

Gender Symbolism and Gender Power Across Time and Contexts
The Irredeemability of Past and Present Sociocultural and Political-Institutional
Responses to Women Gender-Based Violence Survivors During National Transition and
in Peacetime
by
Carolyn Anh Dang

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Natasha Behl, Chair
Julie Murphy-Erfani
Breanne Fahs

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of gender-based violence, how do women survivors experience survivorhood and in what ways do entrenched sociopolitical, cultural, and institutional ideologies and structures impede their recovery process? I argue that, in settings of both national unrest and peacetime, women are deprived the opportunities to heal from their trauma in a just and dignified manner as a result of the machinations of gender symbolism and gender power percolating throughout their private and public communities. I investigate the ways in which the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the aftermath of national unrest as well as sociocultural communities and academic institutions in peacetime analogously perpetuate defective and markedly androcentric ideologies, structural practices, and rules and regulations that simultaneously disregard women's needs and interests while maintaining the cycle of impunity for male perpetrators.

I also present an autoethnographic analysis that conceptualizes my personal experience of gender-based violence in a comparative study across sociopolitical contexts to explode the assumption that pandemic gender symbolism, and subsequently inculcated gender power, is only noteworthy in regard to its impact on the levels of global systems and national institutions, as many international policymakers and political science scholars maintain. I likewise subvert the privileged attitudes that trivialize daily gendered experiences as irrelevant, and demonstrate how quotidian forms of gender power – often overlooked in disciplines of political science and legislation – are markedly destructive and whose far-reaching impacts at the local and individual levels are no less consequential than gender power on the international stage.

For the girl I was, before my assault.
For the person I will never be, because of what happened.
And for the woman I am, in spite of it all.

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Tạ ơn, Ba Mẹ. Con thương Ba Mẹ trên hết.

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CHAPTER 1

SURVIVORHOOD IN THE AFTERMATH OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

INTRODUCTION

Trauma dissects our world into disjointed parts that we must then piece back together through a continuous recovery process, as we learn to live with the permanent cracks within ourselves that will never completely mend. In the following mixed-methods study, I highlight how the arduous undertaking of healing in the aftermath of gender-based violence (GBV) is thwarted by the unjust and immoral actions of international regimes, state systems, and legislative policies that prioritize the interests of men over women. I also uncover how sociopolitical phenomena and interpersonal relations are influenced by gendered conceptions of identity and appropriate behavior, which burden women's lives with relentless prohibitions, exclusions, and denigrations, particularly in survivorhood. I further reveal how the recovery of women survivors in the aftermath of GBV is counterproductively impeded, in both settings of war and peace, by gendered political-institutional entities tasked with addressing these women's needs and attaining justice for the crimes they have suffered (Hawkesworth, 2005).

I investigate the ways in which truth-seeking bodies as well as purportedly objective and gender inclusive organizations – specifically the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in national transition settings and United States academic institutions during peacetime – analogously perpetuate defective and markedly androcentric ideologies, structural practices, and rules and regulations that simultaneously disregard women's needs and interests and maintain the cycle of impunity for perpetrators. I additionally illuminate the incoherent journey from insensate shock, to

eviscerating pain, to dull ache that one inevitably (and perhaps even unconsciously) takes in reconciling the dueling demons of shame and forgiveness with which every survivor of GBV must contend. The trauma of GBV, enabled and exacerbated by pervasive and internalized patriarchal hegemony, is a deeply personal and uniquely experienced phenomenon that cannot possibly be conceptualized through compassion or empathy – it must be directly felt and thoroughly conceptualized to be truly understood (Baldwin, 1963). As such, I also present an autoethnographic study that conceptualizes my personal trauma of GBV first within a childhood of shame and stigma, then throughout an adulthood of denigration and exclusion.

I explore my lived experience as a survivor of GBV in order to show that, absent armed conflict and national unrest, women GBV survivors nonetheless lack the opportunities to experience their survivorhood in a just and dignified manner as a result of the machinations of gender symbolism and gender power percolating throughout their private and public communities. By shedding light on my personal lived experience and the interpersonal dynamics of my cultural community, I aim to explode the assumption that pandemic gender symbolism, and subsequently inculcated gender power, is only noteworthy in regard to its impact on the levels of global systems and national institutions, as many international policymakers and political science scholars maintain. I likewise subvert the privileged attitudes that trivialize daily gendered experiences as irrelevant, and I demonstrate how quotidian forms of gender power – often overlooked in disciplines of political science and legislation – are markedly destructive and whose far-reaching impacts at the local and individual levels are no less consequential than gender power on the international stage.

Furthermore, I examine four specific instances during my assault experience at age fourteen that demonstrates 1) the gendered symbolism which normalizes male dominance, makes men believe in their gender superiority, and assures them of their entitlement to possess women; 2) the cultural stigma of sexual GBV endured by women survivors versus the conspicuous lack of stigma imposed upon men for being perpetrators of assault; 3) the ways in which gendered structures of belief grant men protection from the consequences of their wrongdoing, while these same value systems require women to absolve men of their sins; and 4) how women, as the targets of assault, are invariably blamed for how they experience their own trauma and for not recovering swiftly and quietly so as to shield the rest of society from their unseemly suffering. Moreover, I focus on my lived experience as a medical student twelve years after my assault, and illuminate how my former academic institution exhibited gender power and androcentric standards of operation in its responses to my situation when my attacker returned to my social and academic worlds by enrolling at my school.

I argue that transitional justice efforts will inevitably fail in their idealistic peacebuilding aspirations because of the gender power imbalances and structural inequalities inherent in their political-institutional design. I additionally contend that, not only are perpetrator-centered judicial recourses through criminal courts ineffective in attaining retributive justice for survivors in the aftermath of GBV, but every stage in restorative justice operations likewise fail survivors as they are all infused with asymmetric practices and gender power that privilege men and simultaneously retraumatize and marginalize women. I further assert that, regardless of new and variegated permutations of political-institutional justice mechanisms, and despite

enfeebled or robust sociopolitical, economic, and juridical infrastructures, institutional responses to women survivors of GBV will be largely deficient in the aftermath of national unrest as well as during peacetime. This is because the problem is not logistical or structural, but ideological and behavioral. It is not the counterproductive limitations of truth commission legislative enabling acts or intrinsic difficulty in unearthing painful truths that are the paramount challenges of peacebuilding efforts and which undermine the work of truth commissions and other transitional justice mechanisms.

I contend that, contrary to what practitioners and scholars of peacebuilding and transitional justice widely posit, the precariousness of post-conflict society is not the critical reason why women survivors of GBV are prevented from receiving the support and just reparations they require, since these rights are denied women survivors during peacetime as well. Rather it is the gender symbolism and gender power, which insidiously pervades all levels of political-institutional ideologies and practices, that sabotage institutional responses to women survivors. Through key events explored in my autoethnography, I reveal how, in much the same way that patriarchal value systems and androcentric sociopolitical structures made South African women vulnerable to gross human rights abuses specifically as women during the decades of apartheid and beyond, this male monopoly of power is similarly deployed against women survivors during peacebuilding by the very systems claiming to work on their behalf. I ultimately maintain that endeavors to correct gender-based injustices will continue to fail survivors, both within the context of regime changes or national unrest and in peacetime settings not ravaged by war and mass atrocity, so long as they are fundamentally governed by gender

power constructed via deep-rooted gender symbolism that pervades throughout countless sociopolitical phenomena and various dimensions of cultural life.

OVERVIEW OF THESIS

The remaining chapters first examine gender symbolism and its influence on unjust cultural as well as political-institutional responses to crimes of GBV in both settings of national unrest and peacetime, then explores the adverse impacts that socially constructed gendered institutions and gender power have on the lived experience of women survivors in the aftermath of violence. Chapter 2 expounds a conceptual framework of gender symbolism by 1) identifying the history of its conceptualization in the context of feminist inquiry, 2) reflecting on its role in propelling forward gender as an analytical category, and 3) revealing its substantive contributions to making substantive and intelligible alternative explanations of political phenomena. I draw upon gender symbolism as a theoretical foundation throughout the thesis to illuminate markedly androcentric value systems and standard operating procedures widely disregarded by practitioners of transitional justice mechanisms following gross human rights violations, and notably overlooked by the vast majority of scholars in mainstream political science discourse.

Chapter 3 outlines a mixed-methods approach of investigation into the implications of gender symbolism and gender power, embodied by both cultural and institutional responses that shape how women survivors of GBV experience their trauma. I similarly explore the ways in which gender symbolism influences how gender-based crimes are perceived and understood by communities in which women survivors are

embedded and throughout which they must continue to navigate. I delineate my analysis of South African public archival records and government documents on the TRC's Enabling Act, the Special Hearing on Women and its findings pertaining to women's experiences during the half century of apartheid, and the Recommendations for Reform in the Commission's Final Report. I explain how I will further utilize this textual evidence in Chapter 5 to situate the issue of GBV and the needs and interests of women survivors in South Africa's transitional justice system. I shed light on the perpetuity of patriarchy in the nation's post-apartheid era that impedes meaningful healing and sabotages endeavors for just and dignified healing and reconciliation processes for women survivors during peacebuilding. I also detail the ways in which I draw from my lived experience as a women survivor of GBV via an autoethnographic analysis to reveal the pervasiveness of gender symbolism and how it drives deficient sociocultural and political-institutional responses to GBV in peacetime. I additionally elucidate the distinct tenets, objectives, and focus of autoethnography that sets it apart from ethnographic methodologies. Furthermore, I discuss how autoethnographic analysis is a well-suited approach to uncovering multidimensional gender power infused throughout all levels of sociopolitical life, particularly as it relates to the inherent tensions and inequities within cultural and institutional responses to women survivors in the aftermath of GBV.

Chapter 4 provides a focused review of existing literature that examines peacebuilding and reconciliation systems, with particular attention to paradigmatic transitional justice mechanisms (specifically, international criminal tribunals and truth commissions). I explore the ineffective global and national policies and procedures of transitional justice operations that are aimed at redressing the human rights abuses

women survivors of GBV suffered in settings of armed conflict, genocide, revolution, and national unrest. I present an overview of international relations scholarship assessing the shortcomings of both criminal court systems and truth-seeking bodies in addressing justice and reparations for women survivors and attending to their needs and interests in the aftermath of GBV. I also demonstrate that although political science and psychology literature identify the multifaceted adverse consequences which past and current peacebuilding efforts have on the daily lives of women survivors, there remain gaps in contemporary scholarship that must be addressed in order to gain a rigorous understanding of the nuanced and complex lived experience of survivorhood post-GBV. I expose a conspicuous dearth of studies aimed at uncovering the sociopolitical mechanisms, cultural standards of behavior, and structural forces engendering these systematic deficiencies of transitional justice. I further highlight the virtual absence of comparative studies across sociopolitical contexts that examine sociocultural and political-institutional responses to women survivors of GBV following national unrest as well as in peacetime, and I emphasize the need to illuminate the gender symbolism and gender power simultaneously influencing and perpetuated by these phenomena that shape the post-GBV lived experience of women survivors.

Chapter 5 examines textual evidence of the South African TRC's Enabling Act and Final Report to reveal the ways in which gender symbolism and asymmetric gender power infuse throughout the truth-seeking body's objectives, practices, and procedures. I unearth how gender power constructs gender institutions that work to consistently absolve male perpetrators of their gender-based crimes and simultaneously revictimize and marginalize women survivors. I first illuminate the androcentric dominance inherent

in the South African Parliament's narrow definitions of gross human rights violations that prioritizes men's suffering during apartheid over that of women. I then reveal how the TRC's mandate neither identify the gender implications of many crimes that disproportionately afflicted women nor expressly consider women's needs in its guidelines for investigative tasks. I also analyze the gendered ideologies inherent in the legislative language of the Final Report that normalizes institutional devaluing and deprioritizing of women survivors' interests and that justifies the TRC putting forth official Recommendations for Reform which largely deprioritize, or omit altogether, the needs and goals of women survivors of GBV. I further demonstrate that while the interests of South African men were explicitly considered in the Final Report's Recommendations for Reform once investigations concluded, their female counterparts were socially and institutionally compelled to adhere to restricting codes of conduct based on dualistic expectations of femininity versus masculinity. Women survivors were also expected to remain biddable to state demands, sacrifice their desire for justice and retribution, and compliantly forgive perpetrators for the sake of attaining national unity and reconciliation.

Chapter 6 deploys autoethnography to explore cultural and institutional responses to GBV in peacetime and thereby demonstrate that ineffective provision of meaningful support and just reparations to women survivors are not unique limitations of transitional justice mechanisms in peacebuilding settings, where political or socioeconomic infrastructures have been weakened by armed conflict or national unrest. I utilize my lived experience as a survivor of GBV in order to illuminate how, as in the case of GBV addressed in peacebuilding efforts during national transition, omnipresent gender

symbolism 1) motivates and condones violence against women across sociopolitical contexts; 2) revictimizes survivors and marginalizes their needs in the aftermath of GBV, despite the condition of organizational structures or availability of community resources and legal services; and 3) relentlessly shields male perpetrators from liability, regardless of the severity of their gender-based crimes. Through this autoethnographic study, I also make visible and intelligible the perpetual injustices women survivors of GBV endure as a result of androcentric notions of appropriate human life. I explore how patriarchal dictates of culturally acceptable conduct, governed by gender dualisms, organize sociopolitical phenomena and sustain a deep-rooted system of gender power that favor men at the expense of women. In this respect, I elucidate that institutional responses to women survivors of GBV both in the aftermath of wartime and during peacetime are largely defective because the problem is not logistical or structural, but ideological and behavioral.

The concluding chapter reemphasizes the direct parallels between sociocultural and political-institutional responses to women GBV survivors during national transition and in peacetime. I elucidate the implications of these gendered structuring practices, value systems, and interpersonal relationships as they currently stand in global and individual contexts. I likewise shed light on what these sociopolitical phenomena portend for the lived experience of women survivors who are presently facing the aftermath of GBV as well as for women who will have to contend with the repercussions of GBV in future. Additionally, I advance an alternative to forgiveness as the requisite foundation upon which healing and empowerment are realized in the aftermath of violence, and

explain how forgiveness is, in itself, a gendered notion and a patriarchal vehicle of oppression.

Furthermore, I illuminate the ever-present tension between ostensibly benevolent intentions and effective execution of justice and reconciliation initiatives. I explicate the destructive properties of outward well-intentionedness on the part of international policies and institutional operations that mask an inert reality lacking action and meaningful progress, as well as lulls sociopolitical actors into the false sense that they are spearheading novel forms of resistance against inculcated patriarchy, when they are instead continually influenced by and perpetuating androcentric gender power through political-institutional practices and procedures. I also exhort cultural communities and social institutions to mindfully reflect on their roles in sustaining gender symbolism that naturalize male superiority and disregard women. I further encourage these sociopolitical entities to proactively divorce themselves from the gender symbolism and gender power that undermines their endeavors to create a more just society. I outline a strategy for gendered institutions aiming to achieve consequential self-correction that deploys the feminist ethic of reflexivity and heeds the implications of intersectional positionality.

Moreover, I illustrate the ways in which this mixed-methods study is both unique in its approach and renders a pioneering conceptualization of the heretofore irredeemable political, institutional, and legislative treatment of women survivors of GBV. Not only do I conceptualize and make clear the multidimensional ways in which omnipresent gender symbolism and gender power brazenly desecrates women's lived experience in survivorhood, I also contribute a markedly visceral cognizance to the largely cerebral understanding of sociopolitical phenomena as it pertains to the practice of transitional

justice and peacebuilding operations. I likewise explicate the distinctive insights I contribute to existing literature with my combined archival and autoethnographic analysis that rejects oppressive scholarly dictates, which 1) shackle academic writing to a cold and objective voice; 2) obscure the pain, trauma, and injustice that animates researchers; and 3) invisibilize the human beings, and their lived experience, that galvanize the research process.

Lastly, I lay bare my motivations for writing so that the readers of this mix-methods analysis can evaluate for themselves the basis of my meaning-making process and the validity of my knowledge production. In practicing the feminist research ethic of reflexivity that I ardently champion, I illustrate in raw detail how my translocational positionality fostered my lifelong interest in gender power systems and continually enriches my appreciation of my nuanced and complex survivorhood lived experience as well as that of other women survivors in the aftermath of GBV. As such, I hope to make transparent and intelligible the impetus driving my scholarly pursuits as well as the sociopolitical transformations I wish to compel through my feminist political science research.

CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL FOUNDATION
FEMINIST INQUIRY

For this mixed-methods study, I draw from the tenets of feminist inquiry and deploy gender as an analytical tool to illuminate how patriarchal norms – that enable the specific targeting of women for systematic violence before and during armed conflict – are maintained well after wartime via transitional justice mechanisms. I also examine how these pervasive male-controlled value systems and political institutions sanction and justify the counterproductive processes that revictimize and marginalize women within peacebuilding settings. I further use gender as an analytical category to make the connection between how political operations claiming to seek justice, instead, demonstrate and perpetuate inequitable structures of belief when addressing both the “‘extraordinary’ violations experienced by women during genocide, war, and other mass violence and the ‘ordinary’ violations experienced by women during so-called peacetime” (Lambourne & Rodriguez Carreon, 2016, p. 72). Moreover, I demonstrate how post-conflict justice efforts for reconciliation and national unity undermine their own objectives when they do not divorce themselves from gendered ideologies and practices that allow for the execution of GBV and which subsequently advantage male perpetrators at the expense of women survivors.

