Starting in the Homes: Patriarchy, Power, & Well-Being
Addressing Intimate Gendered Violence Against South Asian Women in Montreal

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ABSTRACT

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South Asian women's organizations (SAWOs) in the United States and Canada have reported high prevalences of intimate gendered violence in their communities for several decades now despite a lacune in both research and attention. This project takes as its starting point the following question: what factors are involved in addressing intimate violence against South Asian women in Montreal and in supporting their well-being? Research methods are based on critical ethnography, writing against culture, and feminist anthropological frameworks and include participant observation, textual analysis, and interviews with front-line workers at and with members of the South Asian Women's Community Centre of Montreal (SAWCC). This thesis is the start of a larger work which uses the analytical tool of mapping. This mapping begins in women's homes, household and home country, looking at the patriarchal gender norms and ideologies which women are socialized into that maintain patriarchal power which are reproduced through key institutions of the family and marriage. Next, four major taboos, i.e. divorce, sex, mental health, and violence, are discussed to provide insight into how they shape women's experiences and responses to violence and serve to keep the status quo of patriarchal power. Finally, interventions into these factors by SAWCC are discussed as possible methods for "pulling the roots" of women's subordination through empowering South Asian women and changing norms. Lastly, the next steps for this analysis are named which entail the mapping out of remaining topographies of key factors that intersect and compound with those named in this thesis. This research found that addressing intimate gendered violence and supporting the well-being of South Asian women requires a critical understanding of specific realities at the intersection of ideological and structural factors, the role of (mis)understandings and use of the concept of culture in 'fields of power', integration of anti-racism into anti-violence work and services, and the recognition of the crucial work done by community and grassroots organizations that provide key interventions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PROLOGUE

"Audre Lorde notes that 'the Master's Tools will never dismantle the Master's House' (Lorde 1984). So too when we assume there is one overarching problem and one way to address it, we limit both our vision and our ability to individually and collectively contribute to the struggle to end domestic violence." - Margaret Abraham (2000, xi)

On July 17th, 2020, I am sipping tea re-listening to interviews and reading the news while working from home, in the context of social isolation for novel global pandemic COVID-19. The headlines of several major newspapers announce that the Supreme Court of Canada has made a "landmark Jordan decision" by refusing the appeal for a new trial of Sivaloganathan Thanablasingham, a Sri Lankan refugee and Canadian permanent resident, and upholding the decision by the initial judge for a "stay of proceedings." This new trial would have been for the 2012 murder of his wife, Anuja Baskaran, whose throat was slit in their Ahunstric Cartierville basement apartment in Montreal, Quebec. This Jordan decision was based on there having been too long a period of time between the charges and the trial, a timeline that exceeded 5 years. According to a news report by local radio CJAD 800, Thanablasingham had been refused bail at the time because his family members expressed that he had done nothing wrong and thus he constituted a flight risk (2017). His sister-in-law is quoted as placing the blame on Anuja herself and: "[...] believed his dead wife was the person causing problems 'because she kept calling the police on him'"(CJAD 800, 2017). Indeed, Thanablasingham had been arrested for three incidents of 'conjugal violence'; once in December of 2011 where he hit Anuja on the head more than ten times, once in January 2012 where he assaulted her with a weapon, and once in May 2012 where he broke court orders to stay away from her. When police arrived during this third encounter, Anuja's parents asked that he not be arrested (Desjardins, CJAD 800). Thanablasingham would plead guilty to two of these assaults. In 2017, after the original stay was given by the judge, Thanablasingham was released from prison, detained by the Canadian Border

Service Agency, and then deported due to the above former domestic violence charges (CJAD 800, 2017). Until today, there had been hope by local groups that he might still face trial for Anuja's murder.

According to an article by La Presse, one of the aspects of the case that most perplexed the public was that Thanablasingham had been in custody for several months after the May 2012 incident and was released at the request of Anuja herself, who, in Tamil through a translator, had told the court that things were fine and that she didn't fear her husband (Desjardins, 2012). She was killed on August 11th, 2012 (CTV News, 2020), six weeks later.

