Tagore 1917: 131). Recognising the dangers of aggressive nationalism he declares that ‘blind worship of nation-state contained the seed of disaster of man’. Tagore’s analysis of ‘nation’ is rooted in the idea of history. He believed in the interdependence of men and countries rather than their independence. Although Tagore’s internationalism is a form of spiritualism – the unity of man and unity of nations without any boundaries, without nationalism, a very different form of globalisation – a true ideal of what globalisation ought-to-be. There is not sufficient space here to discuss this in detail but it could be considered as the foundation for global ethics.

Thus in one sense, globalisation is seen as an attempt to homogenise culture, the project of creating a common culture, as a process of unification of culture and the need to ignore, refine, synthesise and blend local differences. Globalisation is taken in the sense that we are interdependent; that the flows of information, knowledge, money commodities, people and images have intensified to the extent that the sense of spatial distance which separated people earlier no longer accounts for humanity. We are all in each other’s backyard. There seems to be a hidden assumption that all particularities of local cultures would eventually give way under the modernisation force of some kind of cultural imperialism. This implies that all particularities were linked together in a symbolic hierarchy. But the unification of culture in the strict sense seems to be impossible. Modernisation theory set the model with the assumption that as each non-Western nation eventually became modernised it would move up the hierarchy and duplicate or absorb the dominant culture to the extent that ultimately every locality would display the cultural ideals, images and artifacts of the dominant way...
of life; Western or American; Europe at the centre in the nineteenth century and the United States at the centre in the twentieth century. The process of such globalisation and homogenisation is in no way presumed to be gentle and power politics would always play an important role in achieving this aim. The West is consequently granted the moral right and duty to guide and educate the others because of the necessity to ‘civilise’ the totality. The West understands itself as the guarantor of the universal values on behalf of the non-Westernised world on the basis of its own image. One may always question the so-called ‘universality’ of such values due to global interdependence. In this sense, globalisation is a result of increased interconnection and interdependence of people of the world. This raises many questions and there is much discussion and debate within global ethics on what must be done in response to particular problems raised by interconnection and interdependence such as peace and war, aid, trade and development, cross-boundary issues, universal values and global norms regarding what must be done by whom and how (Hutchings 2010). Although, I will not discuss the issues relating to global ethics here, I would only point out that globalisation has proven to be a great help in addressing and resolving the wide range of problems including poverty, human rights, gender justice, business ethics, transnational child adoption, international trade, climate change, refugee rights, humanitarian interventions, terrorism, corruption, economic globalisation, migrant workers, global health and medical research (Journal of Global Ethics 2005: passim). All these problems are human problems and need to be addressed on humanitarian grounds irrespective of the differences and particularities.

Given today’s world, which is globalised to a large extent, we cannot jump to the conclusion that there is something called ‘global culture’ nor is there any ‘local culture’ as such. But we do use such categories. Presuming these categories, a local culture is conceived as being a particularity which is the opposite of global – the culture of a relatively small, bounded space in which the individual who lives engages in daily, face-to-face relationships. It is the habitual and repetitive nature of everyday culture of which the individual has a practical mastery. The common stock of knowledge of a group of people, inhabitants of a physical environment, space, building, and so on, is relatively fixed; that is, it has persisted over time and may incorporate rituals, symbols and ceremonies that link people to a place and a commonsense of the past. The sense of belonging, the common sedimented experiences and cultural forms that are associated with a place, are crucial to the concept of a local culture. Yet, the concept of local culture is a relational concept. The drawing of a boundary around a particular space as my/our own is a relational act that depends upon the figuration of significant other localities within which one seeks to situate itself.

For example, if I meet an Indian in Spain after spending a number of years there, it would be expected that we would find sufficient cultural forms in common from our experience of being Indian to revive collective memories which can constitute a temporary sense of common identity, or community, which demarcates ‘us’ from ‘them’ of the host people, in this case Spanish. Hence, the ‘we-images’ based on commonality and shared experiences and ‘they-images’ as outsiders, exclusiveness is generated within local struggles to form an identity. Further, these images cannot be detached from the density of the web of interdependencies among people of one culture and the people of another culture. Such struggles between established and outsider groups will therefore become more common with the extent of contact with others which brings groups of outsiders more frequently into the province of local establishments.

People assert their own cultural identity when they face the ‘other’ directly. Thus, one of the reasons for local cultural identity is face-to-face direct contact with outsiders – basically a need to assert self-identity. Growth of culture, inheritance and transmission is through communication, language, symbols and other artistic forms. Granting that culture is a complex concept, it may have different meanings for different people. These understandings of the term ‘culture’ are sometimes opposite, sometimes contrary, at other times contradictory and at still other times simply in conflict with another. In any case culture becomes a tool to assert one’s identity while facing outsiders.

The other reason to assert cultural identity could be a perceived threat to local cultural identity through the integration of the locality into wider regional, national and transnational global networks via the development of various communication methods. Interchange of money, people, goods, information and images overcoming the time and space boundaries of the world may provide a threat to local culture. This provides direct contact with other parts of the world, which render different local cultures more immediate and more intelligible. The nationalistic, ethnic and fundamentalist reactions to globalisation are due to a strong assertion of local cultures. It may take different forms such as simulating local traditions and ceremonies or inventing new modes of asserting individual cultural identity.

One more reason could be the danger of the ‘no sense of place’ or homelessness. The sense of belongingness is important and fundamental for cultural growth. Not belonging to any place is one of the conditions of nostalgia with the sense of loss of home or ‘homesickness’. But how is a sense of home sustained? It is a collection of memories in which themselves depends on ritual performances,
bodily practices, language, food and ceremonies that need not be written – weddings, funerals, festivals, celebrations and participation or involved spectatorship at local regional and national rituals. These factors can be seen as the batteries that charge the emotional bonds between people to revive the sense of home and renew the sense of the sacred – the countless little rituals, rites and ceremonies which take place as practices between friends, neighbours and associates. The desire to remain in bounded locality or revive the memories of the past and to return to some notion of ‘home’ becomes an important theme. The home could be real or imaginary, a temporary or concrete manifestation of the sense of belonging, or an affiliation with some community.

Therefore, one can hardly take global and local as discussed here as real dichotomies separated in space and time. The processes of globalisation and localisation are necessarily bound to each other. If a culture is defined as a mechanism to relate with others by way of trust, freedom and social relationship then it is ever flowing and is never static at any point of time and space. It is past, present and future simultaneously. Thus both internal and external dynamism are constitutive parts of culture. Further, it is interesting to note the paradoxical consequence of the process of globalisation – the awareness of the relatedness and boundedness of the planet and humanity on the one hand (not homogeneity), and greater diversity with extended range of local cultures on the other. Hence, the process of globalisation leads to an increasing sensitivity to differences. Globalisation on the one hand, threatens the identity of local cultures by appropriating their rhythm of life to the market economy. On the other, it extends the scope of commercialisation to local cultures. The artisans, craftsmen and artists find opportunities of economic development and social mobility by sharing culture – a way of preserving the cultural traditions, having contacts across boundaries and enhancing the consciousness of cultural identity. This leads to new dynamics of re-localisation in the global-local nexus.