Additionally, I employ the feminist research ethic of critical reflexivity to illuminate my intersectional positionality as I explore and analyze my personal lived experience as a survivor of sexual assault and attempted murder. I adopt the feminist theories of gender symbolism and gender power to investigate how hierarchies of power

are embedded into peacetime organizational practices that dictate how women's needs are addressed in the aftermath of GBV. I similarly elucidate my institutionally imposed revictimization and marginalization as a result of paternalistic operations within my former academic and professional communities. Moreover, I investigate the extent to which these gendered procedures insidiously pervade and influence individuals' lives through the environments within which they navigate. I highlight how institutional approaches to procuring justice for women GBV survivors are androcentric in nature, and how this undermines survivor healing and exacerbate trauma in the aftermath of violence.

GENDER AS AN ANALYTICAL CATEGORY

Mary Hawkesworth meditates on how, since the 1970s, feminist inquiry has sought to be "corrective and transformative" by deploying gender as an analytical tool to illuminate "social and political relations neglected by mainstream accounts," and to advance "alternative explanations of political phenomena" (2005, p. 141). She argues that, because gender is embedded across multiple interdependent social systems, it persistently takes effect in culturally specific forms and in key social, political, and economic processes (Ibid.). Extensive feminist literature also contends that gender as an analytical category reveals sociopolitical state of affairs in need of further investigation (Hawkesworth, 2005; Borer, 2009; Nagar & Geiger, 2007; Harding, 1986; Scott, 1986). By conceiving gender as a framework influencing how communities think about and organize their social activity, feminist political scientists have also shed light on the ways in which gender presents as normative symbols that enable societies to interpret and conceptualize influential organizations, social institutions, and subjective identity

(Harding, 1986; Scott, 1986). In this respect, gender is a reliable cultural designation of relationships of power and a means to unearth and “understand the complex connections among various forms of human interaction” (Scott, 1986, p. 1070). Employing gender as an analytic category, I identify areas of wartime and peacetime GBV for inquiry, frame questions for investigation, discern patterns and injustices in the aftermath of violence that warrant further exploration, and generate concepts, definitions, and hypotheses to guide my feminist political science research (Hawkesworth, 2005).

HISTORICAL CONCEPTION OF GENDER SYMBOLISM

Until the 1980s, “binary oppositions such as male and female remained largely unquestioned for explaining universal power relations and their underlying symbolism” (Kuehling, 2012, p. 321). It was not until the second generation of feminist studies identified gender as an imprecise category in the late 1980s and “called for more attention to overlapping areas, fluid boundaries, and accepted contradictions” that the conceptions of gender symbolism and gender power along with their far-reaching sociopolitical implications were increasingly scrutinized in feminist inquiry (Ibid.). The second wave of feminism, typically described as the period from the 1960s to 1980s, is the “era of formalizing equality rights for women through the law and public policy and increased attention to differences among women” (Dhamoon, 2013, p. 88). Not only did this generation of feminism jettison the reductive dichotomy of rigid feminine versus masculine stereotypes as well as dominant symbols of femininity and masculinity, this stage of feminist inquiry also identified and emphasized the existence of nuanced and complex gender identities, relations, and intersections that defied a homogenization of

lived experience based on socially constructed gender identity. Hence, this rejection of the male-female opposition as inadequate for gender studies intensified the demand for gender as a category of analysis in political science scholarship over the past four decades (Kuehling, 2012). Moreover this analytic tool, that deploys gender to illuminate social phenomena and cultural relations overlooked by mainstream accounts, also galvanized political science scholarship and gender studies alike to reexamine the inherent inequities within sociocultural value systems, political-institutional operations, and legislative priorities previously disregarded by conventional theoretical and methodological approaches.

In theorizing the social construction of gender, Sandra Harding maintains that gender symbolism is a distinct process that produces gendered social life by “assigning dualistic gender metaphors to various perceived dichotomies that rarely have anything to do with sex differences” (1986, p. 17). Gender symbols are then expressed culturally in binary oppositions of feminine versus masculine via various gender stereotypes – “e.g., delicate/sturdy, gracious/powerful, sensitivity/toughness” (Laberge & Albert, 1999, p. 244). Gender structures and institutions are subsequently constructed when patriarchal societies “[appeal] to these gender dualisms to organize social activity,” thereby resulting in social practices and standard operating procedures that function in accordance with a dualistic division of sociopolitical phenomena based on gender (Harding, 1986, p. 17; see also Laberge & Albert, 1999). These societies then breed and sustain an interlocking network of gender power that captures universal human attributes and natural traits, apply them socially to emphasize distinct and opposing gender stereotypes, then reapply them naturally to normalize perceived dominance of one gender over the other (Sahlins, 1976).

For instance, general characteristics such as forgiveness, sensitivity, submissiveness, and fragility are seized by patriarchal societies and subsequently associated with femininity as well as used to inform sociocultural expectations of women's behavior and disposition. Then, in order to socialize women to inhabit these traits, they are reapplied naturally in the forms of gendered metaphors such as the nurturing Mother Earth or the long-suffering, serenely comforting motherland in need of preserving and defending. This cycle of gender symbolism ultimately presents socially constructed ideals of femininity as natural facts thereby normalizing notions of feminine-masculine opposition and inducing female compliance to culturally appropriate codes of conduct. Conceptions of femininity are also starkly juxtaposed with traits of invulnerability, skillfulness, resilience, and shrewdness socially assigned to masculinity and embodied by soldiers, legislative and juridical authorities, and sovereign leadership tasked with protecting femininity and the women who personify it. This gendered phenomenon ultimately fosters an asymmetric gender power that naturalizes male dominance in sociopolitical and cultural domains while trivializing the impact of women's social roles and thereby dismissing their needs and interests. In this aspect, genders are simultaneously cultural forms, structures of social activities, and identities that operate both on micro-level dimensions of gender relations – such as interactions within professional, academic, and cultural environments as well as those involving states and institutions – and on macro-levels that encompass the multidimensional structures of an entire society (Connell, 1987).

GENDER SYMBOLISM, POWER, AND INSTITUTIONS

Feminist scholars have developed detailed critiques of how international affairs and political legislation adopt and perpetuate a “defective and markedly androcentric” notion of appropriate human life by equating certain individual actions and structural forces with masculinity and righteousness, thus effectively legitimizing immoral and unjust policies worldwide (Hawkesworth, 2005, p. 148). According to Sandra Harding, nearly every culture assigns and emphasizes gender difference in natural and social events, relations, and processes in definitive ways that cause these structures and practices to become universally symbolized as either feminine or masculine (1986). Indeed, processes of gendering exist “through which relations of power and forms of inequality are constructed,” and that shape identities of individuals and the practices of institutions” (Hawkesworth, 2005, p. 145; see also Hawkesworth, 2003). As such, sociopolitical phenomena and practices are neither gender inclusive nor gender neutral as they both recreate and maintain insidious hierarchies of difference that favor men at the expense of women. Feminist scholars have developed a theory of gender institutions that elucidate the manifold ways in which “structuring practices, standard operating procedures, rules and regulations” as well as “images, ideologies, and distributional mechanisms” produce an asymmetrical structure of gender power that permeate within and among societies (Hawkesworth 2005, p. 146).

Through application of gender as an analytic category for examination of foreign affairs and armed conflict, feminist inquiry has been invaluable in illuminating the unequal experiences and relations between women and men – i.e., gender power – manifested in “international regimes, state systems, financial and economic processes,

development policies, institutional structures, symbol systems, and interpersonal relations” (Hawkesworth, 2005, p. 146; Enloe, 1990; Tickner, 2001). Furthermore, these gender intuitions, which play operative roles in human life, normalize male dominance via a set of culturally accepted policies and routines that provide disproportionately advantageous opportunities for men solely because of their perceived gender superiority. Given this ubiquitous hierarchy of gender difference, exposed and rigorously investigated by feminist scholars, it is now evident that women’s lives are unjustly burdened by “prohibitions, exclusions, denigrations and obstructions,” and their interests and needs are continually diminished or rendered invisible (Hawkesworth, 2005, p. 147). I implement gender as an analytical category to demonstrate how, in the same way that gender symbols, identities, and institutions regulate women’s lives, international legislative priorities and regional standard operating procedures similarly function to oppress women in the aftermath of GBV both during national unrest and in peacetime, despite professing their unbiased stance and overarching goals of justice and gender inclusiveness.

HERMENEUTIC CONCEPTION OF POWER

I additionally draw from the hermeneutic conception of power that conceives power as “constituted in shared meanings of given communities,” wherein intersubjective conventions make the use of power possible and intelligible (Hawkesworth, 2005; Isaac, 2003, p. 58). Many feminist analyses of international affairs have adapted the hermeneutic conception of power as it provides a particularly discerning model for investigating the political effects of gender symbolism, which produces structural

inequalities that promote men's interests and enable a male monopoly of power (Hawkesworth, 2005, p. 150). This theoretical framework also sheds light on how the institutionalized "coding of certain forms of human conduct as inherently masculine or feminine" insidiously embeds into sociopolitical civilization in a way that normalizes male dominance in value systems and prioritizes masculine concepts such as national security and militarization over the wellbeing of women (Ibid., p. 149-150). Mary Hawkesworth argues that "when rationality, competence, and leadership are coded as inherently masculine characteristics," male power is naturalized and legitimated (Ibid., p. 149). Similarly, "when narratives privilege the roles of men as national defenders of homelands that are described with symbolically female attributes – e.g., nurturing, virtuous, and delicate – norms of citizenship and soldiering are masculinized and women's rights and "contributions to nation building are erased" (Ibid., p. 149).

This gendered logic of appropriate behavior not only shapes individuals' self-understanding and aspirations within societies, but also meaningfully informs and situates international policies in the broader context of post-conflict peacebuilding efforts. Because many post-bellum states closely associate reconciliation and transitional justice with national security, which is symbolized as a masculine issue, governments as well as global authorizing bodies tend to prioritize unity of the populace and social reintegration of (predominantly male) combatants over the interests and needs of women (Ibid.). In this respect, the hermeneutic conception of power substantively highlights the ways in which many international legislative bodies, democratic regimes, and far-reaching policy interventions are continually influenced by masculinist beliefs and practices that foster injustices long after violence has ceased and as survivors of mass atrocities struggle to

rebuild their lives. I utilize the hermeneutic model to illuminate how gender power is embedded in the institutional processes and value systems that enable pervasive victimization of women not only before and during times of conflict, but also in peacebuilding settings when states and institutions remain systemically conditioned to prioritize male interests while paradoxically claiming to strive for comprehensive transitional justice among the entirety of their citizenry.

GENDER AND THE POLITICAL SCIENCE DISCIPLINE

Along with feminist inquiry's ability to excavate "dimensions of political life that remain invisible within dominant [political science] paradigms," I specifically deploy gender as an analytic category for this mixed-methods study because this approach has proven effective in revealing political dynamics operating within institutions that are not recognized by mainstream ideologies (Hawkesworth, 2005, p. 147; Isaac, 2003). Indeed, this feminist approach provides powerful evidence that "gendered hierarchies are created, maintained, and reproduced" within government institutions, which keenly and tangibly influence global policymaking as well as domestic foreign policy (Hawkesworth, 2005, p. 151). Not only does this consequential premise enable alternative assessments of how sociopolitical organizations and practices inherently serve as conduits of opportunity for men and oppressors of women, feminist scholarship also provides a means for definitions of politics, power, and international relations to expand and evolve.

Given the pervasiveness of gender power that disproportionately advantages men over their female counterparts, male dominance is exhibited not only in "political institutions of the nation-state and in the international arena," but also in the political

science discipline charged with interpreting and evaluating the procedures and components of these omnipresent structural entities (Hawkesworth, 2005, p. 150). When political scientists overlook or exclude operations of gender power presented through feminist knowledge production, they fundamentally prioritize, reproduce, and legitimize male power and gender injustice within male-dominated sites of intellectual investigation (Ibid.). As feminist scholarship continues to challenge widely accepted androcentric presuppositions, it also compels the political science field to honor its hallmark norms of objectivity and systematicity by giving equal and thorough consideration to all theories under its purview. Indeed, if political scientists “are not open to new forms of knowledge, then political scientists will fail to explain a political world in which some citizens are vulnerable to [GBV],” thereby replicating gender-blindness, impeding rigorous understanding of gendered violence, and undermining efforts to achieve sociopolitical gender equality (Behl, 2019, p. 168). Therefore, feminist inquiry is an invaluable division of the political science field in that it both subverts the discipline’s reigning paradigms as well as augments conventional perspectives by introducing complex and nuanced conceptions of political processes that continually shape human life.

REFLEXIVITY AND POSITIONALITY

I further draw from the guidelines of feminist inquiry (Ackerly & True, 2010a; Ackerly & True, 2013; Hawkesworth, 2005; Nagar & Geiger, 2007) and mindfully utilize my “translocational positionality” (Anthias, 2008, p. 5) to first explore then iteratively reexamine the complex realities of my physical and psychological trauma through a combination of progressively evolving lenses. Identity is not static but instead related to

context, meaning, and time, and therefore involves shifts and contradictions. I employ the feminist research ethic of critical reflexivity to examine the “complex ways in which power works through people and institutions” as well as how “power operates through ideas and research practices including [my] own” (Ackerly & True, 2013, p. 144). By understanding myself as the product of certain sociopolitical phenomena and “certain structures of knowledge and power,” I become more aware of ways in which I reproduce such structures and of my “possible role in transforming them” (Lowenheim, 2010, p. 1026).

As an interpretive researcher of mixed-methods studies, I alternate “between being in the phenomenon and stepping outside of it” (Enosh, 2016, p. 579) to identify factors that shape my positionality and influence how I generate and interpret knowledge (Clancy, 2013; Shwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Through “radical consciousness of self” and attentiveness to my shifting critical agency (Nagar & Geiger, 2007, p. 267) in facing and examining multiplex sites of power, I make sense of how my social circumstances and constructed identities inform my epistemological biases and influence my research designs and decisions (Ackerly & True, 2010a; Schatz, 2009; Shehata, 2006). As such, my social situatedness and relational positionality (Nagar & Geiger, 2007) thereby affect how I perceive various realities when analyzing events and interacting with participants involved in the autoethnographic component of my research study. I also remain mindful of the political dimensions of interpretive research by being acutely aware that the evidence analyzed in my study is cogenerated by both the researcher and researched and that knowledge construction is inherently political (Behl, 2017). Therefore, I recognize critical reflexivity and positionality as vital processes in all feminist inquiry aimed at

challenging normative definitions of knowledge and knowledge producers. Likewise, I recognize that attendance to this social situatedness is crucial in reshaping “meanings embedded in sociopolitical contexts, languages, and institutional cultures and struggles” (Nagar & Geiger, 2007, p. 276).

I integrate these processual approaches to all stages of this mixed-methods research in order to 1) elucidate my social identity and positionality; 2) provide a rich and transparent portrayal of how my meaning-making is inevitably linked to the interlocking systems of gender power through which I continually navigate; and 3) allow the readers of my autoethnographic study to judge for themselves the validity and value of my findings given the context around which I arrived at my conclusions. Furthermore, because interpretive analysis is grounded in collaborative evidence-generation and sense-making, it is also enlightening and potentially transformative for both the researcher and researched. As such, I regard the individuals involved in and depicted through my autoethnography not as informants, but as subject-participants – they are subjects who help in uncovering evidence, and in doing so, they are also participants in the research process (Ackerly & True, 2010b). As I study gender power operations in both the sociocultural communities and political-institutional environments to which I belonged, I also address the power dynamic inherent in my own research. In accordance with the feminist research ethic, I recognize and critically reflect on the researcher-subject-participant’s joint construction of evidence in the autoethnographic narrative I provide in Chapter 6.

Understanding my multifaceted identity as an amalgam of diverse roles and perspectives helps me to identify the different filters through which I interpret

information and give them meaning. This self-awareness enables me to elucidate the rationale behind my knowledge claims both to myself and to the readers of my autoethnographic analysis (Pachirat, 2009). This keen awareness of myself in all stages of my research sheds light on my role in cogenerating knowledge and provides me with the methodological means to reveal a more “credible and realistic version of events” (Clancy, 2013, p. 15). My purposeful and conscientious reflexivity discloses how the patriarchal, misogynistic, and victim-blaming cultures of my former sociocultural and academic settings were systematically embedded in my personal belief structures and impacted the way I understood my ever-evolving identity in relation to my trauma. In my liminal position as both interpretive researcher and GBV survivor, I am simultaneously knowledge producer and study participant; and as such, I am uniquely situated to identify the ways in which I had unconsciously adopted my environments’ oppressive and often demeaning epistemologies of victimhood. My positionality, socially constructed and informed by personal trauma, further enables me to recognize and continue to embrace my knowledge-based capacity to subvert these mantles of domination as I gradually rebuild my life, reexamine the sociopolitical and gender implications of my lived experience, and continue to negotiate the heterogeneous meanings of my survivorhood moving forward.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

I utilize a mixed-methods approach to explore the implications of gender symbolism and gender power within cultural and institutional responses to women survivors of GBV, and analyze how these ostensibly disparate environments similarly shape the way survivors experience their trauma in the aftermath of violence. I first examine archival records of published government documents from the South African TRC, with particular attention to the Enabling Act that mandates the tasks and objectives of the Commission as well as the truth-seeking body's Final Report findings on women's lived experience in seeking justice, healing, and reparations during post-apartheid peacebuilding efforts. Furthermore, I review the Commission's recommendations for sociopolitical reform to illuminate how women's rights and interests are addressed by this quintessential restorative justice mechanism. Through this textual analysis I also highlight and make intelligible the TRC's skewed conception of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation in the aftermath of gross human rights violations as it pertains to women survivors of GBV.