Most of the news articles on the Jordan decision do not mention Anuja's name and many use a low-quality court proceeding photo of Thanablasingham. I look back through my news clipping database from 2012-2015 to reread the articles released at the time of her murder. Back then, I had found two sources, one of which can no longer be accessed. With this news, I have a desire to see her face, absent from the dozens of articles reporting on the Jordan decision today, and look for photos of the 21-year old Sri Lankan. When I finally find a picture, I try to remember if her face was on the wall of posters in the South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC) dining room, where, for many months, I would have lunch a couple times a week practicing speaking French with the staff. This wall, behind which a small kitchen is tucked away, features ten or so hand-made posters and art crafted by members in various workshops. Among these posters are also several featuring murdered South Asian women made for their vigils and then, throughout the years, carried in memoriam to countless marches. These posters are worn, where hands have held them, but remain prominently displayed. Also amongst the posters are several celebrating women leaders across South Asia. Hanging on the walls are larger fabric banners often held at the front of marches and a hand-sewn quilt made by SAWCC members featuring a patchwork representing their hopes and dreams.

Throughout the spring and summer of 2012, I was working at McGill University for their Social Equity and Diversity in Education Office (SEDE) assessing university-community relationships and current needs as part of building a yearly event that would promote the myriad ways in which community engagement enriches learning and contributes to social sustainability. The goal was to host the first event in fall of 2012.

The South Asian Women's Community Centre of Montreal (SAWCC) was one of the organizations that I met with for Community Engagement Day. After a couple needs-assessment meetings, we organized a 'tea and discussion' event bringing together key members of the McGill University community (staff, domestic violence clinic directors, internship program officers, and students) with SAWCC staff to discuss how McGill could best support the centre's work. One of the primary needs identified by SAWCC was for resources and research to help address intimate violence against South Asian women in Montreal. Nabila, a frontline worker originally from Pakistan, had found that resources outside of SAWCC for South Asian women which would "keep in mind the language barriers, the cultural differences, the taboos" were seriously lacking. "If a woman is going through trauma in her life, she needs a lot of psychological help and guidance and that resource is not available," Nabila reiterated in our interviews a year later, "if I want to send a woman for advice and counselling, I don't know of many persons who understand, even if the woman speaks English for example, who understand the South Asian context or has the background and then can be sympathetic and advise her."

Given my interest in pursuing collaborative community-based research in the areas of gendered violence, I offered to contribute by focusing my Master's research on the issue in the hopes of providing further resources for SAWCC and non South Asian frontline workers, further educating myself to the realities of racialized women and immigrants in Montreal, and documenting the insights of SAWCC workers for their future use. The 'tea and discussion' event was in October 2012, about two months after Anuja's murder. Eight years later, on July 17, 2020 the news brings a confirmation that there will be no legal 'justice' for Anjua's murder. It is a grim reminder that the research I undertook in collaboration with SAWCC from 2013 to 2015 remains relevant. Unfortunately, this is not the only reminder that has come along in the last five years before I returned to finish writing this thesis and it will not be the last.

Experiences of intimate gendered violence against South Asian women in Montreal are shaped and constrained by ideological and structural factors, include an important transnational dimension, and are located in a particular sociopolitical context within a dominant society. The aim of this thesis is to inform anti-violence work and interventions that support the well-being of South Asian women in Montreal and contribute towards the elimination of gendered violence.

The following thesis is a mapping of key ideological factors and social norms, as the first step upon which to build subsequent mapping, using as its central orientation the stories and insights of frontline workers and South Asian women themselves shared during field research and put into 'conversation' with research done in other, mostly, North American cities.

This thesis is broken down into four chapters. **Chapter one** is dedicated to introducing the conceptual and analytical frameworks that have informed research methods, approach, and analysis. Terminology and choice of concepts are defined and explained. **Chapter two** is a detailed explanation of the research methods and positionality of the researcher.