Historically speaking, the first phase of globalisation took place roughly between 1880 and 1920. This drew more nations into a tightly structured, global configuration of interdependencies and power balances, producing an intense nationalism and nostalgia (Robertson 1990: 45; 1992). The Olympic Games, the World Cup finals, the Tour de France, and so on, were the examples of the establishment of national symbols and ceremonies. The second phase of globalisation has taken place since the 1960s as an attempt to reconstitute nation-state collective identities along pluralistic and multicultural lines taking into account regional and ethnic differences and diversity (Heller 1990). This phase is the response to nostalgia and is the re-creation and invention of local, regional and sub-national cultures. World economy, mass media and consumer culture is used as a means to restore a sense of locality. As a result, symbolic hierarchies collapsed and the sense of progress and historical ‘new’ emerged along with a positive attitude towards the excluded ‘other’. There is a return to local cultures, and the emphasis should be placed on local cultures in the plural – the realisation that they should be placed alongside each other without hierarchical distinction. The heritage projects, Disney World and contemporary museums are attempts at this sense of recreating a home which takes one back to the past. All that is happening around us can be seen as the processes of globalisation. I believe that there is not one process of globalisation but many – economy being the major factor for determining the process of globalisation in modern times.

Now, let us briefly discuss some of the possible responses to the process of globalisation.

1. An attitude of immersion in a local culture. This could take the form of resistance in order to remain a long-established identity – a refusal to be drawn into wider collectivities and cultural flows. However, it is difficult to achieve without military and economic power. In this case, there is a problem of being left alone, of remaining undiscovered and of controlling the flow of interchanges (eg the case of Japan).

2. Seeking refuge from modernisation. The members of an ethnic group sometimes romantically become attracted to the simpler life and find a sense of ‘home’.

3. The current phase of nation-state which allows a greater recognition of regional and local diversity and multiculturalism.

4. All locals who travel into other cultures usually take their cultures with them (tourists, working class). In effect they seek ‘home plus’ and protect their local culture from intercultural encounters.

5. There are those whose professional culture is such that they display a cosmopolitan orientation. They live and work in a ‘third culture’ and are happy to move between a variety of local cultures with which they develop a practical or working relationship, bridging this third culture which enables them to communicate with persons around the world.

6. There are also those who do not judge local cultures in terms of their progress towards some ideal derived from modernity, but have been part of higher education within the new middle class and are participating in consumer culture. Other cultures for them are ‘amazing places’ and different traditions which they see with eagerness. They are able to work and live within third cultures as well as seemingly able to
represent other local cultures from within, and ‘tell it from the native’s point of view’. They enjoy both the reproduction of the effect of the real, the immersion in it in controlled or playful ways, and the examination of the backstage areas on which it draws (Fiefer 1985).

7. There are those who cater to the needs of the globalised market to preserve the diversity of local cultures and do not replace either of the two but transform the local identities by new articulations between ‘global’ and ‘local’. Traditional artisans, craftsman and artists communicate with persons across boundaries.

The above list need not be taken as exhaustive.

It is often argued that culture divides human beings. Exclusiveness and rigidity are integral parts of a culture. But this view is based on an inappropriate presupposition that a person’s culture is like religion and the individual is born into it. Culture is never static; it is always in a process, ever flowing. Its growth, inheritance and transmission is through communication in the form of language, symbols, literary and artistic forms which play a critical role in an individual’s development. The more communication takes place among different individuals and cultures, the greater the steps towards globalisation and humanisation and the minimisation of conflicts. In this sense the globalisation process should be taken as opening up the sense that the world is now a single place with greatly increased contact. We have more dialogue between different nation-states; we have dialogical space in which we can expect many disagreements, clashes and conflicts along with agreements of cooperation and working consensus. We are bound together in increasing webs of interdependencies and power balances. This means that it is more difficult to retain lasting and simplified images of ‘me’ as well as of ‘the other’. But from this it would be foolish to conclude that other non-Western cultures will simply give way to the logic of modernity and adopt Western forms. The globalisation process cannot be taken to imply that there is, or will be a unified world society or culture. To jump to this conclusion would be a mistake. Although such an outcome may have been the ambition of a particular nation-state in history and the possibility cannot be ruled out in the future. However, global culture may currently mean the development of a culture as a process, ever flowing, in a less totalistic sense of ‘third culture’: sets of practices, bodies of knowledge, conventions, ceremonies, lifestyles, and so on, due to interdependencies that are a mixture of we and they – a new sense of belongingness to one planet as citizens.

Global culture may also refer to a cultural form: the sense that the globe is a finite, knowable bounded space, a field into which all nation-states and collectivities will inevitably be drawn where the differences and particularities may be retained as far as possible. The globe acts as a limit as well as the bounded space on which our encounters and practices are inevitably grounded. In this sense it can be argued that globalisation produces post-modernism and a post-post-modernism it provokes to rediscover particularities, localism and differences that generate a sense of the limits of the culturally unifying, ordering and integrating projects within Western modernity.

I may conclude by pointing out that the process of globalisation is not even, and cannot be even. On the one hand we agree to have the world as a single place, granting notional equality to others and extending their boundaries. There are selected quarters in cities such as New York, Chicago, London, Paris, Rome, Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, where we find people working with advanced means of communication and enjoying the advantages of globalisation thereby excluding others and creating boundaries by not providing equally advanced means. This may be an essential nature of the process of globalisation and yet, may not be ideal.

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End Note
1. The first draft of the paper was presented at the International Conference on ‘Philosophy and Culture as Ways of Life in Global Change’ at University of Athens, Greece, 1-3 August, 2013.
Mindfulness. His body is on a bed in the Imperial Marhaba Hotel but his mind is on hot Arabic silica. Kelsie would say ‘stop being a toss and just call it sand’ but Kelsie is gone. She can think what she wants back in Essex. And anyway, this is his meditation and he is thinking of his feet and their tangibility – they are not on white hotel sheets, they are carving a neat divot in white sand. His thoughts then move over his ankles and along his legs – heavy, cradled – around his hips – open – to his torso – present and centred on the careful intake of breath. He is not in air conditioning. There is heat above and below. The heat is what he came for. He is calm. He is responsive. He is conspicuous.

Conspicuous has never been an issue until now.