Additionally, I draw from past personal experience within my cultural community as well as in the academic institution to which I belonged in order to expose how political life is shaped in quotidian worlds and to give recognition to political realities and interests that may otherwise be unseen and unheard. I provide narrative testimony to also "give voice to [my] marginalized experiences, to analyze power relations, and to challenge conventional views on epistemology" (Behl, 2017, p. 585). I depict key interactions between myself and 1) my attacker, 2) his parents, and 3) my parents during

the time of my assault as well as in the immediate aftermath. I similarly present and analyze crucial communications I had with law enforcement and academic administrators during the period of my retraumatization after my attacker returned to my cultural community as well as enrolled in my school twelve years after my assault. I examine these detailed accounts through an interpretivist lens to present a nuanced evidentiary narrative that illuminates my lived experience as a survivor of sexual violence and a subject of androcentric operations and gender institutions. In doing so, I demonstrate the oppressive gender power dynamics perpetuated by various areas of sociocultural and political-institutional responses in my trauma recovery process.

I utilize autoethnographic analysis as a “practice of critical reflection on the embodied experience of knowledge making” and as a methodological approach that “provides social scientists with a means to account for their positionality in the research process” (Behl, 2019, p. 89; Dauphinee, 2010; Lowenheim, 2010). While similar to ethnography – which gives visibility to otherwise invisible phenomena in real world environments, and provides insight into marginalized perspectives that cannot be gained solely from more distant quantitative measures – autoethnography additionally aims to “challenge the subject-object separation by placing the researcher’s experience at the center of the phenomenon under investigation,” thereby “mapping power relations within the knowledge production process” (Behl 2017, 584; Schwartz-Shea & Majic, 2017; Brodtkin, 2017; Forrest, 2017). Founded on the premise that people do not function in a vacuum, both ethnographic and autoethnographic researchers seek to contextualize individuals’ political behaviors and modes of thought by becoming a “conduit of research and a primary vehicle of knowledge production” (Shehata, 2006, p. 246). These

researchers likewise navigate within networks of power to examine the real-life settings in which sociocultural and political-institutional processes are developed and shaped (Brodkin, 2017, Pachirat, 2009). However, autoethnography advances interpretive knowledge production further as it “conceives of the individual not just as an interpreter of social reality,” simply offering a different perspective on broad social reality, but also as “someone who can understand herself through thinking about social institutions, practices, and phenomena” (Lowenheim, 2010, p. 1025).

In order to shed new light on general social mechanisms and constructs by revealing the exercise and pervasiveness of certain forms of gender power, I adopt the autoethnographic presupposition that people are complex and ever-evolving human beings. I combine this premise with critical feminist theory built on self-reflexivity and committed to illuminating the 1) aspects of “unequal power relations,” 2) “boundaries of inclusion-exclusion and forms of marginalization” of people and ideas, and 3) “situatedness of the researcher” in the research process (Ackerly & True 2013, p. 136-137, p. 153). Additionally, I engage in this methodological pluralism because autoethnography and feminist inquiry both provide vantage points different from mainstream strategies for studying political behaviors and beliefs that “essentially disassemble individuals into disparate component parts” (Dhamoon, 2013; see also Brodkin, 2017, p. 131). Autoethnography is also particularly well-suited for this critical analysis given that its refusal to deconstruct people into neatly and “analytically relevant categories that can be modeled or measured in relation to variables of interest” (Brodkin, 2017, p. 131) is an inherent rejection of the oppressive, and often androcentric, tactic aimed at binding individuals to static designations (Dauphinee, 2010). Therefore, in

rejecting the paternalistic codes of conduct and value systems within the political science discipline, and in resisting the vast dominance of patriarchal hegemony in sociopolitical phenomena, my engagement in autoethnographic research is also a subversive act because the methodology itself is subversive.

In the subsequent sections, I describe 1) the circumstances surrounding my sexual assault at age fourteen-years, 2) my complicated, nuanced mindset during the twelve years that elapsed between my assault and my acceptance into medical school, 3) the struggles I faced during my time as a medical student after my attacker enrolled in my school, and 4) how the institutional response of my academic administration denigrated my lived experience in survivorhood. In each context I make visible how various power operations mold the “shifting, contextual, and relational contours” (Nagar & Geiger, 2007, p. 267) of my social identity and my positionality relative to the people and institutions with which I interact. I navigate through social, academic, and cultural arenas of political activity that are not necessarily recognized as political because they occur on the periphery of conventional political channels (Behl, 2017; Behl, 2019). Yet these settings and phenomena may be understood as political to the extent that they have bearing on how beliefs are shaped and how interests are advanced or suppressed by directly or indirectly affecting who gets what, when, and how (Lasswell, 1936).

CHAPTER 4

LITERATURE REVIEW

TARGETS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

While I acknowledge that women are not the sole sufferers of GBV, they are historically and disproportionately targeted in these crimes – both during national unrest and in peacetime – more than any other human group worldwide, and endure lasting repercussions in the aftermath of violence (Alcorn, 2014; Anholt, 2016; Chun & Skjelsbaek, 2010; Nobel Women’s Initiative, 2008). This then implies the existence of systematic and intentionally destructive machinations at play that require further in-depth and sustained investigation into the asymmetric gender implications of these horrific offences as well as the sociocultural and political-institutional responses to women survivors. However, my study’s explicit focus on women survivors is in no way meant to negate or disclaim the devastating effects of GBV on the other populations that it afflicts.

SYSTEMATIC GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

As feminist scholars of international relations have recognized that war is profoundly gendered, so too are they illuminating the ways in which post-conflict peacebuilding is both influenced by and complicit in perpetuating androcentric notions of human life. By equating certain individual actions and structural forces with masculinity and righteousness, transitional justice efforts in the aftermath of armed conflict, genocide, revolution, and other settings of national unrest effectively legitimize immoral and unjust policies that disadvantage and marginalize women worldwide (Borer, 2009; Hawkesworth, 2005; Lambourne & Rodriguez Carreon, 2016; Enloe, 2000). Martha

Minow discerns it is in the postwar era that nation-states internationally are faced with the dilemma of coping with the lasting suffering of conflict – in particular, they must answer questions regarding “how much to acknowledge, whether to punish, and how to recover” (1998, p. 2). However, conspicuously excluded from these peacebuilding considerations are crimes of GBV and the needs and interests of women who suffered these gross human rights violations (Lambourne & Rodriguez Carreon, 2016).

Despite the innumerable reports and sufficient evidence of rampant wartime sexual GBV available for juridical action since as early as World War II, these crimes were completely overlooked on a global scale as no related charges were brought forth in the post-bellum Nuremberg Trials or any other international criminal court proceedings (Alcorn, 2014; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002; Adams, 2018; Banwell, 2014). It was not until the end of the Cold War in 1989 that the world community saw a surge in peacebuilding measures take effect, resulting in sweeping changes that initiated a reshaping of global politics to include systematic violence against women in the definitions of crimes against humanity in subsequent decades (Bastick, Grimm, & Kunz, 2007; Dallman, 2009; Hagay-Frey, 2011; Skjelsbaek, 2015; Hayner, 2010). Even then, however, legislative policies and political-institutional practices and procedures were largely ineffective in attending to the nuanced and complex issues of GBV in a just manner and commensurate with the degree to which these crimes were carried out (Lambourne & Rodriguez Carreon, 2016; Borer, 2009).

Following the termination of violent hostilities and in societies transitioning from either war to peace or from autocratic to democratic regimes, peacebuilding operations commenced as a multilateral enterprise with diverse actors and both provisional and long-

term strategies to prevent future conflict as well as correct past injustices committed in conflict settings (Bakiner, 2015; Hayner, 2010; Lederach, 1996). As Wendy Lambourne & Vivianna Rodriguez Carreon observe, transitional justice mechanisms, such as international criminal tribunals and truth commissions, emerged to address gross human rights violations including, for the first time in recorded history, violence that expressly targeted women and girls based solely on their gender (2016). Regardless of this development in recognizing the denigrations, prohibitions, and obstructions women face as the result of gender power relations, however, the transitional justice system continues to marginalize women by disregarding their right to justice and reparations as well as invisibilizing their needs through organizational procedures that deprioritize women's interests.

In spite of the substantive contributions of contemporary international criminal courts – such as the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda – by officially defining rape and other GBV as a war crime as well as prosecuting and sentencing rape in conflict settings for the first time under several international core crimes (Adams, 2018; Skjelsbaek, 2015; Banwell, 2014), these international trials are also guilty of disregarding many women's right to justice and either directly silencing their voices or secondarily overlooking their narratives. Alexandra Adams details the ways in which prosecutorial bodies are compelled by their political authorizing bodies to secure as many convictions as possible through a course of action based on “trial economics” (2018, p. 754). For instance, the ICTY and ICTR were known to convict multiple wartime rapes of one individual or multiple individuals together as a single act, or combined with other criminal acts – e.g., murder or torture –

as one indictment to persuade defendants to confess, thereby producing an efficient trial process with a sure conviction (Ibid.). This commonly used tactic effectively obscures the extent and severity of gender-based crimes, ensures impunity for many perpetrators of GBV, and deprives many women survivors the justice to which they are entitled (Adams, 2018; Allais, 2011).

Similarly, scholars and practitioners of peacebuilding and transitional justice have criticized trials for their reductive and constraining rules of evidence and procedure in trial processes that result in 1) a limited range of crimes prosecuted, 2) narrowed scope of truth established, and 3) valuable information, such as that in survivor testimonies, excluded (Bisset, 2012). In the cases of women survivors of GBV, the accounts of their suffering are overlooked or marginalized, challenged through cross-examination, or prioritized below other evidence considered more likely to secure a conviction (Bisset, 2012; Brouneus, 2008; Lambourne & Rodriguez Carreon, 2016). Criminal trials' omission of many women survivor testimonies as irrelevant or unnecessary not only devalues women's lived experience as unworthy of consideration as well as provide legal loopholes by which male perpetrators of pervasive human rights abuses can avoid accountability and circumvent the justice system, but this common practice also paradoxically undermines fact-finding and reconciliation efforts.

Counterproductive, androcentric, and inherently conflictive conditions are not unique to international criminal courts in the aftermath of war and national unrest, however, as past and present truth commissions also struggle to fairly and respectfully attend to the needs and interests of women survivors of GBV. Recent literature increasingly challenges the assertion of many twentieth-century political institutions and

reconciliation studies which assert that offering public testimony, a requirement of most truth commissions, afford opportunities for survivors to heal (Bisset, 2012; Brouneus, 2008; Lambourne & Rodriguez Carreon, 2016; Ephgrave, 2015; Bakiner, 2015). Because the healing process is especially complex, non-linear, and subjective in crimes of such a stigmatized nature as GBV, recounting experiences “may be empowering or cathartic for some [survivors], but for others, it may reignite anger and prove highly traumatic” (Ibid, p. 38). Despite modern day transitional justice investigatory bodies moving away from their “gender blind” predecessors and implementing gender mainstreaming efforts “to encourage women’s participation,” women continue to “experience shame and fear of public ostracism if they reveal they were raped” during testimonies for criminal prosecutions and truth commission proceedings (Lambourne & Rodriguez Carreon 2016, p. 79).

Tristan Anne Borer argues that, while women are targeted with sexual violence during all types of armed conflict specifically because they are women, their gender continues to mark them for unjust and revictimizing treatment in the aftermath of violence (2009). Jan Jindy Pettman additionally contends that in order to transform social and institutional structures in the aftermath of conflict to foster lasting peace, transitional justice mechanisms must also examine and address the gender power relations both before and during conflict that enable the execution of systemic mass atrocities against women (1996). Furthermore transitional justice mechanisms are generally products of peace negotiations, which are deeply gendered processes as “negotiators from both state and non-state parties [of] the conflict as well as international negotiators [are] overwhelmingly men” (Borer, 2009, p. 1172). As such, “conceptualizations of how

accountability, justice, and human rights will be approached cannot help but be gendered” and the status quo, wherein state peacebuilding politics move forward often at the detriment of women, remains intact (Ibid., p. 1172). A prominent comparative study conducted by the International Center for Transitional Justice encapsulates the lived experience of women in peacebuilding settings by exposing how retributive and restorative justice operations tend to 1) underreport crimes of GBV, 2) silence the women’s voices, 3) minimize their testimony in reports, and 4) deprioritize their needs and goals in official recommendations for sociopolitical reform and juridical prosecutions (Nesiah, 2006). In this regard, survivors of GBV are markedly revictimized and marginalized by the very systems that pledge to secure for them the justice to which they are entitled.

The dismissal of women’s suffering and silencing of their narratives in the aftermath of GBV by international criminal court practices, the revictimizing of women survivors and stigmatization of their lived experience by truth commission procedures, and the overall marginalization of women’s interests by both paradigmatic mechanisms of transitional justice evinces the fact that “there is a near universal tendency for women to lose out in state consolidation politics during peacebuilding” (Borer, 2009, p. 1171). This demonstrates the pandemic impact of gender symbolism that devalues women’s roles in and contributions to their societies and can be explained by culturally normalized gender power relations within sociopolitical phenomena, which are constructed by dualistic notions of culturally appropriate feminine versus masculine behavior, status, and worth. When the impetus is placed entirely on women survivors to facilitate national healing and reconciliation through retraumatizing public testimony and unjustified

forgiveness of male perpetrators, peacebuilding societies and institutions reveal their roles in maintaining the androcentric structures of belief that inherently require women to sacrifice themselves and their needs for the protection and wellbeing of men. This consistent adherence to masculinist beliefs and practices by past and current transitional justice systems alike – which foster injustices long after conflict has ceased and as women survivors of GBV struggle to rebuild their lives – reveals that the vast majority of international legislative bodies, democratic regimes, and far-reaching policy interventions are in dire need of comprehensively transforming the inherently defective and markedly asymmetric hierarchy of gender power that continue to undermine their peacebuilding endeavors for reconciliation, national unity, and justice (Lambourne & Rodriguez Carreon 2016).

Although many studies on international relations and peacebuilding have concluded that current inadequate transitional justice mechanisms must be approached with a focus on “transforming psychosocial, socioeconomic, and political power relations in society” in order to attain equitable human rights for women and build sustainable peace, there strikingly remains a lack of rigorous scholarship centered on illuminating the problematic gender-related causes of transitional justice’s deficiency as it pertains to addressing the needs of women survivors in the aftermath of GBV (Ibid., p. 71). When scholars and practitioners of transitional justice proactively highlight problematic gendered aspects of peacebuilding responses to GBV, they continually fail to substantively demonstrate the formidable ubiquity of gender power and gender institutions socioculturally constructed through insidious gender symbolism. Furthermore, within both existing political science and gender studies literature, there is a

virtual absence of comparative analyses that examine gender power inherent in responses to women survivors of GBV across contexts – in both settings of national unrest and peacetime.

Similarly, there is insufficient scholarship investigating how the profoundly embedded nature of gender symbolism inevitably constructs and governs social activity, institutional practices, structuring procedures, and value systems at both the international and local levels. This lack of exposure and transparency is highly problematic in that the global political community at large is either kept uninformed of the insidious gendered forces operating pandemically or is provided with a convenient excuse to collectively turn blind eyes to the innately destructive capacity of patriarchal hegemony and the full reach of defective and markedly androcentric sociopolitical phenomena. As such, practitioners and scholars of transitional justice and post-conflict reconciliation are exempt from being held accountable for their legislative policies and conceptualization of peacebuilding operations that grossly affect the lived experience of women, universally, and survivors of GBV, specifically. Without a system of checks and balances provided by rigorous feminist inquiry that illuminates the multidimensional workings of gender power, international and regional policymakers alike will continue to lack the motivation to counteract this relentless impediment to attaining justice and equality. Thus, only by uncovering and making intelligible the gendered forces propelling widespread victimization of women in both national unrest and peacetime, as well as the retraumatization and marginalization of women survivors in the aftermath of GBV, can the pattern of institutional complacency and inertia be broken and toxic legislation and

structural practices be transformed to best benefit the individuals for whom they are fundamentally created.

CHAPTER 5

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE RESPONSES TO WOMEN SURVIVORS OF GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE

INTRODUCTION

Since their widespread implementation in the 1980s and 90s, truth commissions have not been devoid of controversy nor are they currently strangers to political contestation and accusations of bias. However, innumerable scholars and practitioners of post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives have rationalized this restorative justice mechanism's shortcomings by delineating the limiting factors with which truth commissions must contend, namely, their brief mandated life spans, unavoidable resource constraints, and restricted historical periods authorized for investigation (Bakiner, 2015). Extensive transitional justice studies have similarly defended the deficiencies of truth commissions by pointing to the widely accepted perspective that in the precarious and unorganized setting immediately after armed conflict or regimes changes – when truth commissions are often established – the combination of fragile political settlements and institutions crippled by war or national unrest impedes procedures of many reconciliation endeavors (Bisset, 2012). According to this viewpoint truth commissions are ostensibly inaugurated within compromised infrastructures not conducive to their success as these challenging backdrops exacerbate the already cumbersome and complicated affair of truth-seeking investigations, thus resulting in unproductive ventures toward national harmony and reconciliation.