He hears a word that could be ‘run’ or it could be ‘gun’ but it is both. A Kalashnikov pulled from a folded parasol. He tries hard not to think of the theme song to Secret Squirrel with its cartoon machine gun cane and instead focuses on the rat-a-tat-a-tat of the Kalashnikov blistering the bodies of sunbathers. The guy smiled, they say. A big old grin like on the yellow suns Matthew drew as a boy in a classroom in England; a friendly sun, its heat somewhere else, far off, on another continent, waiting for him to come and lie in it and eat it and suck it up through his skin. But now that heat has made its way inside of him and is fevering to push out. Rat-a-tat-a-tat, it knocks. Rat-a-tat-a-tat. The heat is ripping.

The next night she slid her phone across the kitchen counter.

Tunisia? he said.

Why not, she said.

A little close to Syria?

Matthew, you need to go back to Geography.

He looked at the phone. He searched more images. He read an entry on Wikipedia.

It is closer, he said.

And cheaper, she said.

That is important.

Well, you are a nurse, she then said, a fact she always found reason to raise during big money conversations.

And think of the cultural experience, she added.

Yes, I imagine. Money can’t buy a suicide bombing experience. They’re all the rage.

When those words came out he realised just how much of a dick he could be.

Well, she said, you are a nurse.

And so when they made love on the sofa instead of the bed that night he figured they must have been onto a good thing.

Tunisia. Whenever the word came to mind he could not help but think of the desert landscape of Star Wars. Tatooine. The sarlacc in the Great Pit of Carkoon. Two droids wandering around getting sand in their gears. How the hell did those droids function, anyway? How did all
that Saharan sand not feasibly bring a halt to their quest to overcome the dark forces of the universe?

Tunisia. Kelsie said the word only brought to mind blue sky and date palms and men with the name Mohammed.

* 

The travel agent told them that Tunisia is really laid-back and affordable. She said the shopping is cheap but you have to haggle and she hates haggling but it’s well worth going. She said not to expect bacon and burgers and pork sausages. She said the television sets even in the big hotels are the old-style box ones, but who goes to Tunisia to watch tele, right?

Right, they said.

They laughed later when Kelsie recalled the travel agent’s can tan and bright pink lipstick. She then mimicked the girl’s unimpressed mouth when mentioning that booze isn’t served many places.

Online they found more helpful information: Tunisia went through a revolution in recent years; their first parliamentary election was held in 2014; Arabic is the first language, French the second; religion is not a social issue; fundamentalism is frowned upon and the government suppresses it however possible; tourists are very welcome.

Then, of course, there was the ISIS attack at the National Bardo Museum in March. One Briton died. That detail was a little harder to laugh about.

* 

June came. So too the heat. They arrived in Sousse as the night relieved the day.

* 

Anouar was their smiling waiter for the evening. He knew their names before they even sat at the table.

So friendly, Kelsie said.

So very well trained, Matthew said.

He didn’t know why she couldn’t see it as a system. An efficient system, granted. It had to be: the tourism coin was a very shiny one, and there were many more Anouars out there on the back streets.

Throughout the three-course meal Kelsie tipped this particular Anouar generously. He brought her white wine and Matthew red. They ate fish and steak and pastries. They talked, romanticised the light on the hotel pool, and were happy.

Anouar liked bringing wine, and they drank so much of it that he gladly escorted them back to their room at 10:30. Another tip. Another Anouar smile.

Thank you, my Arabic delight, Kelsie said, so Matthew shut the door and they fell onto the bed, crushing the duvet they found expertly crafted into a swan upon arrival.

* 

8am. On the beach were a few Germans and some French but mostly Brits. Brits in white sneakers and floppy wide-brimmed hats. e-Books on sun beds. Engorged from the all-inclusive buffet breakfast. Conspicuous. Unable to shed their Western values. Unaware these values were tucked into bumbags and money pouches strapped to their bodies, or in safes being compromised back in their rooms.

Matthew watched from the apartment balcony. They’d paid a little extra for the sea view, past the pool and parasols and blue and yellow beach towels.

Kelsie was lying on the bed, last night’s swan now just a throw on the floor beside.

Camel riding is only twelve pounds, she said. I’d love to see you poncing around on the back of a camel. That’d be a right gag, that would.

Hm?

Or there’s quad biking for the same price.

Right.

Says here they sweep the beach by hand every night. Isn’t that just incredible?

But while Matthew was there he also wasn’t there – already he was out on the sand, turning red then brown, the burn going deeper than epidermis.

Mindfulness, he told himself. Be aware of yourself and your surroundings. Present-centredness.

* 

The NHS brought mindfulness therapy to Matthew’s hospital last year. They said it would be good for the patients, especially those struggling with their circumstances. The anxiety. Depression. The hospital held a staff in-service by a Professor in Clinical Psychology from Oxford. He told them that mindfulness
techniques are the antidote to the blinkered vision that typifies daily life. He spoke about the tangled thoughts of our lives and how focusing on the present can rejuvenate the senses and allow clarity of mind. He spoke about negative thought patterns. He spoke about control. He spoke about perspectives on life that would help them see the world in a simpler way.

Matthew was sceptical. He believed distraction was key to one's well-being in hospital. He favoured music – for the more long-term stayers he would ask family about the patient's favourite songs and download them to his iPod and play the songs through portable speakers while on his rounds. This lifted their spirits. This made them less aware of their bodies, their physical limitations. Their distress.

But gradually he started thinking otherwise. He caught the news on the tele, the radio, and heard the fear in the patients talking in the refectory and he wondered whether everyone had somehow slipped into a new world without their knowing, and that this world required a new view, a new sense of self in order to tolerate its aggressions. To refute its radicalisation. He was a pacifist, after all.

So that was when he started practicing mindfulness. And that was when he suggested some time away with Kelsie. Somewhere hot. In one of his mindfulness sessions he recalled that boy drawing the smiling sun, aching for foreign heat.

*I'm heading down, he said. You coming?*

I don't think so. Kelsie found the remote control to the LCD screen tele. See you later maybe, when it's not so hot, she added.

*It's only going to get hotter, he said.*

Then take some water and sunblock, okay.

Sure.

Mid-morning and all the sun beds were occupied. He would have to get up with the Germans tomorrow if he wanted one of those. But no matter, he wanted the sun to smile down upon him. No roof. He wanted its glory. A Tunisian gift.

He walked away from the thatch parasols and put down his yellow towel. He had forgotten his water but remembered the sunblock. He lathered the cream thickly then lay there and closed his eyes, focusing on the careful intake of breath.

Later, he threw his body into the sea, but the heat was in him now. He felt he could make the water boil around him just by being there.

*He stayed in the room that evening while Anouar played host to Kelsie. Earlier, Matthew had vomited and thought maybe it was the food but Kelsie said she was sure it was sunstroke. She was right, of course. He wasn't thinking straight.*

She ran him a cool shower and gave him a large bottle of mineral water from the mini bar, the lid of which looked as though it had been tampered with – no doubt refilled from a tap, she said.

He had dizzy bouts and fatigue. His pulse was high but he ended up sprawled on the bed, naked, the balcony door wide open and the lights on as he slept.

At 10pm the hotel switched on the power to the air conditioning units. At 11:30 Anouar dropped Kelsie back from the bar.

Matthew woke to their arguing. Anouar didn't seem to accept that she had emptied her purse into him already.

*Please, please, Anouar chanted.*

Pliss, pliss, she mimicked, then told him to just go away and stop annoying her.

*Out there, the morning unravelled as expected.*

Matthew didn't get up with the Germans. Instead he dozed. Kelsie brought him food from the buffet then left to do some shopping. When noon came and the heat blew in past the curtains Matthew stood there and heard the first shout, and then the second, and then the rata-ta-tat. There was no mistaking it. The Kalashnikov flashed as bodies fell into sand and some cowered into their deaths. Others fled into the Imperial Marhaba and the buildings around it. Matthew held the hem of the curtain. He took the full blast.

*Did you not hear me?*

Kelsie shoved clothes into suitcases, toiletries into a plastic bag.

*Did you not hear me, Matthew?*

He heard. She'd phoned the travel agent during the lockdown and a shuttle bus was due in twenty minutes or so for a flight back to London. They'd be home in six hours, easy. The agency organised the whole
A mass evacuation of British tourists. Incoming flights redirected. He imagined the hysteria at Enfidha-Hammamet International. All those money pouches opening and passports coming out. The wary eyes. The stories of how close, how lucky, how terrifying.

Matthew lay on the bed, his feet on white sheets.

Matthew?

He looked at her.

Hurry the fuck up. Get off the bed.

I'm not going, he said.

She did this thing with her face. Incredulity.

What do you mean you're not going?

I'm staying, he said.

You're joking, yeah? You can't fucking stay.

I know it's difficult to understand but I'm not leaving. Not right now anyway.

She looked outside – the sun was still shining, the swell rolled against the shore – then she looked at him, there on the bed. She looked at him like he had been the one.

You right prick. Who do you think you are, Matthew? You didn't even want to come here in the first place –

That's irrelevant now.

– and now you want to stay here, where guys walk around with fucking machine guns killing Westerners and laughing like they're the ones on holiday?

They watched each other. Waiting for the yield. But his action was a statement.

Kelsie dropped his suitcase, kicked it, opened the door. He heard the ding of the lift and from then on it would only be him.

He thought of the Anouars on the back streets.

* 

Mindfulness, he tells himself, and he thinks of his feet. They are not on white bed sheets but on hot white sand; his head not on a pillow but on the hand-swept shore of a far away continent. His mouth is open. He hears the air. Each breath a reminder. Each breath a confirmation of the liberty of choice.

Ross Watkins is an author and illustrator for adults and children. He has published illustrated books (The Boy Who Grew Into a Tree and One Photo), plus his short stories have featured in Australian and international journals and anthologies. Ross teaches Creative Writing on Queensland’s Sunshine Coast, Australia.

of course flatness, doubt: a suite of brunswick east poems

i.

fist river throat iron
protest; trace
somnambulant foreclosure
high coal cut fire

ii.

mouse moon saint marrow
and watt,
east w and two devil
knot illuminated

iii.

heart opal, iridescence
moss league of rest
bare bolt audible
was lockness

R. D. Wood, Perth, WA
The Road

FRÉLIX CALVINO

Francisco had often thought of making a will, but the nearest authority was more than two hours’ walking distance, and there would be expenses, and money was scarce. Besides, he was healthy, circumspect, and thought that preparing for death was like sending an invitation.

Of course there was the priest, legally binding, free of charge, and not far away. Unsettling, though. Francisco could not see himself arriving at the priest’s house, taking the soft hand put out to shake his. Sitting in the spacious office with its inlaid furniture, his hat in his lap, conscious of his wooden-soled shoes on the waxed floorboards. Behind the desk Father Herrera, pen in hand, his face round and rosy, his eyes no longer young, but still piercing as they questioned Francisco for instructions.

And there would also be preparations for the spirit, beginning with confession. Then Francisco would be invited to give a few days of free labour to the church’s farming state at harvest time, which after all was the Lord’s own. It seemed so simple, and yet Francisco didn’t like any of it. He would save some money somehow and make the trip to town. There would be less discussing, fewer complications, he said to himself.

He died the following week, in his sleep.

* 

Francisco was buried two days later, next to his wife. His sons returned to plough their fields, united by grief and a diligent attitude to work and care for their possessions. In summer, they harvested and threshed and brought in the hay. After the leaves turned gold they attended to the corn and the potatoes and the wood for winter.

When not working in the fields, Benito took the cows to pasture and José attended to the housework. In their spare time both brothers shared in the cutting and carving of a tombstone for their father’s grave. It was a common stone from the local quarry, but their carvings of birds and trees attracted much admiration from those visiting the village burial grounds and the four centuries of dead.

* 

“I am thinking of getting married,” Benito announced one evening in early autumn.

The brothers were in the kitchen eating a dinner of potatoes and salted pork. Benito was the firstborn. He was of medium build, with a square chin and small eyes. José was tall, slim, and long faced.

“To whom?” José asked, and laughed loudly.

They finished the meal in silence.

Benito got up from the table, put on his corduroy jacket, and went to a neighbour’s house to play cards. José cleared the dishes and fed Feo the dog. He then put two handfuls of white beans to soak overnight and went to bed. He was tired and he had a slight headache. Perhaps he had caught a chill while doing the family washing in the river that morning. The water was no longer pleasant and the wind was already sharp. Then he thought of his small and frail mother and all the washing she had done.

Perhaps it had been the cold that brought in the malady that ate away her bones. He felt sorry for her. He also envied her. At least she’d had company while she soaped and rubbed, wrung and pounded the garments against the smooth stones. After her death, their father would not accept help from neighbours, and his brother wouldn’t even think of it. It was an awkward job for a young man of fifteen, so he did the washing very early or very late in the day to avoid the village women.

The thought of a woman around the house pleased him. He would be released from the sweeping, the cooking, the many things his mother used to do. And there would be children. But who was she? Benito did not go out to fairs or feast day dances in nearby villages like other single men. He didn’t go anywhere but to town to pay the land tax or to sell a fattened pig or a calf when luck was on their side. And in the village there were only half a dozen girls just out of school, and two old widows. Of course, there was big-breasted, furry-legged Rosa, in her early forties. Here José’s heart almost stopped. It was well known that she was after a man, she had found many, but only temporarily. But she would not be good to his brother, and she would be of little help to him. She was shy about work, and did not like brown bread, and had little by little sold her land to supplement the money
her sister sent from Cuba at Easter time. That was no good, he thought before finally going to sleep.