Notwithstanding these considerable impediments, I argue that transitional justice efforts will inevitably fail in their idealistic peacebuilding aspirations – no matter the

sociopolitical settings in which they are embedded – because of the gender power imbalances and structural inequalities inherent in their political-institutional design. Given that peacebuilding efforts habitually marginalize women in their hypocritical quest to foster national unity through unequal social healing, they cannot claim to be effective when they are selective of which populations deserve justice and which must bear the disproportionate burden of continued mistreatment and indignity. I focus on the South African TRC, an internationally established restorative justice mechanism, because it is a paradigmatic example of the peacebuilding systems that have risen to global prominence in the past few decades, with many nations implementing transitional justice operations that either replicate or emulate the Commission’s procedures and scope (Bakiner, 2015; Bisset, 2012; Hayner, 2010). In addition to its progressively growing impact on the world community, the TRC also vigorously professes to be the fruitful alternative to criminal court proceedings in providing a safe platform for survivors of GBV to voice their experiences of violation and have their needs for healing and reparations met. As such, truth commissions must be held to a higher standard than their juridical counterparts and must themselves embody the unbiased, gender inclusive, and transformational capabilities that they so stringently claim their retributive justice foils lack.

I specifically highlight the practices and procedures of the South African TRC vis-à-vis women survivors of GBV to illuminate how gender symbolism, inculcated through centuries-long patriarchal hegemony, has pervaded so deeply into all facets of sociopolitical operations that even investigative bodies claiming to rectify and reform injustices precipitated by inequitable value systems are paradoxically influenced by as well as directly perpetuate these exact gendered structures of belief. I additionally

contend that, not only are perpetrator-centered judicial recourses through criminal courts ineffective in attaining retributive justice for women survivors in the aftermath of GBV (as extensive research has demonstrated), but every stage in restorative justice operations likewise fail survivors as they are all infused with asymmetric practices and gender power that privilege men and simultaneously retraumatize and marginalize women. I also provide analogous evidence in Chapter 6 via an autoethnographic study involving peacetime GBV to show that social and juridical organizations leveled by revolution and genocide are not the chief obstacles thwarting meaningful institutional responses to women survivors struggling for justice in the aftermath of violence. I further argue that, despite the many iterations of ill-suited and poorly executed peacebuilding initiatives competing to be the optimum pioneering alternative to deficient modern-day transitional justice mechanisms, and regardless of an absence or existence of war-torn sociopolitical infrastructures, political-institutional responses to women survivors in the aftermath of GBV (both during national unrest and in peacetime) will be intrinsically defective because the problem is not logistical but ideological and behavioral.

SOUTH AFRICAN TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

Because truth commissions are an “inherently conflictive space for action and reflection by virtue of the tensions and contradictions built into their institutional design,” they have also proven to be either unable to or incapable of divorcing themselves from the gendered practices and value systems of the male dominated authorizing bodies that instituted them as well as the patriarchal societies within which they navigate (Bakiner, 2015, p. 6). From the Enabling Acts that dictate this truth-seeking entity’s course of

work, to the procedures of the truth commissions themselves, and ultimately to the recommendations for sociopolitical and institutional reforms brought forth in final reports once investigations have concluded, this quintessential restorative justice mechanism consistently and irredeemably adheres to a hierarchy of gender power that undermines its purportedly inclusive and impartial objectives. As a result, women survivors of GBV during armed conflict and national unrest are again forced to bear the repercussions of inexplicable trauma in the aftermath of violence, further compounded by systemic revictimization that is both legitimized by gender institutions and justified through androcentric value systems designed to subjugate women. Because extensive scholarship exists on how the South African TRC's practices and procedures adversely impact women survivors of GBV (Borer, 2009; Lambourne & Rodriguez Carreon, 2016; Ephgrave, 2015; Brouneus, 2008), I focus instead on the gendered ideology behind the mandate of the Commission's Enabling Act that precipitated the demonstrably retraumatizing lived experience of women survivors during peacebuilding. I likewise examine the gender institutions and embedded gender power that both influence the TRC's findings on human rights abuses against women and justifies the investigatory body to put forth official recommendations for reform that essentially deprioritizes, or omits altogether, the needs and goals of GBV survivors.

GENDER INSTITUTIONS AND THE ENABLING ACT

On December 15, 1995, South African President Nelson Mandela appointed commissioners for the TRC with Archbishop Desmond Tutu as Chairperson. The Commission held its first meeting in Cape Town the following day to establish four

committees and develop a collective plan of action based on the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, Number 34 of 1995. A main objective mandated by the TRC's Enabling Act was to "uncover as much as possible of the truth and past gross violations of human rights" since this task was "necessary for the promotion of reconciliation and national unity" (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998a, p. 49). Through eliciting testimony from different perspectives and populations impacted by the injustices of the nation's apartheid era, the TRC hoped to acknowledge untold suffering and restore dignity to survivors, while affording perpetrators the opportunity to come to terms with their own past (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998a). Despite these good intentions, however, the Parliament-mandated guidelines allowed for too narrow an interpretation of gross human rights abuses, which largely excluded individuals who suffered both direct and secondary injustices – many of whom were women survivors of GBV – that did not fit neatly into the Enabling Act's exacting definitions of grave crimes against humanity.

Meanwhile, the Commission, inflexibly adhering to its reductive Enabling Act, failed to substantively address the gendered implications of these limited definitions of violations that essentially forced complex offenses such as GBV outside of its restorative justice purview (Borer, 2009). The TRC "recognized that these issues formed part of the broader context within which the specifically defined gross human rights violations had taken place" and acknowledged that submissions from many humanitarian organizations made valuable contributions to the Commission's understanding of the gendered context "within which the gross violations of human rights took place" (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998c, p. 11). However, the gender implications of GBV

during apartheid were paradoxically not considered in victim hearings, despite providing “depth to the larger picture” of gross human rights abuses because they “could not be interpreted as falling directly within the Commission’s mandate” (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998c, p. 12). As such, the TRC’s Enabling Act demonstrated a systemic internalization of gender power throughout state institutions when it instinctively marginalized women survivors of apartheid-related injustices before the Commission even began its investigations.

Arguably more telling than what is expressly mandated in the TRC’s Enabling Act are the striking omission throughout this directive (as well as in the thousands of pages comprising the Commission’s Final Report) of clear guidelines on how to define gross human rights violations in terms of gender. Although the mandate regards “rape, sexual assault, and abuse or harassment...as constituting severe ill treatment,” these common forms of GBV are officially recognized as gross human rights violations (and thus qualify for financial reparations or redress of grievances) only if they “meet the general criteria that apply to all gross violations of human rights” that includes resulting in “serious or permanent physical or mental” injury (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998a, p. 80-81). Given that the mandate’s definition of gross human rights violation does not specify whether psychological effects from trauma constitute serious mental harm, women survivors predominantly tormented with post-traumatic stress symptomology in the aftermath of GBV were thus not explicitly included among individuals considered deserving of reparations. Furthermore, these criteria are inherently gendered in that men historically comprise the majority of deaths during wartime and national unrest, while women are disproportionately more likely to

experience nonlethal human rights violations such as rape and other forms of sexual violence that, although do not consistently result in grave bodily damage, are enduringly agonizing nonetheless (Leiby, 2009). As such, the TRC's dependence on observable physical injury to gauge the severity of apartheid-era abuses essentially restricts gross human rights violations to the injustices predominantly suffered by men, thus prioritizing the interests of male citizens over those of their female counterparts.

Because GBV is complex, multivariate, and nuanced, these uncompromising and reductionist criteria deny many women survivors of GBV the truth-seeking experience and recompense they deserve, since the atrocious harms they suffered did not necessarily leave clearly visible nor easily measurable wounds. Furthermore, "factors [that] were taken into account in determining whether particular suffering or hardship was severe," and subsequently used to determine proportional reparations, included "duration [of hardship]," "physical or mental effects," and "age, strength, and [pre-existing] state of health of the [survivor]" (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998a, p. 80). Yet, nowhere does the mandate attend to gender as a pivotal indicator for severity of suffering, despite many women enduring not only direct violence such as rape and sexual torture during the half century of apartheid but also indirect and structural violence including socioeconomic and political discrimination and disadvantage by virtue of their gender (Lambourne & Rodriguez Carreon, 2016).

Moreover, the mandate has an overall myopic approach to national healing and reconciliation in that it 1) fails to take into consideration the long-term effects of human rights violations such as GBV; 2) prioritizes the personal interests, reputation, and safety of alleged perpetrators over those of survivors; and 3) is unwilling to expand its scope

and meaningfully address how past inequitable legislation was designed to enforce apartheid as a means to expose vulnerable populations (including women) to violation and abuse. In the case of GBV, by solely focusing on contemporaneous physical and psychological injuries caused by mass violations, the TRC's Enabling Act disregards – and in essence, discounts – the pervasive gender power that preceded and enabled these crimes as well as other sociopolitical phenomena that disproportionately burdened women. In so doing, the TRC continually permits normalized male dominance to persist unimpeded in state systems, institutional structures, and interpersonal relations (Hawkesworth, 2005).

This patriarchal privilege is further emphasized vis-à-vis the issue of perpetrator rights, in which the mandate specifies that no naming occur where “the identities of individuals and institutions involved [is] unclear” and only the institution is to be named “where the identities of both individual and institution [are] clear,” but where it is “not possible to verify or clearly determine excessive force or illegitimate claims of self defense” (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998a, p. 92). While there are protocols in place to protect individuals' reputations against unfair accusations, the mandate provides no analogous steps to protect the legal, emotional, or physical safety of survivors who are required to give public testimony against alleged perpetrators. With regard to pervasive GBV, these uneven dictates of the Commission's Enabling Act are tantamount to institutionally bestowed impunity for male wrongdoers while leaving women survivors exposed and vulnerable to potential harassment and retribution before, during, and after testifying (Brouneus, 2008; Ephgrave, 2015; Lambourne & Rodriguez Carreon, 2016).

The Commission, itself, ultimately conceded to marginalizing women survivors of both structural inequalities and GBV and deprioritizing their right to justice and reparations during South Africa's peacebuilding efforts, although not without striving to justify its actions (or lack thereof) as occurring beyond its control. Despite the TRC fully recognizing that "large-scale human rights violations were committed through legislation" passed by the apartheid government and asymmetrically impacted women, its focus was not on these state policies – "however morally offensive" – since its practices were limited to examining the "gross violations of human rights" that specifically included killing, torture, abduction, and severe ill treatment as defined by its mandate (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998a, p. 64-65). As such, the TRC acknowledged that it did not, and could not, integrate gender fully into its investigations for that would require it to amend its understanding of its Enabling Act. The truth-seeking body further admitted that its simplistic definition of gross human rights violations resulted in a blindness to the types of abuse predominantly experienced by women, who were targeted for violence, discrimination, and denigration based on their gender (Borer, 2009). Despite these striking deficiencies, the TRC's mandate and procedures not only prevailed unobstructed in South Africa but also continue to heavily influence the practices of many subsequent truth commissions worldwide, with few countries making meaningful attempts at providing a gender-sensitive, gender-responsive, or gender-inclusive approach to transitional justice (Lambourne & Rodriguez Carreon, 2016; Bakiner, 2015; Bisset, 2012; Hayner, 2010). This reality exhibits a common global view that women's needs and interests are irrelevant in the peacebuilding process and thus inferior, disposable, and undeserving of basic human rights.

The fact that the TRC – an internationally renowned transitional justice operation – did not fully explore the role of deep-seated, centuries-long patriarchal hegemony in enabling and driving significant human rights abuses as well as intentionally overlooked GBV against women from its investigative scope demonstrates how standard operating procedures and regulations perpetuate asymmetric gender power both within communities and throughout entire nations. These gendered conceptions of appropriate behavior and entitlement to human and civic rights subsequently creates androcentric governments, courts, international organizations, and – in the case of South Africa – parliaments that dictate biased objectives for truth commissions, leading to skewed investigative procedures that advantage men over women (Hawkesworth, 2005; Bakiner, 2015). Additionally, that the TRC was thoroughly aware of its gender exclusive procedures and nonetheless proceeded in its endeavors for the sake of South African peace evinces an internalized disregard for women’s rights across sociopolitical phenomena and a systemic prioritization of masculine concepts – e.g., national security and state interests – over the welfare of women (Hawkesworth, 2005). In this sense, as the mandate claims its measures are aimed at “rehabilitating and restoring the human and civil dignity” of individuals who suffered injustices from apartheid legislation and practices, its work instead confirms that only *male* individuals fall under the category of whom the parliamentary authorizing body and, by extension the TRC, considers humans deserving of fundamental rights (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998a, p. 57).

GENDER POWER IN FINAL REPORT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORM

President Mandela received the TRC's Final Report on October 29, 1998 after his own party initiated an "eleventh-hour court interdict to block" its publication, and with an entire page of the document redacted at the insistence of former President Frederik Willem de Klerk to remove what he viewed as derogatory comments against him (Bakiner, 2015, p. 172). As the Commission was consistently explicit and resolute in claiming that its overarching goal of reconciliation would be achieved in the course of its two and a half year lifespan, the South African public expected nothing less than nationwide healing and unity to result from the truth-seeking body's findings and ultimate recommendations. However, following the Final Report's publication, tensions that were already brought to the fore during the investigative proceedings were further heightened over the meaning of the national past (Bakiner, 2015). In the aftermath of apartheid, persistent hostility and strained relations were largely exacerbated by the TRC's public hearings that unveiled state initiated and institutionally enforced human rights abuses as well as by high-ranking Commission officials who coerced survivors to forgive perpetrators immediately following their initial testimonies (Hayner, 2010). Further disproving this purportedly unbiased peacebuilding mechanism's idealistic presumption that truth is not only definitive and uncomplicated but also the straightforward path to reconciliation, was the public uproar in response to the Commission's highly anticipated recommendations for sociopolitical, economic, and institutional reform.

I assert that it is not mainly the transitional and thus capricious state of South Africa's infrastructure post-apartheid, the contentious regime change, or even the perceived impossibility of reconciliation after mass human rights abuses that continually inhibited the TRC's success. It was instead the Commission's obdurate compliance to the "history of patriarchy that accompanied and supported" the apartheid system and its facilitation of human rights violations that planted the seeds for the truth-seeking body's failure during peacebuilding (Borer, 2009, p. 1180). As evidenced by the gender symbolism present throughout its interpretation of findings and the gender power influencing its recommendations for reform, the TRC's intrinsic tendency to omit or diminish women's disproportionate burden of apartheid era injustices in its Final Report is akin to self-sabotage as it counterproductively undermines the Parliament and Commission proclaimed desire to move forward as one people toward healing and forgiveness. Women were simultaneously forced to 1) accept the incoming South African government's definition of justice; 2) tolerate their institutionally imposed invisibility within transitional justice efforts; and, for the sake of national peace and unity, 3) sacrifice their justifiable desire to see perpetrators punished, all while being sacrificed themselves as collateral damage in the peacebuilding process that denies them their right to meaningful healing and reparations commensurate with the injustices they predominantly suffered.

In contrast to the Commission's Enabling Act, which neither specify the gender implications of many human rights abuses that disproportionately afflicted women nor expressly consider women's needs and interests in its guidelines for investigative tasks, the TRC's concluding volumes briefly reflect on the ways in which women were subject

to more restrictions and suffering than did men during the half century of apartheid. However, these sections appear to serve more the appearance of comprehensiveness rather than a need to meet the truth-seeking body's professed goals of accurately identifying the prevalence and nature of gross human rights violations and justly apportioning blame for offenses and reparations to survivors in order to facilitate reconciliation and rebuild peace. Occupying the final chapter in Volume 4 and mentioned on a single page in Volume 5, women's experiences of injustice and their needs in post-apartheid South Africa emerge nearly as an afterthought in the TRC's mammoth Final Report. This perfunctory and curtailed discussion of women's traumatic lived experience during the apartheid era not only reveals the nearly nonexistent regard paid to women's rights and quality of life, but also demonstrates how "patriarchy remains largely intact" in the post-apartheid era (Borer, 2009, p. 1180).

In disregarding the violations suffered systemically and predominantly by women, the TRC fundamentally fails to officially establish the culpability of those responsible for the substantial human rights abuses that are gender-based in nature, leaving perpetrators unaccountable for their actions, and thereby paradoxically marginalizing a large segment of the survivor populace in the pursuit of collective national reconciliation. The instances where women are explicitly included in the Final Report, however, they are treated separately and "relegated to a category of essentialized difference, at the same time as differences between women were homogenized" (Borer, 2009, p. 1181; Goldblatt & Meintjes, 1999). The women-focused Chapter 10, which concludes Volume 4 of the TRC's Final Report, begins by articulating that the "suffering caused by influx control and [apartheid] related laws was not only physical but attacked the very selfhood of many

women,” and it continues on to indicate ways in which gender roles and socialization inhibit women from political and socioeconomic participation in the public sphere as well as make them more vulnerable to disadvantage and exploitation (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998b, p. 290-291). This ostensible acknowledgment of how gender power and gender institutions either directly cause or indirectly sanction GBV and structural violence against women is initially encouraging. However, the remainder of Chapter 10 diverges from its gender-sensitive introduction as it then conversely subscribes to an androcentric logic of appropriate behavior and civic duty as well as adopts patriarchal structures of belief that legitimize biased investigative practices and gendered understandings of truth-seeking outcomes.