* 

One morning, a few days before Christmas, José was in the kitchen smoking the hams and the chorizos. Feo was sleeping by the fire. Outside, icicles hung from the eaves and the fields were whitened by the first snowfall. Benito came in and kicked Feo out. He sat down and warmed his hands at the fire. Then he took off his wet wooden-soled shoes and warmed his feet. After, he removed his socks and placed them and his shoes facing the fire. He rolled a cigarette.

"We have to divide the property," Benito said a while later.

"Why?" asked José.

"I want my half share."

"What do you want to do with it?"

"That is my business."

Soon after, Benito put back his socks and his shoes and went out. Feo came back in and watched José watching the smoke rise in the air.

* 

The brothers' small inheritance consisted of the family home: a tall, narrow stone structure with a kitchen and two bedrooms on the first floor, and housing four cows and three pigs (the sow close to litter) on the ground floor. An assortment of sheds stood at the back for storing wood and farming tools, and were home to a dozen hens. They owned twenty-one parcels of land scattered about the valley, and a large barn at the top end of the village.

The property barely sustained one family, but neither brother ever thought of living in the village. Their world was the valley. The towns and cities that lay behind the great ranges to the south were never an option.

They worked quietly, dividing the lots in half, the boundaries meticulously marked with solid stone posts. No mediators. No arguments. The brothers, along with their preference for silence, had also inherited discretion and suspicion towards people. Those neighbours expecting gossip or a feud, which often accompanied the apportioning of property, were not pleased.

* 

There was hare stew for Sunday dinner. It was a heavy and long hare with thick gold and white fur. José had trapped it two days before and had marinated it with two bay leaves and the last of his garlic stock. Benito had volunteered to tan the skin. Next he had gone to the store in the nearby village and bought two gallons of wine, which surprised José again since their father only bought wine on the day of the village patron saint. In the last few weeks, since they had placed the final stone marker, Benito had been calm and had even made some attempt at conversation. José was pleased. He liked his brother and wanted to be like him. But not when he was rough and clammed up for weeks on end.

"Now we have to decide which half is yours and which half is mine," said Benito towards the end of the meal.

"And how are we going to do that?" asked José.

"You worked hard cutting the stone posts and I think it is fair that you have the first choice," said Benito.

José said nothing.

* 

Winter set in hard. The days were often too cold or too wet for Benito to take the cows to pasture, or for José to go to the quarry to cut stone for a builder in town. Benito was in a bad mood, and day after day after day he demanded that José make up his mind. José said he would, but he was filled with doubt; on one hand, he feared making the wrong choice, on the other, he could not let the opportunity pass. In this ambiance of indecisiveness, round and round they went like a dog chasing its tail.

Then, just as the days were getting longer again, Benito found a way to deal with his brother's indecision.

"If I were in your shoes," said Benito one evening, "I would choose the plot along the creek without hesitation."

"That is what I have been thinking," replied José, with relief.

And so, by the reasoning of Benito, and with the cautiousness of José, all the parcels but one was allocated. The remaining parcel consisted of four acres of land on the coast, looking out over the ocean. It was harsh, arid land, inhabited by crying seagulls and brown lizards. It had been acquired by an uncle living in Argentina who wanted to retire to the place of his childhood. But his dream never came true and, after his death, the land passed on to his brother, their father.

And there was the house, which Benito claimed as the elder's privilege. "But you can have the barn and the land on the coast."

There was a long silence. José didn't know what to say at the thought of having to live by himself. He went to bed with a heavy heart.

*
Three weeks later, the brothers got up at dawn. Benito brought in hay and water for the cows. José fed the pigs and the chooks. Then they had breakfast, changed into their Sunday clothes, and left for the long trip to town. Feo zigzagged this way, that way, his nose on the ground, sniffing, until told to go back to mind the house. He squatted on his haunches, his head tilted to one side, and watched until the men came to a fork in the path and disappeared from sight.

The warm spring sun rose above the trees. The birds nested and twittered. The brothers walked in silence along the river for a while then turned towards the hills. Benito was in front, José a step or two behind. An hour later they were at the top. José stopped and turned and gazed at their village in the valley below and said, "A year ago father was still alive." Benito kept walking.

In town they sought directions to the Land Titles Office. They sat in the waiting room for more than an hour before they were called. There the man in charge consulted big books and unrolled bigger maps on the wide timber counter. He would tell a good yarn to his colleagues over drinks after work: two brothers who could hardly read or write, turned surveyors and cartographers, had come to see him with their exercise book...

Afterwards the brothers went into a tavern and had a big plate of fried sardines, white bread and a carafe of wine. The wine made José want to talk, but Benito was not in the mood for conversation. Later, José shopped for iron chisels and cooking oil. Benito bought a red flannel shirt.

They were home before nightfall.

* *

A month later José moved into his new home. He divided the barn in two halves. The two cows, the pig and the chickens were at the back. His living area was at the front. It was a large room. There was a door to the street, and a small window overlooking the vegetable garden and the fields beyond.

He placed a stone sink under the window and built an elevated open fire hearth with timber benches on either side. He slept on a mattress of straw at the other side of the room, on a stage-like platform made of planks and supported by hand-turned timber posts. He protected his parents’ memory by carving a cross on each post for each year since their death. Feo slept at the foot of the narrow stairs.

José was now the poorest man in the village. He toiled hard. His share, either swamp or rocky land, meant that it was a struggle to make a living. He worked at improving the barn, often into the night. He added a thatched ceiling to protect himself from the summer heat and the winter cold. He stone-paved the earth-bitten floor. Then he built an oven to bake his bread, which remained largely unused for lack of flour, wood to heat it up, or both. Desperate for water, he dug an enormous and unsuccessful deep well. The same happened in his second attempt at the other end of the barnyard. But he made excellent wooden-soled shoes and was handy with ruffling and stonework, thus was able to barter for grains and other essentials. Still life took its toll. His once straight back never recovered from working in the confined spaces of the wells and was now permanently bent like an Indian bow. And he was thin and his clothes were ragged and often too big or too short for him.

Some people laughed behind his back. Others were saddened. But José never complained, and he never lost his spontaneous laugh or his willingness to help anyone in any way he could. And the children liked him. His barn was their meeting place. It was there that they learned how to make whistles and catapults, or mend their carts, or settle their disputes.

* *

Seven years later, the provincial government built a road through the area. Then came electricity along wires hanging high from timber posts buried deep on the side of the road. A lower set of wires carried the telephone voices.