Immediately following the brief explanation of gender as a social construct, the sole chapter on women’s issues, abuses, and hardships within the multi-volume Final Report focuses predominantly on the various types of pervasive “silences around the gendered nature of atrocities under apartheid” (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998b, p. 294). The Commission noted that it encountered women’s silences on their suffering from gross human rights violations in the following forms: 1) speaking only as “secondary victims” – as relatives of men who had suffered; 2) reluctance to come forward and testify as a result of feeling as if their sufferings were less severe than those of many other people; 3) remaining silent about “illegal activities” out of a desire to protect their families and themselves and to forget terrible experiences; 4) refusal to lay bare their trauma because they did not believe there are ready and supportive listeners; and 5) hesitance in relating experiences of sexual violations since doing so would result in a loss of dignity (South African Truth and Reconciliation

Commission, 1998b, p. 295-296). The TRC further discovered throughout the course of its work that, of the many motivating factors driving silence, the possibility of stigma and sociocultural ostracism from sexual GBV was the most consistent in compelling resolute silence among women survivors, making this particular human rights abuse one of the most difficult to address (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998b).

The Final Report further documents instances throughout the truth-seeking process, both during the hearings and within survivors' public and private communities, where a combination of gender symbolism, the Hermeneutic conception of power, and subsequent internalized misogyny was culturally recognized, impacted the TRC's standard operating practices, and determined whether women achieved healing and just reparations for the crimes they had suffered. As detailed in the Special Hearing on Women, survivors of GBV testified that "if [they] said that they were raped, sexually abused, or sexually tortured in their communities or while in detention during apartheid, they were regarded as having sold out to the system in one way or another" and "women [in the survivors' communities] were among the cruelest in enforcing these attitudes" (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998b, p. 296). This is "because women are supposed to be [people] that are protected by [men]," and thus revealing rape and other "gender-specific offences" exposes the weaknesses of men who have failed in their socially recognized duties as saviors of women (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998b, p. 297).

This counterproductive pattern of repercussions in response to women's testimonies on GBV illuminates how the asymmetric hierarchy of gender difference based on androcentric structuring practices that normalize male dominance is maintained

to 1) oblige women survivors of GBV to sacrifice their need to heal and desire for justice in return for the overall good of their communities, a duty socially expected of womanhood; 2) grant protection for the pride and dignity of male perpetrators, an entitlement culturally bestowed onto them by virtue of being men in a patriarchal society; and 3) condition female peers of women survivors to take part in denigrating and constraining survivors' lived experience by upholding androcentric structures of belief and socially accepted codes of conduct.

The Commission's official findings demonstrate how gender symbolism, based on dichotomously opposing traits, infuse into social activity and organize the structuring procedures of political institutions such as the TRC, thus naturalizing male advantage at the expense of women's wellbeing. Respectability, strength, and responsibility are associated with masculinity and perceived as required characteristics for leadership roles in society – which are also considered to be exclusive male domains – while purity and virtue are valued in women. As such, men are thereby shielded from phenomena that debunk their noble reputations and threaten their dominant status in society, while women are coerced into silence regarding the GBV they have suffered for fear of marring the unspoiled state of existence they are socially compelled to personify. Additionally, rather than acknowledging that publically disclosing gender-based crimes to official truth-seeking bodies justly condemn male perpetrators and facilitate a redressing of human rights abuses, truth-seeking narratives from Commission hearings instead shift to the androcentric trope of rape disclosures secondarily victimizing the male heroes tasked with defending women's honor. This Hermeneutic conception of women as fragile beings perpetually in need of rescue while simultaneously expected to sacrifice their needs to

safeguard the social standing of men undermines the TRC's goals of healing and reconciliation in that it invisibilizes women's suffering, marginalizes their right to justice in survivorhood, and negates their roles as equal social citizens. Lastly, the fact that South African women are some of the most rigorous proponents of gendered viewpoints that blame women survivors for revealing male wrongdoing attests to the universal embeddedness of gender power in patriarchal societies.

Despite these notable findings that can be applied as an investigative catalyst for further exploration of institutions infused with patriarchal structures that discriminate against women both before and after violence, as well as guide meaningful inquiry into gender relations percolating throughout peacebuilding processes, the TRC chooses to overlook the implications of these silences. Rather than adopting a gender-sensitive approach to statement-taking that increases the focus on sexual violence and other gender-based offenses as well as sheds light on the preexisting sociopolitical, economic, and structural matrix of gender power and inequality in South African society that drives this "profound silence about women's violence experiences during apartheid," the Commission focused instead on how women were as responsible as perpetrators for the difficulty of post-apartheid truth-seeking (Lambourne and Rodriguez Carreon, 2016, p. 80). Former TRC Commissioner Yasmin Sooka understands this phenomenon, wherein both survivors and perpetrators are unwilling to reveal the truth about sexual GBV, as a "conspiracy of silence" that somehow implies a "bizarre collusion" between individuals and the abusers who gravely injured them (Sooka, 2004; Krog, 1998). This insular and naïve perception is at once absurd and dangerous since it demonstrates a victim-blaming mentality by implying that if perpetrators of mass atrocities were unable to be identified

and held accountable, survivors would be at fault for not adequately contributing to national reconciliation procedures. This myopic conception also frames a false equivalency that allows institutions to use survivors' complex decisions and behaviors to homogenize their lived experience in the aftermath of trauma, and reduce them to scapegoats for defective restorative justice efforts aimed at uncovering the comprehensive truth about gross human rights violations.

When self-proclaimed impartial truth-seeking bodies, such as the TRC, adopt – even unconsciously – the institutionalized “coding of certain forms of human conduct as inherently masculine or feminine” and decry individuals who deviate from the gendered logic of appropriate behavior, they become complicit in perpetuating a cycle of gender power that privileges men's interests over those of women. In much the same way that these patriarchal value systems and androcentric sociopolitical structures made South African women vulnerable to abuses specifically as women during the decades of apartheid, this male monopoly of power is deployed against women survivors during peacebuilding by the very systems claiming to work on their behalf (Borer, 2009; South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998c). Because criminal courts possess masculine connotations of stalwart, forceful, and proactive righteousness, truth commissions serve as striking juxtaposition to their retributive justice counterpart by advancing feminine qualities of morality, virtuousness, and forgiveness in restorative justice operations (Hawkesworth, 2005). Whereas male juridical officials evidently dole out prosecutions in top-down peacebuilding efforts, truth commissions place the onus of national reconciliation on survivors of gross human rights violations, particularly women survivors, since they are the socially recognized peacekeepers of humanity. As such,

when women refuse to testify for fear of a multitude of culturally imposed, gender-based ramifications – including public ostracism, shame, stigma, and retaliation – they are not only viewed as failing an entire nation, but also considered deficient in their obligations as women in society.

The tenacious grip that gender power has on myriad sociopolitical phenomena in the aftermath of mass atrocity is further demonstrated in the censoring attitudes and disproportionate pressure placed on women to accept the responsibility of procuring peace and reconciliation in the aftermath of violence and injustice. The TRC demonstrably subscribes to the gender symbolism that places restorative justice ideals within the female domain as it perceives truth-seeking to be a burden for women survivors to bear. Hence, GBV survivors experience a coercive catch-22 when navigating the practices and procedures of institutional peacebuilding operations. Firstly, women survivors are expected to thoroughly heal so as to restore the social fabric of communities; however, they are criticized for the gradual speed at which they recover from their traumas if they cannot bring themselves to forgive their abusers after initial cursory testimonies before the TRC (Tutu, 1999; South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998b). Secondly, the Final Report defends its inability to unearth many important truths of apartheid injustices by highlighting women's silence – in essence blaming women for not speaking up, while the Commission disregards prevailing cultural and institutional factors that make it impossible for women to publically vocalize their experiences without facing long-term repercussions for their testimonies (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998b; Borer, 2009). In this respect, women are retraumatized when testifying, denigrated for the content of their truth, and maligned if

they remain silent in a perpetual cycle of revictimization throughout their interactions with gendered peacebuilding institutions and androcentric transitional justice policies.

Moreover, markedly asymmetric expectations for women versus men are further exhibited when male perpetrators were not obligated to confess their wrongdoing, whereas women survivors were compelled to divulge their experiences of GBV via public testimonies in Commission hearings. The TRC concedes in its Final Report that, despite the Amnesty Committee providing a reasonable set of criteria for individuals to come forward and confess to crimes in order to qualify for amnesty, very few men came forward to claim their past misdeeds and no person admitted to crimes of sexual GBV (Borer, 2009). Despite this conspicuous pattern of behavior, however, the TRC did not focus on this striking and questionable phenomena or highlight the civic duty of all citizens to proffer truthful information; instead, it reemphasized the need for women survivors to come forward with their testimonies of victimization so as to further illuminate the national past and facilitate national reconciliation (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998b). Because the Commission is a gendered, political-institutional apparatus espousing the conception of male roles as leaders and defenders of the homeland while women are duty-bound to embody the symbolically female attributes of sacrifice and forgiveness, South African women are called upon by purportedly unbiased restorative justice mechanisms to not only heal themselves for the betterment of their country, but to obediently do so while accepting the fact that they will likely never see their abusers held accountable. Forcing women to speak on their experiences of GBV without simultaneously ensuring that men do the same of their crimes “does little more than maintain the culture of impunity, with little to no accountability” and is hardly

conducive to a peacebuilding system that endeavors to attain justice by apportioning blame to perpetrators of gross human rights violations (Borer, 2009, p. 1181). This counterintuitive practice fundamentally undermines the very cornerstone of forgiveness inherent in reconciliation efforts, for how can there be forgiveness when there is a scarcity of officially recognized crimes and perpetrators, and thus no established wrongdoing, to absolve?

Within the sociopolitical phenomenon of transitional justice, a clear dichotomy characterizes the overall lived experience of women survivors in general and women GBV survivors in particular. Women consistently face institutionally imposed revictimization or marginalization in survivorhood, with periodic reported cases of empowerment lost amongst the patriarchal milieu of peacebuilding. Regarding women GBV survivors in South Africa, either 1) they are obliged to give public testimony of their experiences and suffer again the cultural backlash of patriarchal value systems, and all the physical and psychological trauma that it entails – as revealed by extensive ethnographic studies on the impacts of truth commission procedures; or 2) their needs are disregarded and their interests relegated to the periphery of national consciousness – as seen by the glaring lack of reforms explicitly aimed at improving women’s human rights in the more than 100 recommendations of the TRC’s Final Report (Ephgrave, 2015; Hayner, 2010; Bisset, 2012; South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998c). As the parliament-established TRC perpetuates gender power by infusing preexisting coding of appropriate sociopolitical roles that privilege men and constrain women’s lives with “exclusions, denigrations, and obstructions,” it thereby effects a type of sanctioning by default of the uneven requirements placed on the national populace in

post-apartheid society (Hawkesworth, 2005, p. 147). Indeed, while South African men were granted protective stipulations that shielded them from unfair and defamatory accusations throughout the truth-seeking process and asymmetrically benefited from the recommendations for reform once investigations concluded, their female counterparts were institutionally compelled to sacrifice their desire for justice and reparations while also being sacrificed themselves in the exclusionary political-institutional truth-seeking machinery for the ostensible betterment of their society.

JUSTIFIED INEPTITUDE

Given the inevitably weakened civic infrastructure during national transitions and regime changes, peacebuilding operations such as criminal tribunals and truth commissions have responded to accusations of ineffectiveness, bias, and unsuitability by shifting blame to the combination of fragile political settlements, deficient judicial systems, and inadequate economic resources that largely preclude states from comprehensively addressing gross human rights violations (Bisset, 2012; Borer, 2009). With regard to rectifying crimes of sexual GBV and addressing the needs and interests of women survivors, truth commissions, including the South African TRC, have defended their flawed and exclusionary approach by additionally claiming the violations predominantly experienced by women cannot be adequately integrated into their investigations as gender-based abuses are not interpreted as falling directly within the truth-seeking entities' mandates (Borer, 2009; South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998b). I argue in the succeeding chapter that the continual injustices women survivors face in the aftermath of GBV is not principally dependent on the

sociopolitical state of affairs within their nations or communities, since they are revictimized and marginalized in their sociocultural and political-institutional environments even during peacetime. I also reveal in the following autoethnographic study how women's needs and interests are rarely considered in the aftermath of GBV, regardless of an existence or absence of legislative stipulations and political constraints.

Furthermore, in response to controversy over the ways in which the Commission's negligent and gender-insensitive actions vis-à-vis women survivors of sexual GBV counterproductively result in needless and avoidable retraumatization of survivors and sustained impunity for perpetrators, the TRC directs attention to its Special Hearing on Women as evidence of its gender-inclusive practices, wherein it homogenizes women's complex and nuanced experiences of GBV and deemphasizes their post-apartheid needs. The Commission additionally faults women for their allegedly obscure testimonies, or lack thereof, and their unwillingness to readily forgive abusers for perpetrating blatantly selective, gender-based injustices. As such, not only are human rights abuses that disproportionately affect women trivialized and subsumed under broader issues of injustice, thus invisibilizing their distinct suffering, but they are also rebuked and scapegoated for the failings of the very institutions tasked with advocating for their rights and facilitating their rehabilitation. I demonstrate in Chapter 6 that even when women survivors are transparent about the GBV they suffered and proactively do all within their power to report their perpetrators to legal and institutional authorities in the hope of effectively managing their situations, these women are nonetheless continually revictimized and marginalized in survivorhood.

CHAPTER 6
PEACETIME RESPONSES TO WOMEN SURVIVORS OF GENDER-BASED
VIOLENCE
INTRODUCTION

I argue that the critical challenges of peacebuilding efforts are not war-torn political or socioeconomic infrastructures, counterproductive limitations of truth commission Enabling Acts, or the intrinsic difficulty in unearthing painful truths that undermine the work of truth commissions and other transitional justice mechanisms. Rather it is the gender power, which insidiously pervades all levels of political-institutional ideologies and practices, that sabotages institutional responses to women survivors of GBV. I additionally contend that, contrary to what practitioners and scholars of peacebuilding and transitional justice widely believe, the precariousness of post-conflict society is not the chief reason why women survivors are prevented from receiving the support and just reparations they deserve, since these rights are denied women survivors during peacetime as well. It can be reasoned that if enfeebled and war-ravaged structural operations alone are capable of thwarting transitional justice systems, and since comparable hurdles are not encountered in the course of sociocultural and institutional responses to GBV during peacetime, then similar failings would be avoided in the absence of national unrest. Indeed, if these extenuating circumstances are the determining factors in successfully procuring peace, healing, and reconciliation in the aftermath of systemic human rights violations, then it can be logically inferred that analogous political-institutional and cultural mechanisms during peacetime – absent the

reverberations of conflict and national unrest – would not have similar insurmountable obstacles to contend with and thus be effective in redressing crimes of GBV.

In the following autoethnographic study, I explore my lived experience as a survivor of GBV, first in the immediate aftermath of my assault, then twelve years after the crime occurred, in order to show that, absent armed conflict and national unrest, women survivors of GBV nonetheless lack the opportunities to experience their survivorhood in a just and dignified manner. I highlight four specific instances during my assault experience at age fourteen that demonstrate 1) the gendered symbolism which normalizes male dominance, makes men believe in their gender superiority, and assures them of their entitlement to possess women; 2) the cultural stigma of sexual GBV endured by women, and the conspicuous lack of stigma imposed upon men for being perpetrators of assault; 3) the ways in which gendered structures of belief grant men protection from the consequences of their wrongdoing, while these same value systems require women to absolve men of their sins; and 4) the ways in which women, as the targets of assault, are invariably blamed for how they experience their own trauma and for not recovering quickly and seamlessly enough so as to shield the rest of society from their unseemly suffering. I then focus on my lived experience as a medical student twelve years after my assault, and illuminate how my former academic institution exhibited gender power and androcentric standards of operation in its response to my situation when my attacker returned to my social and professional worlds by returning to my cultural community and enrolling at my school.

I further contend that endeavors to correct gender-based injustices will continue to fail survivors – both in the context of post-conflict national transition and in peacetime

settings not ravaged by war and mass atrocity – so long as they are fundamentally governed by gender power constructed via deep-rooted gender symbolism that percolates throughout countless sociopolitical phenomena and various dimensions of cultural life. I show that, similar to cases of GBV addressed in peacebuilding endeavors during national transition, omnipresent gender symbolism motivates and condones violence against women, revictimizes survivors and invisibilizes their needs in the aftermath of GBV, and relentlessly shields male perpetrators from liability. By conceptualizing my personal trauma of GBV first within a childhood of shame and stigma, then throughout an adulthood of denigration and exclusion, I shed light on my lived experience and the interpersonal dynamics within my various communities. Through this process, I also concurrently explode the assumption that pandemic gender symbolism and subsequently inculcated gender power are only noteworthy in regard to their impact on the levels of institutions, as many international policymakers and political science scholars maintain. I likewise subvert the privileged attitudes that trivialize daily gendered experiences as irrelevant, and demonstrate how quotidian forms of gender power – often overlooked in disciplines of political science and legislation – are markedly destructive and whose far-reaching influence at the local and individual levels are no less consequential than gender power on the international stage.

THE PERPETUITY OF TRAUMA

I was assaulted on a Wednesday afternoon, five weeks after the Twin Towers fell. While many see September 11th as the pivotal moment that forever changed a nation, I remember that period as the time I died. I died on an unremarkable autumn day, as leaves

turned earth tones and temperatures gradually dipped. I died during the afternoon rush hour, while ice cream trucks made their rounds, and school children gleefully raced home to awaiting parents. I died as the cold, steel blade pierced through my chest and impaled the warm, pulsating flesh of my heart. I died as he stood over me, peering down at my torn dress and wide-eyed confusion, watching me drift away as my life's blood seeped out into a crimson pool around my crumpled body. I died as my eyes fluttered close, as I felt him bend down and press his lips forcefully on top of mine, as I heard him shut the door with a finality that would forever signify that moment. I died that day. No matter what reassurances the surgeon told my mother, no matter how miraculous a story the local news spun, no matter who I saw looking back at me from behind the mirror, the person I was before my attack never came back.

Subsequently, every breath I took reverberated with the awareness that my sentient life in the aftermath of my death was somehow offensively unnatural and my survival inexplicable. As I tried to understand how I could be both alive and dead, both healing and suffering, I also grappled with the liminality of my survivorhood, a disruptive middle state of unresolved tension. The abject space I occupied did not even merit categorical recognition in the social context of trauma; neither murder victim nor rape survivor, I belonged nowhere, not even within myself. Whether I was subsisting on borrowed time or fraudulently living the life of someone who no longer existed, I never felt quite deserving of the spaces I occupied. I never felt quite right in my own mind and body as if, by some obscene cosmic accident, my spirit was haphazardly dumped back into my mutilated shell to endure its grotesque memories and ineffable pain.

So, in an effort to hide my brokenness from society (and perhaps also from myself), I let the fear of who I had become drive me. I worked myself ragged until I was too exhausted to feel, earned degrees and accolades in an effort to prove my worth, and presented the serene, unbothered image of success in spite of my chronic shame and self-doubt. My lifestyle of barely living worked to rid me of my humanness, keeping the triggering memories at bay. I continued this way for eleven years after my assault until I reached what I thought was the zenith of my academic career (medical school), only to have my entire world implode a second time when my attacker came back into my sociocultural and academic environments. As a result, I was forced to once again absorb all the shards of my shattered life into myself where they lacerated my spirit as my erstwhile mentors attempted to trivialize my struggles and my purported advocates gradually disregarded my inconvenient existence. My former institution's eventual and outright abandonment of me further underscored how I am not worth prioritizing over an attempted murderer and rapist, that I do not deserve the success and support my attacker enjoys. Since then, I have lived in constant anticipation of the next catastrophe, mentally preparing myself for when I might be utterly wrecked again, while simultaneously doing everything in my power to prevent that from happening.

PEACETIME GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

The person who assaulted me at age fourteen was a boy I grew up with, whose parents were friends with mine, and whose sister I used to babysit. He had few friends, was socially awkward, and spoiled by his parents. He also exhibited such unpredictable mood swings that he tended to violently lash out at those around him in a moment's

notice. His mom used to say those times were just his way of releasing pent up energy, and that everyone knows boys just have so much stamina. After elementary school, he stopped scoring well on academic placement exams and he never won any of the scholastic awards for which he applied against me; facts which his mom never let him forget. His mom always reminded him of the differences in our grades, test scores, and academic honors. Her constant criticism of her son heightened in intensity and frequency in spring of our sixth grade year, when I placed in the prestigious International Baccalaureate program, which allowed me to enroll in high school courses the following year, and he did not. On multiple occasions thereafter she would ask her son, in my presence, why he would allow me, a girl, to exceed him. She mused that it was not the natural way of things for me to academically surpass him. Was he not ashamed? Could he not try harder? She would ask him how he could ever hope to marry me, or any girl for that matter, if he failed to succeed. What girl would want a husband who could not outdo her?

It was also near the end of elementary school when he became more violent, lashing out at other kids and especially his sister, beating her in fits of anger for the smallest slights or even when she was not directly connected to what had incensed him. On one occasion when his mom walked in on him wrapping a blanket around his sister's head and continuously punching the side of her ribcage, she told her son calmly to stop playing around and walked back out of the room. His mom never saw his behavior as anything other than the manifestation of excess vitality, perfectly normal and of no concern. The adults in my parents' group of friends never thought or did much in response to his outbursts either, except to tell their kids to avoid him when he became

unreasonable – after all, he was such a quiet and unassuming boy otherwise. I also did not mind him. Aside from periodically being irritated by his bad temper, I never felt threatened by him. He had always had violent tendencies, for as long as I had known him, but he never laid a hand on me – not until the day he tried to rape and kill me.

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, 2001

“Take off your clothes,” he demanded again, his knife trained on me. “What?” I said again. What was happening? He spoke my name, but I would not hear what he meant to say after that because I interrupted him. “Don’t be stupid,” I said.

He moved back and stepped behind the coffee table in my family room, putting some distance between us. He stood motionless, looking over at me for what felt like an eternity. “I’m nothing, I can’t do anything,” he finally said. “Everyone would be better off if I died.”

I told him his parents wouldn’t be better off. I told him it would kill his mom if he ever hurt himself. He looked up, then down again as if remembering the knife he was holding. He tightened his grip on the handle, “Take your clothes off.”

I looked over at him. I did not move. He reached for his temple with his free hand and grimaced. “My head,” he groaned. I swayed on my feet, and he jerked toward me, blocking my view of the stairway leading through the kitchen and toward the front door. Once he was certain I could not get around him, he said again, “I’m nothing.” He turned his attention back to the blade, which, much like his fingers, was smeared with droplets of my blood. He raised it to his chest, his arms shaking. “I should just die.”

“Don’t,” I mumbled. In that moment I actually felt sorry for him, this pathetic human being who had come to my home to rape and kill me, who had plunged a knife into my heart with such force that I choked on my own breath, and who had wrenched me from my body as he ripped the steel blade back out of my chest. This person, who made me feel like someone had reached down my throat and pulled out my lungs, now had me pitying him.

I could not tell where the blood was coming from; there was so much. My chest felt wet, there were red stains on my backpack and on the carpet where I stood. My biology paper revisions were due the next day. How was I going to submit them now? He had not moved. How long had it been? When would my mother get home from work?

“Don’t,” I whispered again, not knowing what else to say; but he did not seem to hear me. He was focused on the knife, held with both hands in front of him, blade aimed at his chest. Then he exhaled a loud, ragged breath and lowered his arms. He could not bring himself to do to his own heart what he had done to mine.

“I have to lie down,” I said, mostly to myself. I stopped caring; he could do what he wanted. I was so tired. My eyes closed as soon as my head hit the floor. Some time later – perhaps a couple minutes that felt like forever – I heard the rustling of movement and felt his lips press down hard on mine. Then the front door slammed shut.

It would be two more hours before my mother found me.

QUOTIDIAN PATRIARCHY

Gender symbolism not only shapes the practices and procedures of international regimes, state systems, and institutional structures – as seen during armed conflict and in

peacebuilding settings, as well as extensively illuminated by political science scholars – it also percolates throughout the daily lives of individuals in tacit and omnipresent forms. Gendered logic of appropriate behavior insidiously shapes our interpersonal relationships, influences how we perceive our identities in the context of our place in society at large, and governs how we navigate cultural expectations from our more intimate social communities (Hawkesworth, 2005). I was raised in a patriarchal Vietnamese refugee community with conservative values that upheld rigid gender roles and assigned gender difference by emphasizing that normative conduct and principles are based on universal symbolisms of what is feminine and masculine. As a male member of our community, my attacker was expected to personify the culturally coded masculine qualities of leadership, competence, and strength. He was additionally indoctrinated to believe that my accomplishments in academia, a historically androcentric field of reason and proficiency that advantages men, would result in a weakening of his own gender identity. As such, in earning the accolades that he wanted but could not procure, I was perceived as depriving my attacker of his male birthright while simultaneously overstepping my culturally designated gender boundaries as a female member of society.

Moreover, when my attacker's mom associated her son's scholastic capacity – which she perceived to be an indication of his future potential – with his ability to marry me, or any other girl, she conditioned him to understand his life's achievements as a means to acquire future rewards – i.e., women. In this respect, possessing me would demonstrate his manhood, and degrading me would prove his superiority, for what better way to exhibit his male dominance than overpowering the subversive female interloper who did not know her place and dared to outshine him? If academic achievements and

accolades are symbols of male primacy, and subsequently provide opportunities for further rewards in the form of female possessions, then by this rationale reaching the ultimate end of conquering a woman would effectively validate the worth of a man regardless of the means (scholastic or otherwise) he employs to overcome her. When my attacker sexually assaulted me to assuage his feelings of inadequacy and prove his ability to live up to societal expectations of masculinity, wherein men stake claim to women and women have no place in symbolically masculine cultural and institutional domains, he exhibited the malignant gender symbolism that sanctions violence and aggression toward women by virtue of their gender. Analogously, when I refused to submit to my attacker's demands on my body, thereby invalidating the sense of entitlement culturally inculcated in him and further reflecting his culturally-perceived failures back at him, he preferred to see me dead than have to continually be reminded of the defectiveness that was himself, the end product of destructive androcentric social norms.

POST-SURGERY, INTENSIVE CARE UNIT

Three days after my assault, I woke up in a hospital bed, in the intensive care unit of the children's hospital in my hometown. My eyes were blurry, there was an odd weight on my chest, and my head felt like it was full of cotton. Keeping my eyes open was a monumental task, so I closed them again and went back to sleep.

Some time later, I awoke to a woman's voice that I didn't recognize, saying my name. "You're awake," she said. "How are you feeling?" I mumbled something unintelligible, but she nodded as if she understood perfectly. She introduced herself as

Dr. Something-or-Other (I was not listening to her name) and said that she just wanted to talk.

I asked her where my parents were. She said they were right outside the hospital ward, that they were fine, and that they would be in shortly. I asked her what day it was, and when she told me, I said my mother must not have slept in a long time, not if I had been in the hospital for so many days – she must have rarely left my side. “Where’s my father,” I asked. There must have been panic in my voice, because the doctor made soothing sounds with her breath and patted my hand. That was when I noticed the needles and medical lines in my arms, held in place by flesh colored tape.

“Where’s my father?” I asked again. My neck ached, and my sides hurt. There were tubes in my chest, beside my sternum, at my right side under my arm, and near my left collarbone. “He has high blood pressure,” I said. “He can’t handle stress. Where is he?”

“They’re fine,” the doctor said. Her voice was different now, kind of wobbly. She sniffed loudly, took a deep breath, and started again. “You’re not supposed to worry about them,” she said. “It’s their job to take care of you.”

She was holding my hand now. She said she was a neurologist, and she had come to see how I was doing. “You lost a lot of blood,” she said. “You fainted for a long time.” She said it was unclear if and for how long my brain was deprived of oxygen. She said she needed to check and see how I was recovering, since problems could arise in situations like mine.

“But you’re fine,” she said. She patted my hand, and then squeezed it. “You’re just fine.” The doctor sniffed loudly again, then left after a few more consolatory

sentiments. Within seconds, my mother rushed through the curtain that surrounded my hospital bed, with my father following closely behind.

She rearranged the pillows beneath my head and leaned down to whisper conspiratorially, “You started your period,” she said. “At first, the doctors thought – ” she paused. “They weren’t sure. But it’s fine. Nothing happened.”

She was talking nonsense. I hid my irritation as she ran her fingers through my hair, pushing it away from my face. She continued fussing over me, but did not elaborate on the comments she had made. I looked to my father for clarification, but he said nothing. He stood at the head of my bed, looking down at me. I smiled at him, hoping he would find it reassuring, but his face was expressionless and he remained silent.

Shortly thereafter, the curtain opened again and my attacker’s parents walked in. Suddenly I remembered. At once, all the events of Wednesday afternoon came flooding back to me. Why were they here? Was he with them? Why would my mother and father let his parents come to my hospital bed?

My attacker’s dad looked at me, his face pained. He was about to say something when his wife interrupted. Her eyes had been darting around the curtained room, looking for something. “I haven’t eaten all day,” she said. She reached for the Jell-O cup on the food tray next to my bed. “Can I have this?” she asked. “Please, I’m so hungry.” My mother waved her hand dismissively and my attacker’s mom took the cup.

My attacker’s dad looked nervous, he seemed unsure about how to act, but finally he opened his mouth to speak. He was rambling at first, alternating between apologizing and pleading. I was not paying much attention to him until his last words made my head jerk in his direction. “If my son violated your daughter,” he said, his voice shaking,

“Then my family will fix this.” He said his family would take care of me. He said he would marry me to his son, when I was old enough, so that I would not have to endure “any more shame for the dirtiness” that had transpired.

I could feel my heart pounding within my bandaged chest. He would marry me to his son. His son, the person who had hurt me.

That was when my father spoke for the first time since I saw him. He looked at my attacker’s dad, his former friend, and there was something in my father’s eyes that made the other man stop mid-sentence. “Don’t you ever speak those words again,” my father said, clearly enunciating every syllable. His voice was even and his breathing calm, but the other man looked down, not meeting my father’s eyes.

My attacker’s parents left the hospital shortly after that.

ASYMMETRIC STIGMA

When violence and aggression are coded as inherently masculine characteristics, considered necessary instruments in noble sociopolitical quests to defend home and country, and rationalized as appropriate behavior for strong-willed and powerful contributing male citizens of society, monstrous offenses perpetrated by men – and particularly against women – are normalized, condoned, and overlooked (Diken & Laustsen, 2005; Hawkesworth, 2005). Conversely, to be exploited and abused as a woman, especially by virtue of being a woman, is socially aberrant and in direct opposition to the culturally recognized attributes of virtue, purity, and untroubled serenity foisted upon the female gender, and which are meant to sustain women’s roles as nurturers and unobtrusive supporters of their communities (Hawkesworth, 2005). In this

respect, when I was assaulted and thus sullied, I was in noncompliance with cultural stipulations for my gender and perceived as much more of a disgrace to my patriarchal community than my attacker, for at least he was acting in accordance with entrenched social expectations of masculinity, and thus could be pardoned for his wrongdoing. He recognized a threat to his male dominance and took action to rectify what he was conditioned to believe as a fundamental irregularity. Through the lens of gender symbolism that skews toward male advantage, I was perceived to have exceeded cultural expectations and overreached into a realm specifically reserved for men, so naturally my attacker took it upon himself to put me back in my place; and for his efforts, his father believed he should be rewarded with me as his future bride. In essence, this universal stigma vis-à-vis sexual GBV survivors provides yet another shield of impunity for male perpetrators in peacetime – as it does in settings of national transition – by shifting the focus and blame onto women and away from men, regardless of the general sociopolitical state of affairs.

DISCHARGED, AWAITING POLICE INTERVIEW

A few days after I came home from the hospital, my attacker's mom came over to our house, claiming that she wanted to see how well I was recovering. My mother had helped me down to the kitchen so I would not have to spend another day confined to my room. I sat at the dining table, sipping tea.

“You look like you're recovering well,” my attacker's mom said, beaming at me. I gave a curt nod. I could not even bring myself to look at her.

My mother made no effort to speak either, so his mom made small talk for a while. After a few minutes, my mother interrupted the other woman's ramblings. My mother thanked her for visiting and told her to leave because I needed peace and quiet to rest. As my mother started ushering the other woman toward the front door, my attacker's mom hurriedly pulled her arm out of my mother's grip.

"Wait, please don't tell the police he brought the knife from my house," she said in a rush. My mother was unable to hide her surprise. My attacker's mom hurriedly continued, "If they find out he had planned it, his punishment will be very bad. He could go to jail. His future will be ruined. Please don't ruin my boy's life."

"Where would the police think the knife came from, if not from your house?" my mother managed to say.

His mom said we could claim it was a knife from my home. She suggested we say that, during a fight, which children so often get into, her son grabbed a knife in our kitchen drawer and stabbed me with it in a fit of rage. My mother said no, that she would not lie to the police. The detective assigned to my case had not come to take my statement yet. He and the district attorney's office wanted to give me time to get my strength back before they paid me a visit. My attacker's mom knew this; she was with my mother in the hospital when the detective explained to my parents his intentions.

My attacker's mom said she knows we have a knife exactly like the one her son used to hurt me, that it was part of the cutlery sets she and my mother had purchased on a shopping trip together. She told my mother that all we needed to do was say the knife in police custody was our knife, then the crime would not be premeditated, and her son could get some leniency.

Again, my mother said no.

“Please,” his mom said. “Please, you’re a mother. Don’t you understand my pain?”

My mother said nothing.

His mom became more agitated and before I knew it, she had yanked open one of my kitchen drawers and was rummaging through it. She found the knife identical to the attempted murder weapon and threw it in my trash. “Why would you want to keep this around anyway?” she said. “It’s frightening, and it will give her flashbacks.” She pointed aggressively in my direction.

My mother walked to the trashcan and fished the knife out, rinsed it in the sink, and replaced it in our drawer. “We’re keeping the knife,” she said.

My attacker’s mom started to cry, mumbling something about how she had the worst fortune, how this must be bad karma from a past life’s sins. She said she wished none of this had ever happened, and that it felt like a nightmare. “Please,” she said again, directing her words at no one in particular. “Please have mercy on my son. He’s my only son.”