About this time a serious sea storm hit the area, and the receding waters exposed a stone road, emerging from the sea like a recalled ghost. It was poked and measured and photographed and finally declared of great historical value. Historians had long suspected a sea gate in the early stages of the building of the Roman fort in Lugo in the 3rd century.

Day-trippers soon arrived. Scattered holiday houses began to appear along the coast, followed by a hotel. José’s barren land contained the only natural access to the beach in a long stretch of unbroken cliff, and he became a wealthy man.

* *

The first thing José did after receiving his settlement was to call on his brother and offer him half a share of his money, even the lot. All he wanted was for them to live together as in the past. His offer was brusquely rejected. Well-meaning neighbours’ attempts at reuniting them met with the same fate.

It was soon clear that that things were not normal in Benito’s household. The curse of greed had now joined forces with envy and jealousy, said those who remembered how his brother José had become the poorest man in the village. First, Benito had abandoned the pride and dignity of work and care for his possessions. His hens and the pigs were eaten and not replaced. A cow was sold, and then another.
Twelve months passed. Early one morning Benito was seen in the village cemetery using a sledge hammer to smash the tombstone he and José had carved for their father’s grave. When stopped by neighbours from the nearby houses and asked what was going on, he just laughed. By late in the day, it was evident he did not even know who he was.

José had always rejected suggestions by friends to build a house for himself. Deep in his heart he believed his brother would invite him back. In the meantime, the barn was fine. Now with his brother in the asylum, his only sustaining dream lost, he withdrew into himself, into loneliness and silence. By the time of his death in his sleep two years later, his physical appearance was that of a very, very old man.

*****

Félix Calvino is a PhD Candidate in Creative Writing at the University of Queensland. He is the author of the short story collection, A Hatful of Cherries (2007), and the novella Alfonso (2014) released by Australian Scholarly Publishing. His next book So Much Smoke will be published late this year.

WHISPERING

He’s whispering into my ear from the other side of town.
Perhaps he’s whispering so that no one there will hear but it makes no difference here.
Everyone has been woken up.
Perhaps he’s whispering because unimportant news would be loud.
His news is first-to-know news; his news is first-to-tell news.
The more he whispers, the more important his reverence becomes.
The more important he becomes.
Perhaps he’s whispering because he doesn’t want to wake the dead.

Graham Rowlands,

BOOK REVIEW


Any piece of literature that begins by quoting Bob Dylan’s ‘All Along the Watchtower’ deserves some attention, particularly when the object of inquiry is one that beckons for ‘some kind of way out of here’. Óscar García Augustín and Christian Ydesen’s collection focuses on the post-crisis scenario of an austere time, aiming not only to describe it, but also to suggest what valuable, useful debris for the construction of a post-crisis society there might be.

Their anthology is an attempt to uncover some of the inner workings of current capitalism (chiefly termed post-Fordism, cognitive bio-capitalism, and semio-capitalism) from different approaches and themes. These range from human rights (Dorfman), political institutions (García Augustín, Mezzadra), the reproduction and representation of bodies (Morini, Cocco), debt (Lazzarato, Christensen), value (Marazzi), and labour (Fumagalli). It also makes explicitly philosophical inquiries into the phenomenology, ontology, power, time and subjectivities of capitalism (respectively Keller, Ydesen, Poulsen and Murphy).

The political project of the book has a strong linguistic imprint, aiming to create a new language for the Common, to enable them to tackle a time of crisis. According to the authors, it is in fact through the formation of a new vocabulary that the realisation of one’s power occurs, making resistance possible. This formation of new empowered subjectivities will allow for ‘escape’ (Hardt and Negri 2012). Knowledge is therefore a key ingredient to the struggle against cognitive capitalism: critical cognition against the exploitation of cognition. The book aims to highlight the subjectivities of the Common in order to achieve an affirmation of the Common itself.

The anthology features contributions from some of the most prominent authors in post-workerist scholarship, such as Cocco, Fumagalli, Lazzarato, Marazzi, and Mezzadra. The book is divided into two parts, which both explore some of the central themes of contemporary post-workerist thought. According to the editors, what distinguishes the two parts is that the second is explicitly in dialogue with Hardt and Negri’s work, although it seems that it reflects more of a hierarchical division, placing leading scholars in the field at the beginning and the others at the end.
This collection offers primarily a theoretical contribution to the field, as it only occasionally deals with empirical material, and only occasionally suggests tangible ways to achieve the much awaited ‘escape’. Most of the chapters take a largely descriptive account of the post-crisis scenario, highlighting the many aspects of neo-liberal domination. Any attempts to suggest post-crisis tools for resistance (which is one of the explicit intentions of the anthology) generally remain at the abstract, speculative level, even in the more empirically-founded pieces. Marazzi’s excellent historical analysis of valuation mentions a necessary alternative (subjective forms of valuation) in his conclusion, but this is not the focus of the chapter.

Similarly, Lazzarato’s work uses strong theoretical tools to convince the reader that debt is infinite and unpayable, concluding that the weapon to reverse the apparatus is a negative affirmation of the system itself (refusing to pay). Yet there is no reflection on how this can be achieved in praxis, despite there being numerous cases which one could draw from. Christensen’s article on private debt in Denmark touches on this by constructively highlighting concrete instances of resistance, albeit focusing on discourse. Fumagalli instead proposes the introduction of a universal basic income as a solution to precarity. His conclusion, however, is that this is politically impossible, ‘a mere illusion’, leaving the reader feeling like he is sitting in a sports car in an unpaved sandy desert. The most constructive contributions are from García Augustín and Mezzadra, the first urging for the acknowledgement of new institutional forces that are already emerging, and the second suggesting contextually relevant tools for the formation of a political left in Europe.

Given that the anthology explicitly aims at the construction of a post-crisis society, it would have been significantly strengthening for it to have engaged with more examples of micro-struggles. By using more empirical material, and covering a broader geographic range (with the exception of Cocco and García Augustín, all focus on the West), the book could have given a more accurate picture of the diverse forms which bio-capitalism takes and is challenged, as it recurrently refers to capitalism and multitudes at a global level. This is perhaps a reflection of a broader epistemic tendency within Marxian thought to reason in monoliths, as for many the point of departure (Capital) is characterised by unity, totality and singularity (Gibson-Graham 1996). Ultimately, the book leaves the reader with the impression that the power of the Common is limp. While the renewed vocabulary is useful for analysing the current discrepancies and problems of capitalism, it is less useful for affirming the ‘subjectivities of the Common’.