I could hear the desperation in her voice. I could feel the bile rise in my throat. My mother was quiet for some time. “He hurt my daughter,” she said finally.

“But he’s my *only* son,” his mom said again.

My mother looked over at the woman who she went grocery shopping with every weekend for the last decade, the woman for whom my mother advocated to be considered for a job opening at my father’s company, the woman whose family my mother had welcomed into our home when they had no place to live.

“He nearly killed my only child,” my mother said.

ENTRENCHED IMPUNITY

At its core, gender power – fostered through sustained and deep-seated androcentric imagery, ideologies, and standard operating procedures – is precisely formulated for the chief purposes of 1) shielding men from obstacles, 2) skewing sociopolitical phenomena and interrelational processes in their favor, and 3) absolving them of their sins by redirecting the burden of accountability onto the female targets of their wrongdoing (Hawkesworth, 2005; Borer, 2009; Lambourne & Rodriguez Carreon, 2016). As such, when my attacker’s mom schemed to pervert the narrative of my assault so as to lessen his culpability in the eyes of the law, she was not merely exhibiting an innate maternal desperation to protect her child from harm and suffering; she was also unconsciously subscribing to the pervasive hierarchy of gender difference that prioritizes his male interests over my female wellbeing (Hawkesworth, 2005). Her actions embodied the gendered logic that, despite her son’s immoral actions, he remained entitled to clemency and forgiveness because his future accomplishments and lifetime contributions to his community are expected to far outweigh any transgressions he committed, particularly against a female target. Furthermore, by pursuing his punishment and obstructing his upward mobility, I would be indirectly depriving society of his potential. In this sense, if my attacker, by virtue of being male, deserved leniency to preserve his promising future, then by extension, I was not worthy of securing justice for myself because my suffering was socially irrelevant and my culturally determined worth paled in comparison to that of my attempted murderer and rapist. Therefore, he must not be duly

condemned for his heinous actions against me, while I must also take on the responsibility of earning him reprieve for his intentional and calculated crime.

IMPOSED SHAME IN SURVIVORHOOD

In addition to the secondary trauma that my attacker's parents inflicted on me with their presence and disregard for my lived experience in the aftermath of GBV, I was also forced to bear the shame and internalized misogyny so deeply embedded throughout my patriarchal community that it had reached my own parents as well. During a particularly bad morning, when I was noticeably struggling to cope with my chest pain, my mother started to cry and blurted out, "Why did you have to open the door for him?"

I did not reply. I did not look at her. I was sitting on the living room sofa, propped up with pillows at my back because it had gotten difficult for me to breathe lying down. I did not move. I trained my gaze on the bamboo plant in front of me; the one my grandfather bought because a store clerk had assured him that it would bring good luck. My bandages were caught on my stitches for the umpteenth time that day, pulling at my skin. I could not remember the last time I showered or combed my hair. The doctors said not to get my stitches wet, so my parents had been treating me as if I were allergic to water. It hurt to breathe, but I had to keep coughing periodically, to expel any residual fluids from my lungs after my heart surgery. I gave a half-hearted cough. Then I coughed again, with more effort than the last. The upward rush of air forced my chest to expand outward, stretching the area around my stitches and forcing my heart up against my surgically fractured rib cage. I doubled over as the pain caught me off guard.

At the time, I could not have known that what my mother meant to say was, “I wish this hadn’t happened to you. I wish you didn’t have to go through this.” But instead, her words involuntarily came out in an accusatory tone that asked, “Why did you let this happen?”

Why did I let a boy who grew up with me into my home after he said he wanted company while doing his homework? A boy who my father drove, along with his sister and me, to school everyday. A boy whose family lived in my parents’ house for four months when they had nowhere else to go, when even their own relatives would not take them in. Why did I open the door for that boy?

Because there was no way I could have known he intended to rape and murder me that day. Because, at fourteen, I did not think the people I knew were capable of hurting me. I did not think that was the kind of world I lived in.

INTERNALIZED GENDER POWER

I should not have to justify my actions when the guilt is someone else’s to shoulder. I need not tolerate the gendered structures of belief tantamount to blaming survivors for being assaulted. Yet gender symbolism is so pervasive throughout civilization and gender power so hostile that sociocultural responses to women GBV survivors in the aftermath of trauma absurdly focus on what they did wrong to incur the justifiably wrath of men. Rather than striving to hold male perpetrators accountable, in order to secure justice for individuals who have been victimized and as a deterrent for similar crimes in future, androcentric value systems and masculinist cultural practices that safeguard male sociopolitical dominance work to silence women’s voices,

invisibilize their suffering, and devalue their needs. By this gendered logic, patriarchal standards of operation thereby signal to men that they are forever exempt from punishment for their heinous actions and emphasize to women that their interests will never take precedence over that of their male counterparts.

TRAUMA REVISITED

Despite the seemingly aberrant and almost bizarre nature of my lived experience in survivorhood, however, the circumstances surrounding my retraumatization and revictimization were not unique to the patriarchal community in which I grew up nor was it an isolated ordeal in society at large. My situation was in no way singular; I was not an exception but a typical example of the denigrating obstacles survivors continually encounter long after the physical violence against them has abated. In the following sections I shed light on experiences I had outside of my social community twelve years after my assault, when I was once again confronted with my attacker in an academic setting. I illuminate the ways in which my former medical school, recognized for its ostensibly progressive ideologies and impartial practices and procedures, was similarly influenced by gender symbolism that privileges men. I further reveal how this institution, hailed for its objectivity and respect for equitable policies, counterintuitively perpetuated unjust gender power that once again insulated my attempted murderer and rapist from accountability – thereby sustaining a cycle of impunity for male perpetrators of GBV – whereas I was expected to silently cope with my retraumatization as best I could.

INSTITUTIONAL REVICTIMIZATION AND MARGINALIZATION

In September of 2013, two months into my second year of medical school and over a decade after my assault, I met with my community's chief of police to report my attacker enrolling in my program and to explain my complicated situation. After our meeting, the chief referred me to a dean from my university to help manage my problem and a detective tasked with helping me obtain a protective order against my attacker. I met with each individual and was assured that my situation would be handled with the utmost expediency and care. Several days later, the dean called me with an update.

"Good news," she said, and for an agonizing moment, I felt hope.

"I spoke to him," she continued, meaning my attacker. "He understands the difficulty of this situation. He promised he won't come near you." That was it. She was done. Then she was silent, awaiting my response. I did not know what to say.

"Good news," I thought to myself. My head pounded with the reverberation of that incongruous phrase. Good news. Good news. Good news.

The detective contacted me a couple of weeks after I received the dean's call. He apologized for not reaching out to me sooner. He informed me that he was unable to obtain a protective order for me because I did not meet the criteria for one to be granted; and besides, even if I were to qualify, I would have to appear in court across from my attacker to plead my case, and why would I want to put myself through that trouble?

"After all," the detective said, "He gets a chance to defend himself too."

The detective also told me that he spoke to my attacker, and like the dean, praised the person who had tried to rape and kill me for his reasonable nature.

“He’ll leave you alone,” the detective said. “I don’t think you should worry. Besides, he just wants to move on with his life and put all this behind him.”

“Yes,” I said, my fingers tightly clutching my phone, my breathing labored, and my heart pounding. “I’m sure this situation is very difficult for *him*.”

Displeased with the responses I had received from the two people to whom the police chief had referred me, I asked my program’s Dean of Students for help. Initially, this dean was very comforting and supportive after I had told him the story of my past assault and my attacker’s presence at my school. I was satisfied at first and felt hopeful again. However, when he called me into his office shortly after our first meeting, my heart sank.

“There’s nothing I can do,” he said, his brow furrowed. He told me that my attacker passed the criminal background check required by my school. He said it was probably because “the incident” occurred when we were both minors.

“He was accepted to the program,” the dean said, referring to my attacker. “I’m sorry, but as a student, he deserves to be here as much as you do.”

I spoke to several more deans and administrative personnel after that, hoping someone would have a solution aside from merely advising me to move on with my life and to try to cope with my attacker’s constant presence as best I could. I must have retold my assault story more times during the first two months that I was meeting with various authority figures than I ever had in the twelve years since I was attacked. Ultimately, however, my actions were agonizingly carried out to no avail.

Subsequently, one of the deans I had been meeting with strongly suggested I take a personal leave of absence for the rest of the school year to “deal with this difficult situation.” My attacker was not asked to do the same. When I brought up this inequity to the Dean of Students, he said dismissively that I should not worry about what my attacker does or does not do, and that I can only control how I respond to my circumstances.

Upon my return to medical school after taking my leave, the group of deans and administrators who I had spoken to further required that I receive psychiatric therapy and also meet weekly with the Dean of Professionalism to update her on my healing progress. The psychiatrist I was assigned to (who later became one of my supervisors and evaluators during my third-year clinical rotations) promptly prescribed me three different medications: one to help manage my post-traumatic stress symptoms, another to make me sleep at night, and yet another to keep me alert throughout the day. After several months of navigating the rigorous and time-sensitive requirements of the medical school curriculum in a chemically induced mental haze caused by the cocktail of psychiatric medications I was taking, I again asked both the Dean of Students and the Dean of Professionalism for help.

“You have to put in the effort,” the Dean of Students said. “We have to be able say that you’re doing all you can to heal and successfully complete medical school.”

He said everyone was counting on me to overcome this obstacle. Everyone was hoping that I won’t jeopardize my chances of getting into a residency program.

“Do you still even want to be here?” the Dean of Professionalism asked. I knew she was referring to the medical program. She reasoned that if I truly wished to be a

physician, then my heart should be in the game and I should do whatever it takes to achieve my goal.

“Do you still want this?” she pressed again.

“Do I?” I thought to myself.

“You’re going to struggle. Do you hear me? You’re going to struggle.”

I was standing across from one of the physicians who taught the two-week Ethics Block prior to start of third year clerkships. She had asked me to stay behind for a few minutes to tell me that she noticed I was not at my best. She was standing across from me, at arm’s length, as she repeated the words that expressed how she felt about my intellectual capacity and my ability to complete the curriculum requirements. She told me she was worried I would not be able to keep up with the rigorous obligations of third year clerkship rotations, since they were “a completely different animal” than courses and labs alone.

“You’ve got to get it together,” she said. “You’re going to struggle.” She thought she was telling me something I did not already know. She thought she was helping me.

I wanted to ask her what she wanted from me. I wanted to say, “So what then? What are you going to do for me? Aren’t you going to help me at all? Or do you just want me to quit? Do you want me to drop out?”

What was the whole point of telling me how inadequate of a medical student I am? What was her objective? I wondered why she would discourage me with such demoralizing proclamations then leave the conversation in limbo with no constructive feedback on how I could improve. How did she expect me to respond?

I wanted to say a lot of things, but instead I said, “I’m sorry.” I noticed I had started apologizing for myself a lot more frequently once my attacker came back into my academic environment. Apparently everything that went wrong after his return was my fault.

“I’m sorry,” I said again. “I’ll try harder. I’ll do better, I promise. It’s just that my PTSD has recurred, and I –”

“Everyone has PTSD,” the physician said. “Medical school is a traumatizing place, I know. I had PTSD, too.”

I wanted to tell her that my symptoms did not arise from the inherent stress of medical school. I wanted to tell her that I constantly felt unsafe in class because I knew he was around; that I would hyperventilate in the hallways for fear of running into him while walking alone; and that I would grip my pepper spray so tightly my knuckles would turn white as I rushed to my car every night in blind panic because I did not qualify for a protective order against him, which meant there was nothing legally preventing him from hurting me again. I wanted to tell her all those things and more.

Instead I said, “I’m sorry.”

Three years after my attacker came back into my social and academic communities, I met with my program’s Dean of Students and told him I wished to withdraw from medical school.

“Alright,” he said, leaning back in his chair. He reached into one of his desk drawers and took out a blank sheet of printer paper. “Write down today’s date, your name, and that you’d like to withdraw from medical school,” he said. “Then sign it.”

He said that under normal circumstances, when students contemplate withdrawing from medical school, he would give them at least a week to mull over their decision, but with me, he did not think that necessary. I did what he instructed and handed the paper back to him. He said he would submit the request to the registrar's office so that I would not need to come back to the medical school after that day.

"I'm going to need your badges now also," he said. I handed him my IDs for all the hospitals where I had completed clerkship rotations. He looked at my ID from my first year in medical school. "You've changed so much," he said. "I don't even recognize you in this photo."

"Yes," I said. He put my IDs in the same drawer he had taken the sheet of paper from.

"It's a shame," I said. "To have gone through all that I have, to have done everything I've done, only to leave in the end."

"Yes," the dean said. He was quiet after that, looking over at me from behind his desk.

I felt like I should say something to fill the silence, to nonchalantly demonstrate the confidence and courage I did not actually feel. So I shrugged and said, "Oh well, it is what it is."

He nodded, "It is what it is."

I shook his hand and walked out of his office, leaving the medical school for the last time.

GENDER POWER WITHIN GENDER INSTITUTIONS

Although GBV in wartime versus peacetime often contrast widely in how it is executed by perpetrators and experienced by survivors, the gendered ideologies that dictate appropriate codes of conduct and structural practices analogously drive these crimes in both contexts, and subsequently influence the sociocultural and political-institutional responses to women survivors in the aftermath of violence. Following my sexual assault, I experienced the cultural stigma of impurity and the expectation to sacrifice my needs during my healing process while my attacker enjoyed the impunity reserved for male perpetrators in patriarchal societies. Similarly, when I was retraumatized over a decade after my assault when my attacker returned to my social and academic communities, my wellbeing and interests were once again marginalized and even disregarded, while my attacker experienced no such denigrations and had very few institutional challenges to overcome.

Not only did my academic administrators expect me to be satisfied, and even grateful, for the minimum effort they exerted in responding to my situation, but law enforcement additionally justified their inaction and powerlessness in attaining legal protection for me by rationalizing that my attacker must have changed in the years since he nearly succeeded in raping and murdering me, and thus no longer deserved to be socially or professionally burdened by his past crimes. Furthermore, my medical school administration required me to abide by an abusive and hastily improvised scheme that included 1) delaying my academic progression; 2) squandering what little free time I had with ineffective meetings and ineffective cognitive therapies; and 3) further impairing my physical and mental health with ill-suited psychiatric medications, callous disregard for

my personal safety, and overall negligent treatment of me. After deciding that my attacker had a right to be at my academic institution, the medical school deans determined that I, as a retraumatized survivor of GBV requiring long-term and conscientious support, was the actual problematic factor in need of neutralizing.

Despite my acquiescence to the administrators' every demand and when it became clear that my post-traumatic stress symptoms could not be medically excised out of my psyche or be made to simply dissipate after a brief allotted timeframe, the deans concluded that I was no longer worth their energy. They gradually distanced themselves from my situation, while occasionally informing me of my inevitable failure in medical school and suggesting that I reconsider my chosen profession. As such, when I ultimately decided to exit my former academic environment and cut ties with the oppressive administrators who demeaned my survivorhood by prioritizing my attacker's impunity over my interests and wellbeing, the deans eagerly took advantage of that opportunity to rid their program of my inconvenient presence. This desire to erase me, along with my survivorhood lived experience, from my academic institution's collective memory was particularly evident when the Dean of Students casual confessed that I was to be deprived of the thorough and measured withdrawal process afforded previous medical students. Instead of allowing me the customary seven days to contemplate my momentous decision, I would instead be removed from the medical school's enrollment records immediately, thus depriving me of the opportunity to change my mind.

Similar to the patriarchy-infused institutional practices of truth commissions during national transition, every component of the male-dominated medical academe is saturated with asymmetric practices and gender power that privilege men and

simultaneously deprioritize women. In much the same way that women survivors of GBV are continually made to endure exacerbated trauma and revictimization during state consolidation and regime change, so too was I forced to bear the repercussions of my male attacker's return to my academic world as well as compelled to recover from my retraumatization swiftly and silently so as to not disrupt the uncompromising medical school curriculum. Androcentric privilege is further emphasized in the uneven requirements that my former administrators placed solely on me, which were tantamount to institutionally bestowed impunity for my attacker, and unambiguously conveyed that I was not worthy of the support or protection that my attacker enjoyed. This universal reality of female survivorhood exhibits the global gendered view that women survivors' needs and interests are irrelevant – both in the aftermath of national unrest and during peacetime – and only deserving of perfunctory and idle consideration before ultimately being sacrificed in exchange for the impunity of male perpetrators and preservation of male dominance.

While I – like many feminist scholars – challenge universalizing assumptions of women's experiences and reject the gendered ideologies that attempt to homogenize women survivors of GBV into a reductive sisterhood of trauma (Dhamoon, 2013), I assert that many dimensions of my peacetime lived experience in survivorhood reflect that of the unjust struggles women survivors of GBV face in settings of national transition. As I contended with the deeply embedded and omnipresent gender power in my cultural and academic environments so too are women survivors of GBV being continually revictimized and invisibilized in the aftermath of armed conflict and national unrest by the very operations tasked with attending to their suffering and rectifying the

human rights violations perpetrated against them. Gendered institutions, including academic organizations and law enforcement systems, eagerly normalize forgiveness of male perpetrators and rationalize their reintegration into society as a matter of course, all while relegating women survivors to the fringes of their own communities where they are forced to tolerate a lived experience of repressed, denigrated, and concealed survivorhood.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The denigrating and exclusionary realities of female survivorhood worldwide exhibit the universally gendered perception that women survivors' needs and interests are socially and politically inconsequential – both in the aftermath of armed conflict or national unrest and during peacetime. Thus, women survivors of GBV are only afforded cursory consideration before being ultimately sacrificed in exchange for the impunity of male perpetrators and preservation of male dominance. As women survivors are continually revictimized and invisibilized in the aftermath of national unrest by the patriarchal operations tasked with attending to their suffering and rectifying the human rights violations perpetrated against them, so too must their peacetime counterparts contend with the deeply embedded and omnipresent gender power of the sociocultural and political-institutional environments through which they navigate. Whether it be the paternalistic legislation and procedures of truth commissions during national transition, the steadfast androcentric rules and regulations of male-dominated academe and other institutions in the public domain, or the patriarchal gender symbolism that dictates culturally-accepted codes of conduct, nearly every aspect of sociopolitical life is saturated with asymmetric gender power that privileges men and simultaneously deprioritizes women.