Although the contributions are clean and original, this book is primarily valuable for thinking differently about problems rather than proposing concrete possibilities. If a reader is looking for ways to walk ‘all along the watchtower’ (to return to Dylan’s idea), then they might want to look elsewhere. Nonetheless, this book is an excellent tool for connoisseurs and beginners to post-workerist studies alike, as it not only covers its nodes of thought, but adds to them, providing vital translations that are often tucked away from English speakers.

References

End Notes
1. Although these terms have a wide range of connotations and interpretations, they generally refer to the shape which capitalism takes up with the financialisation of value. Post-Fordism is here intended as the gradual expansion of production from closed factory walls, to ‘the social’ where value can be extracted from every form of life. In particular, semio-capitalism denotes a particular relationship between language and the economy, where ‘any kind of good (immaterial or material) can be translated into the combination and recombination of information (algorithms, figures, digital differences)’ (Berardi, 2015: 92).
2. They refer to, amongst other things, a reigning logic of accumulation, the normalisation of debt, an increased level of surveillance and the transition from manual to cognitive forms of labour (and consequently, exploitation).

I love you, with taste
I love you, with taste
salt in my tongue
our tongues
wild honey
we are seaweed
ice wine

SARAH ST VINCENT,
CANBERRA, ACT
BOOK REVIEW


**************

White allies in need of rescue: a review essay of *Trapped in the Gap and Decolonizing Solidarity*.

‘If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time; but if you are here because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.’ – Lilla Watson

Both Land and Kowal’s latest books concern the under-researched topic of white allies working with Aboriginal people: white allies who seek to avoid harm and receive absolution from their white privilege. Both are based on doctoral theses. Both have among their central concerns the racialised identities of zones within the settler society called Australia, and can be characterised as seeking to recognise and activate Indigenous sovereignty. Each work relies on respectful and careful ethnographic observation and interview analysis, and acknowledges the author’s own personal positionality within those white allies under study. They both refer to the well-known trope of (self)critique in Indigenous affairs: ‘mercenaries, missionaries and misfits’ (Kowal, 2015: 141-147; Land, 2015: 2). Both inquiries were prompted in part by Koori activist and historian Gary Foley’s injunction for white anti-racists a space to help Aboriginal people without worrying about or try to help Aboriginal people, unless explicitly asked to do so (Kowal, 2015: 24; Land, 2015: 175, 206). Both benefit from the openness and trust shown by their interviewees. Finally, both seek to transcend the binary of Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjectivities in pursuit of a more socially just and inclusive Australia.

Trapped in the Gap

Kowal’s site is the avowedly ‘progressive’ Institute of Indigenous Health in Darwin. This centre conducts research and supports interventionist public health programs in Aboriginal communities that have some of the worst health statistics in the country. Staff are mostly non-Aboriginal, many from outside the Northern Territory, and are committed to ethical partnerships, community control by Aboriginal people, and crucially, to avoiding previous patterns of assimilation or abuse. While many Australians may be aware of disadvantages facing Indigenous people, most remain oblivious to the entrenched nature of white privilege, and when confronted with it, adopt strategies of minimisation or denial (Dunn and Nelson, 2011). Meanwhile, institute employees are called upon to acknowledge their racial identities and privileges on a daily basis, and frequently try to erase themselves or to publicly defer to Aboriginal voices (2015: xiii, 47-48, 132). Those Aboriginal people who normally interact with such ‘post-colonial’ staff become adept at deploying their power to condemn or shame. Kowal’s main interest is the interplay between these racialised identities, and the extent to which their entanglement works to thwart good intentions.

A key tension for white anti-racists is between remedialism (reducing the gap between Indigenous health and wellbeing and that of other Australians) and positive Orientalism (valorisation of cultural difference). Elsewhere Kowal (2008: 343) has explained that, ‘At the simplest level, remedialism aims to change Indigenous people to reduce inequality (i.e. to make them healthier) whereas Orientalism requires them to remain different.’ Kowal (2015: 50) usefully suggests that for many non-Indigenous people, Indigenous difference is split into two parts: sanitised alterity (songs, stories, art, living as part of the environment) and un-sanitised alterity (violence, drinking, poor diet and health, and now sexual abuse of children). Efforts are made to correct the behaviours of un-sanitised alterity or their impacts, while sanitised alterity remains intact ‘to ensure that these newly healthy subjects are recognisably Indigenous’ (2008: 345). This is crucial to reassure the interveners that they are quite unlike earlier interventionists, who took away children and bullied Aboriginal people to change ‘for their own good.’

In one of her key theoretical arguments, Kowal criticises those like me who focus on structural causes (often now termed social determinants) of Aboriginal ill health and downplay agential explanations (2015: 43). She records frantic efforts to avoid citing Aboriginal choices and behaviours as leading to disease, achieved by a refusal (despite specific request) to countenance ‘politically incorrect’ factors (2015: 43-45). Overstrucructuration, according to Kowal, works by directing efforts to remediable difference (poor housing, poverty, lack of access to services). Remediable difference offers white anti-racists a space to help Aboriginal people without harming them (2015: 48-49). While the appeal of this reassuring strategy is clear, this reviewer would argue that all white anti-racists will need to accept the inherent contradictions involved and own the harms they do even when actually ‘helping’.

Kowal’s accounts of the interactive performances, seeking and claiming recognition by both white anti-racists and Aboriginal interlocutors, are some of the
most striking aspects of the book. She reveals how individual white staff compete in their public vigilance towards any racist or colonial assumption, even if doing so compromises project outcomes. Kowel also identifies how white staff seek the ‘authentic Indigenous voice’ to protect them from anxiety, and how the Aboriginal people who provide it authenticate their views by strategies of opaqueness (2015: 117-119). As she notes, ‘When an Indigenous person does speak, they are rarely questioned or challenged, and their comments are generally followed by a respectful silence’ (2015: 119).

Others have noted the anxiousness of non-Indigenous workers to avoid appearing racist (Bennett, Zubrzycki and Bacon, 2011). Kowel puts this anxiety within the context of international literature on recognition that has mostly focused on minority peoples. This allows new insights into the constraints and limitations for both Aboriginal and white people negotiating mutual recognition, whereby, ‘On both sides, these spaces are prisons and vehicles of change: spaces of confinement and potential mobility’ (2015: 129).

Managing the stigma of privilege is a major challenge for white anti-racists, especially when directly confronting the harsh conditions in remote communities. As noted, one strategy is self-effacement, whereby white anti-racists minimise their roles and anticipate their demise. Another is to revel in suffering, ‘whether the suffering relates to physical hardship, professional frustration, or suspicion and betrayal from Indigenous colleagues’ (2015: 150). Such suffering temporarily relieves the white anti-racist of the stigma of privilege, ‘For if we are suffering, we take solace from the belief that we cannot be simultaneously causing harm’ (2015: 151). Kowel calls for an alternative politics seeking ‘non-stigmatised, non-settler identities’ (2015: 169) that don’t ignore history or privilege but ‘decouples Indigeneity from disadvantage … and from callow moral dichotomies’ (Paradies, 2006: 363). This move away from essentialist understandings of race and privilege is welcomed in both teaching and recognition, whereby, ‘On both sides, these spaces are prisons and vehicles of change: spaces of confinement and potential mobility’ (2015: 129).