At present, women survivors are continually burdened with avoidable injustices in the aftermath of GBV. This reality is not principally dependent on the sociopolitical state of affairs within their nations or communities, since they are revictimized and marginalized even during peacetime. As historically demonstrated by legislative policies,

institutional practices, and cultural value systems at both international and regional levels, societies worldwide eagerly normalize forgiveness of male perpetrators and rationalize their reintegration into society as a matter of course, all while relegating women survivors to the fringes of their own communities. Women's entitlement to a just and dignified lived experience in survivorhood is rarely considered in the aftermath of GBV, regardless of the international legislation, political stipulations, or infrastructural development that have been globally lauded in recent decades as innovative, gender-sensitive, and gender-inclusive. This is because the root cause of existing androcentric phenomena that further debase women in survivorhood is not external and logistical, but deep-seated and ideological.

IMPLICATIONS OF EXISTING RESPONSES

Despite the need to make meaningful sense of ideological mechanisms that make possible gender symbolism as well as construct gender power and gender institutions, it is equally important to not disregard the complex individuals who are embedded in these sociopolitical phenomena, who are directly affected by them, and who continue to know these recurring circumstances as naturalized realities of daily life. Likewise, it is imperative to avoid adopting a misguided “fictive distancing” – a pervasive belief within academia and fields associated with international politics that only an exclusive class of experts are suitably placed to offer “input on issues of political and social import through the pursuit of appropriate research” (Dauphinee, 2013, p. 348). Because few scholars and legislators ever personally encounter the violence of a political world or experience the GBV about which they write or upon which they have built their careers (Ibid.), it is all

the more critical that researchers and policymakers never forget the human beings whose lived experience they deploy as evidence to substantiate meaningful knowledge production and legislation. As such, GBV research must continually and rigorously meditate on the real-world human implications of GBV responses across time and contexts as well as proactively and veraciously accentuate the voices of individuals most impacted by such phenomena and who appreciate this multiplex of trauma and injustice on an acutely visceral level.

The reality is there are women survivors currently suffering alone and in silence, who reasonably think that they have nowhere to turn because no one is on their side, who have witnessed – in the cases of their fellow women survivors who have spoken up and demanded justice in the aftermath of GBV – a stagnant, derelict world that permits unchecked and blatant infliction of physical, psychological, and structural violence upon women. These women survivors grip onto their untold stories of trauma and bury their narratives deep within themselves in a last-ditch effort of self-preservation because they keenly understand the devastating effects of omnipresent and irredeemable political-institutional entities that perpetuate androcentric gender power, thereby 1) enabling GBV, 2) endlessly revictimizing women survivors, and 3) upholding male privilege and impunity. However, even as women survivors of GBV are continually forced to absorb the shards of their shattered personhood into themselves and expected to carry on in a society that has eviscerated their spirits, they nevertheless rip themselves apart to conjure up the strength and resilience necessary to subsist in survivorhood, to repeatedly recover from relentless retraumatization, and to painstakingly conceal their chronic wounds so

that they and their sociopolitical contributions are not stigmatized by the communities and institutions that previously neglected them in their time of need.

Women survivors of GBV have no choice but to persist and overcome all the asymmetric demands placed upon their gender, while male perpetrators are undeservedly insulated from repercussions for wrongdoing. If this reality persists, GBV – of any kind and in all contexts – will never cease. As long as GBV in both national unrest and peacetime is neither successfully prevented nor suitably punished to deter future violations, male perpetrators will come to recognize (if they have not already done so) that their gross human rights abuses and disproportionate offenses upon the bodies and psyches of women are not socially, legislatively, or institutionally considered crimes at all – or at least not offenses worth officially penalizing. With the free reign secured by gendered authorizing powers and buttressed by gender institutions and androcentric sociopolitical practices, crimes of GBV will inevitably continue to worsen as male perpetrators become more confident in their impunity and bolder in their abusive approaches. Therefore, meek acquiescence, pointless compromise, and stalling tactics are out of the question; society no longer has the luxury to linger in complacency and turn a collective blind eye to the flagrant dehumanization of women in general and women survivors of GBV in particular.

Cultural communities and individuals in leadership roles also cannot hide behind the self-congratulatory mentality of trumpeting their minimum efforts in order to escape valid accusations of complicity. If society acknowledges the fact that women's needs and interests are of paramount importance but nonetheless continue to deprioritize the wellbeing of women survivors by justifying that national security is a more pressing

issue, that economic growth and employment rates are more important to the populace's overall quality of life, that constraining policies on sexual and reproductive health rights are more ethically pertinent to communities, or that a multitude of other issues must be addressed before justice for women survivors can be attended to, then society as a whole is complicit in the intentional harm of women survivors in the aftermath of GBV. In this sense, society will be collectively at fault when perpetrators of GBV – such as rape, sexual torture, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and structural violence – are enabled to cement gender power globally by becoming presidents of formidable nations and high court justices sustaining androcentric laws and practices for generations to come, as well as by holding other political, legislative, and economic leadership positions that effectuate calamitous injustices on women's lived experience in survivorhood.

Every day that society drags its feet and wallows in the self-delusion that it is doing what is best for women, more women survivors continue to suffer a dehumanizing existence to the point where it is normalized practice for both national and global legislative institutions to make categorical compromises on women's interests and wellbeing, effectively negating women survivors' right to justice, in order to oblige demands founded upon gender symbolism and patriarchal codes of conduct and structures of belief. This reality is most recently seen on April 23, 2019, when the United Nations Security Council capitulated to a United States threat to veto a German-drafted resolution on sexual violence in conflict by removing a long-agreed phrase calling for full and timely sexual and reproductive health assistance to survivors of wartime sexual violence, which the White House Administration sees as code for abortion rights (Nichols, 2019). Regardless of partisan leanings or personal beliefs, this all too common

situation wherein women's lived experience is dictated by gendered notions of appropriate female behavior – in this case being required to assume the role of the long-suffering mother and forced to accept the consequences of a situation which they had no hand in creating – demonstrates that helping women GBV survivors for the sole reason that it is the just course of action is not an established ethic in society.

At present, women survivors of GBV are continually forced to meet oftentimes absurd and destructive androcentric stipulations and must contort themselves to best embody what male-dominated legislative powers expect of their gender before they can have even their most basic of human rights and needs met in the aftermath of violence. With this slippery ideological slope, it is only a matter of time before gender power and gender institutions devise justifications for not redressing the injustices women survivors face and for not attending to their interests altogether. Therefore, scholars of GBV and policymakers of transitional justice must endeavor to transform the understanding of and legislative requirements vis-à-vis sociocultural and political-institutional responses to women survivors, rather than simply maneuvering within the existing, irredeemably gendered system in hopes that sporadic alterations will eventually bring about just and fitting outcomes for women survivors.

ALTERNATIVE TO FORGIVENESS IN HEALING

Regardless of the manifold potential approaches to providing women survivors the reparations, services, and environment necessary for a just and dignified lived experience in the aftermath of GBV, history has made clear that effective responses to gendered offenses is not via outright compromise nor tacit capitulation on the part of

justice mechanisms, and it most definitely is not through obligatory forgiveness of male perpetrators by women survivors. The general human act of forgiving is in itself gendered as it has been seized by patriarchal cultures, subsequently associated with femininity, placed in opposition to socially-recognized male attributes, and continually used to inform sociocultural expectations of women's behavior and disposition (Harding, 1986). As such, gender power and gender institutions during national transition and in peacetime have hijacked and manipulated women survivors' healing journey in the aftermath of GBV by urging them to forgive male perpetrators as a means to condition women to submissively and passively accept their subjugation. Gender power additionally exploits women survivors to further justify the inevitable culturally and institutionally granted impunity for men by insinuating that survivors' forgiveness – oftentimes given under duress or implicitly required by gender institutions and patriarchal communities within which the women are embedded – sufficiently evinces support for male perpetrator exoneration.

In the case of post-apartheid South African, the TRC portrayed forgiveness as an essential catalyst for women survivors' personal healing, which would then ostensibly facilitate national reconciliation. Similarly, in the case of my personal experience in the aftermath of GBV, my academic institution advocated for a forgive-and-forget mentality, which they maintained would enable me to move past my retraumatization and successfully accomplish my professional goals. Indeed, even in what should be the sacred state of visceral suffering caused by GBV and thus exempt from gendered, sociopolitical manipulations, the suffocating trauma of women survivors is continually used and corrupted to advance androcentric agendas. Not only are women needs and interests

sacrificed in the aftermath of GBV, they are also compelled to modify their healing process in an endless cycle of revictimization and marginalization in survivorhood in order to best serve cultural and institutional efforts that privilege men and facilitate male perpetrator impunity.

I reject the gendered and constraining notion of forgiveness as the sole and crucial path toward meaningful healing in the aftermath of GBV. I refuse to accept the mandates of oppressive patriarchy imposed onto my survivorhood that aim to dictate how I must experience my trauma. The gender symbolism and gender power that enabled the violence and injustice perpetrated against me will not continue to shape my lived experience in survivorhood or taint my profoundly personal and excruciating recovery process. I condemn the public suffering required of me, and of innumerable survivors of GBV, by gender institutions that force women (as opposed to their male perpetrators) to verbally recount their horrors and relive their trauma for society's judgment and ridicule before their needs can be met. These sadistic attempts to punish women for being ostensibly broken and problematic, for permitting a marring of the unspoiled existence they are socially compelled to personify, and for daring to believe that they are entitled to justice in a patriarchal world is yet another form of social ostracism and stigmatization of GBV meant to shame women survivors into submission and self-imposed sociocultural exile.

I repudiate the assertion that forgiveness will somehow engender peace – peace does not require forgiveness, peace requires justice. I do not need to forgive to heal; I am progressively healing every day, but I do not forgive. I do not forgive my attacker. I do not forgive my former academic program's administrators who falsely claimed to be my

advocates or the law enforcement officials who hypocritically pledged to do all within their power to protect me. I reject the paradoxical contention that I must forgive those who have hurt me in order to heal from the pain they, themselves, have caused me. I refuse to shoulder the burden of my trauma while pardoning others for their hand in prolonging and exacerbating my suffering in the aftermath of GBV.

Instead, I advance an alternative to forgiveness as the requisite foundation upon which healing and empowerment are realized in survivorhood. Although I do not forgive my attacker for his crimes against me, I also refuse to dehumanize him out of pain or hatred during my healing journey. He is human, no more and no less, which means he has flaws and weaknesses. He is not invincible and he can be defeated, much like the gender symbolism and gender power that enabled him to continue hurting me with impunity. Gender symbolism is culturally created and must be socially recognized in order for it to successfully construct gender institutions that secure male dominance over women. As such, the power of gender symbolism, and its associated implications, is only as influential as people allow it to be within interpersonal relationships, structuring practices, and value systems as well as throughout international and regional communities. When we, as global citizens and sociopolitical actors, are no longer imprisoned by the misguided perception that the challenges of gender power – such as GBV both during national unrest and in peacetime – are monumental and insurmountable, we can reshape our defeatist mentality into one that is more conducive to actively transforming androcentric sociopolitical phenomena and injustices.

PITFALLS OF SUPERFICIAL WELL-INTENTIONEDNESS

The glaring deficiencies of international, state, and institutional responses to the needs and interests of women survivors in the aftermath of GBV not only calls into question the fitness of these systems for addressing complex, nuanced, and multidimensional trauma and the need to transform them entirely, but also spotlights the ever-present tension between benevolent intentions and effective execution of justice and reconciliation initiatives. Moving forward, societies must cease to disguise or obscure the anguish and injustices of women survivors' lived experience behind a façade of unified goodwill and harmonious interpersonal relationships, but instead identify and confront the gender symbolism and gender power that 1) constructs sociopolitical phenomena, 2) shapes cultural practices and standard operating procedures, and 3) conditions behavior at both institutional and individual levels according to dualistic expectations of appropriate ways of being for women versus men. Only by making visible and intelligible the insidious mechanisms and ideologies that motivate continuous revictimization and marginalization of women survivors long after GBV has ceased can society attend to the needs of survivors and rectify the wrongs they have suffered in a way that does not denigrate these individuals and sacrifice their entitlement to justice for the sake of male impunity.

Furthermore, the destructive properties of well-intentionedness – as exhibited by both restorative justice mechanisms and peacetime quotidian structures such as the South African TRC as well as my cultural community and academic institution, respectively – mask an inert reality lacking action and meaningful progress. This complacency also temporarily assuages collective sociopolitical consciousness, situating us, as society's

citizens as well as human targets and embodied repercussions of gendered mechanisms and cultural activity, in the comforting yet false belief that we are contributing to a revolt against insidious and deep-seated patriarchy when instead our actions and decisions are implicitly conditioned by the precise gender symbolism and gender power that originally enabled and propelled the injustices we aim to counteract. In order to rectify these counterproductive prohibitions, exclusions, and obstructions that asymmetrically burden women survivors of GBV, there must first be a period of self-correction among well-intentioned people and institutions, then subsequent efforts to form concerted, strategic, and carefully executed responses in survivorhood that resist and subvert the centuries-long patriarchal hegemony continuously exploiting sociopolitical phenomena to subjugate women.

I urge international policymakers, scholars of peace and reconciliations studies, and institutional leadership during both national transition and peacetime to adopt the feminist research ethic of reflexivity and 1) mindfully explore their positionality, 2) recognize their inherent biases, and 3) understand the gendered structures of knowledge and power in which they are embedded. There must be more women in legislative and institutional positions and other consequential roles that oversee how the interests of women survivors are attended to in the aftermath of GBV; however, it is not sufficient to superficially satisfy a gender quota without consequently effectuating change. Across time, contexts, and a multitude of sociopolitical phenomena, society has seen that asymmetric gender power is so pervasive that it has been internalized and perpetuated by much of the global populace. Therefore, I further exhort the human force behind political-institutional bodies and sociocultural entities tasked with attending to the needs

and interests of women survivors of GBV to meditate on how their roles are governed and manipulated by socially accepted policies and routines, and the ways in which they are complicit in advancing androcentric regulatory processes and interpersonal relations that privilege men at the expense of women. It is only when individuals recognize their historical complicity in perpetuating a hierarchy of gender difference and maintaining disproportionately advantageous cultural frameworks for men can global citizens and community members begin to transform the universalized perception of gender superiority and redress the macro- and micro-level injustices that much of the world populace had a hand in creating and which women survivors of GBV continue to endure.

UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PRACTICE AND DISCIPLINE

This mixed-methods study is both unique in its approach and renders a pioneering conceptualization of the heretofore irredeemable political, institutional, and legislative treatment of women survivors of GBV. Not only do I conceptualize and make clear the multidimensional ways in which omnipresent gender symbolism and gender power brazenly desecrates women's lived experience in survivorhood, I also contribute a markedly visceral cognizance (which is strikingly absent in existing literature) to the largely cerebral understanding of sociopolitical phenomena as it pertains to the practice of transitional justice and peacebuilding operations. Through my study's intentional emphasize on the real-world, human implications of GBV across time and contexts, I also set myself apart from the complicity – unwittingly or otherwise – which sociocultural phenomena and political-institutional entities exhibit in perpetuating a gender hierarchy of power that excludes and invisibilizes women, as well as from hubristic scholarship that

diminishes the value and input of its research participants. I likewise invaluablely contribute to existing literature with my notably unique combined archival and autoethnographic analysis that rejects oppressive scholarly dictates, which 1) shackle academic writing to a cold and objective voice; 2) obscure the pain, trauma, and injustice that animates researchers; and 3) invisibilize the human beings, and their lived experience, that galvanize the research process (Behl, 2019).

WHY I WRITE

As Elizabeth Dauphinee asserts, “if we don’t show our motives, they cannot be evaluated by our readers” (2010, p. 808). I confess that I write out of pain, of shame, and of anger. I also write in order to understand and to accept. I write to heal, to forgive, and to hold myself (and others) accountable for what my life has become. Most of all, I write because I realize my personal experience echoes those of other survivors who “do not have the privilege to write” (Behl, 2017, p. 585). I write in an earnest attempt to “identify my complicity in the violence I seek to ‘understand’ and ‘explain,’ [and] in which I seek to intervene” with my intersectional knowledge production as well as my rigorous meditations on the ubiquitous and quotidian impacts of sociopolitical phenomena (Dauphinee, 2013, p. 349). I also write as a means to reflect on and recognize how I have been shaped by my academic training and how I can continually recondition my thinking and evolve my research to most accurately, respectfully, and justly illuminate the lived experience of women survivors of GBV across time and contexts.

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