Decolonising Solidarity

Covering similar terrain, Land explores the interpersonal context of white (would be) supporters of Aboriginal struggles, primarily in Melbourne but with national implications. The key question is how to decolonise solidarity. Most of the Aboriginal and non-Indigenous activists she interviews stress the absolute importance of waiting to be asked before offering help (2015: 128). This injunction is often twinned with the demand that supporters educate themselves, and then educate other non-Indigenous people to relieve Aboriginal people of this burden (2015: 82, 175). In line with Lilla Watson’s famous quote, allies are expected to be change agents, not helpers, to be ‘absolutely clear that you are doing this because it is in your interest or for the greater good’ (2015:206). Land (2015: 164) cites Gary Foley:

The first thing you need to do is not go and talk to any blackfellas at all, really. You need to look in the mirror. … You need to think hard and fast about who you are.

Critically, this self-reflection must be linked to public political work that is long-term and sustainable. Working in and on the local level is also seen as crucial, given the common focus on remote areas in Indigenous affairs (2015: 182). Land recognises that allies benefit from being seen as ‘good whites’, but is told that such kudos should be used to convince others to support Indigenous struggles (2015: 244-245).

In contrast to the more analytical style of Kowel, Land provides hundreds of direct statements from her informants, thereby reinforcing diversity within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. These voices also offer wonderful insights into intercultural misapprehension and connections, as when to her intense dismay, the dog that the Melbourne activist asked a Yankunytjatjara elder to name was declared Lassie (2015: 181).

While exotic nomenclature is a minor appropriation, Land’s informants describe the constant questions and demands made by often well-intentioned whites, and forbearance towards ignorance and offence required by Indigenous people who seek dialogue and collaboration (2015: 123). Such forbearance is not always forthcoming, and allies should expect to be abused and regarded as racist, in part because they are validated by such treatment (2015: 132-133). This tension reflects intergenerational conflicts and reminds us that that the state is not just outside of and imposed on its critics but lives within them (2015: 132). This realisation challenges Kowel’s call for a ‘non-settlers’ identity. Land envisions a rich mosaic of Aboriginal leaders and long-term and well-regarded non-Aboriginal allies, and offers hope for genuine comradeship.

Saving the Saviours

These two studies contribute to the small literature on white anti-racist supporters in Indigenous Australian contexts. The parallels between the academic and political spheres are striking, as are many of the lessons learned. Land repeatedly evidences Aboriginal experiences of and preferences for ways of working with Indigenous people that are respectful, self-aware and trustworthy. Kowel offers a penetrating and often disconcerting analysis that mirrors many other settings in the academy, government, and non-government agencies. She suggests that we can escape the defeatism and contradictions typically found amongst those who work to empower Aboriginal people and make themselves redundant. Reading the two together offers non-Aboriginal Australians solid material to work through, preferably together with other allies, so that
the burden of educating whites and enduring their well-intentioned slights and irritations may diminish over time for Aboriginal colleagues.

References

Author
David Hollinsworth is an Adjunct Professor in Indigenous Studies at The University of the Sunshine Coast. He has taught Aboriginal studies and anti-racism since 1974 in several universities and has published in these fields. He has been an activist and supporter in many local and national Aboriginal struggles since 1968, including land rights campaigns in South Australia, Northern Territory and New South Wales, and the Ngarrindjeri struggle over Kumarangk (Hindmarsh Island), and has served as national non-Indigenous co-chair of the Stolen Generations Alliance.

Night
Morpheus leans his elbow into my chest.
'I'm not a panic attack,' he says.
'I'm the God of Sleep – you know that.'
He’s checking his mobile.

He swaps elbows.
I gasp a shuddering breath.

Morpheus shifts his weight.
He’s onto click bait now,
so I’m most likely stuck.

The phone rings, and
he gets up.

Sarah St Vincent, Canberra, ACT

NOT LONG TO GO

Flying? I’m not flying anymore. No, not terrorists just more than these old bones could stand. No haven’t been behind the wheel for years. Yonks.
Managed to drive for ten years without a prang but then had some sort of blue fit or pink.
Couldn’t face going for a new licence. No way.
I know I haven’t got long to go but even so I’ll be blowed if I’m going into a red gum.
Yes, I do know about the hole in the ceiling but I’m yet to look up & see a possum’s paw let alone a fully grown Mum or Dad poss. Well if I was younger but hardly matters at my age.
No, haven’t been taking my medication for months. What’s the point? Can’t last much longer anyway.
Oh! For sure. I was a three-meals-a-day-man but then I cut down, cut down to two – yeah scarcely missed the one so I cut out two.
Down to one? No, it’s been a few days now since I had anything at all. Why should I?
Might cark it halfway through bacon & eggs.

Graham Rowlands, Adelaide, SA
During the semester, design students embraced the opportunity to explore hand-crafted print media as an alternative to using the digital platform. Self-expression was principal while learning new skills with a variety of mixed media techniques that formed an exchange of visual ideas, and the mastering of hands-on traditional printing techniques to showcase in the ‘Regional Marks’ – Celebrating 50 Years of Print exhibition, University of the Sunshine Coast Gallery, 19 May – 2 July 2016.

To coincide with the World Environment Day, Sunday 5th June, the theme students followed was to create awareness for nurturing our natural world that holds the key to our future living environment.

Below: Melinda Huurdeman’s series of Australian Bird lino-cut prints ask the viewer to consider threatened and endangered species that continue to rise with the on-going clearance of native vegetation, poor management of bushfires and extinction from introduced predators such as foxes and cats. It is vital that we protect these species before it is too late. Top: Cockatoo and Rosella. Bottom: Kookaburra and Cassowary.

Next Page: Madison Hadland’s lino-cut print presents a portrayal of the Australian outback and the separating elements associated with drought. It explores the idea of growth and the inability to be connected to nature.
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- V32.4 Animals, Fiction, Alternative
- V33.1 Music Politics and Environment
- V33.2 Social Alternatives Open Theme
- V33.3 The Wicked Problem of Violences in Mad Places/Spaces and People
- V33.4 A Year of Peace
- V34.1 Cosmopolitanism
- V34.2 Random Callings: Discerning the University Mission
- V34.3 Election and Aftermath
- V34.4 Youth and Precarious Work
- V35.1 Silence as a Power