Chapter 3, begins with what Margret Abraham in her seminal book on the subject, *Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital Violence among South Asian Immigrants in the United States*, refers to as "cultural constraints" or South Asian beliefs, customs, and practices that act as "barriers to escaping" and institutions that uphold gendered violence (2000). Following the crucial insight of frontline workers, we start our orientation and mapping in women's homes, looking at the roots of subordination: the socialization into patriarchal values through gender norms and ideals. The institutions of the family and marriage are key shaping factors in women's lives and reproductive sites of this socialization. Social and material life is organized through these and, thus, so to are identity formation, sense of belonging and available paths for responses to violence.

Chapter 4, looks at four key social taboos and how the breaking of these comes at high social, embodied, and material costs that serve to reinforce adherence to social norms. By understanding the above, supporting South Asian women facing violence must take into consideration the costs and pressures they face and meet them where they are. As well, key interventions into the socialization process can be made to empower women and to dismantle the cycle of patriarchal subordination through education, the naming and recognition of violence, and the rejecting of current norms through the modelling and passing on of new norms and values. Lastly, we look at the necessary next steps for this mapping project whereby additional topographies of key factors are identified and how they shift or transform one another. Using a variety of approaches and interventions, SAWCC manages to build community at the frontlines

while navigating and transforming the multi-dimensional map of factors that affect the well-being of South Asian women facing intimate gendered violence in Montreal.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

"Whether in the form of a film or a book, or whether the recorder is a filmmaker or an anthropologist, or whether an account must be condensed to a paragraph or fills a 300-page monograph, we must still be accountable for the consequences of our representations and the implications of our message - because they matter" - D. Soyini Madison

In the following chapter, the key frameworks used to guide and conduct this research as well as well as its analysis are presented. Some frameworks were chosen before going into the field. These include feminist anthropology, critical ethnography, and the anthropology of violence. Others emerged in response to the field and during the research such as "writing against culture" and mapping as analytical tool. Concepts chosen before entering the field were tested and some had to be exchanged for more appropriate ones (i.e. resilience to well-being). Both the conceptual frameworks and research methods (presented in detail in the next chapter) are the mantle of this research and key to understanding its aims and its findings.

Feminist Anthropology

"In terms of perspective, what I present here is an unapologetically feminist approach. But of course feminism - even while it is under attack in this supposedly 'post-feminist' era - means different things to different people." - Amrit Wilson

In her book *Critical Ethnography: Methods, Ethics, and Performance,* D. Soyini Madison traces back the controversy over "what constitutes a feminist perspective" to three waves in the development of women's rights:

The first one concerns itself with women's inclusion and access to institutions that had historically been denied to women. In this case, the concern was for the liberty and freedom of women to enter the doors of these institutions and structures and to be represented in them, but not necessarily to change the structures themselves. The second movement or wave was also concerned about access and membership, but it was also concerned with the transformation of the structures themselves relative to discrimination practices at multiple levels (e.g. women, family, race, sexuality, economic inequities, and the environment);. Second-wavers were interested in transforming institutions to make them more just, to build a more equitable society. The third wave, however, for many contemporary feminists, is more global in perspective and more visionary in its concern for overlapping of oppressions of difference. (2005, 90)

According to Madison, "generally, feminist theory is concerned with power differences between men and women and how these differences impact the public and private domains of our lives" (2005, 89). This theory, Madison writes, "focuses on how the differences [of biological sex] are performed, hierarchically classified and materially arranged in the social world" (89). To understand contemporary feminism, Madison points to concepts and contributions from material feminism and ecofeminism.

Material feminism, she writes, responded(/s) to "pressing global issues of inequality and exploitation" as well as criticisms of mainstream feminism by third-world feminists and people of colour in terms of how feminism typically centres the concerns of "white, middle-class, heterosexual women in the United States and Europe" (90). The material aspect of this feminism specifically refers to " divisions of labor and the distribution of wealth both nationally and internationally, as well as how meaning and value (relative to freedom and opportunity) are constituted globally" (90). Material feminism is a "form of critical postmodernism" that "argues that the interlocking web of patriarchy, capitalism, heteronormativity, and racism is neither abstract nor isolated, but it is interpenetrating and ubiquitous as it interacts at varying levels and degrees in regulating our every day lives" (91).

In terms of ecofeminism, Madison explains that this feminism recognizes a very gendered dimension of environmental injustice and vice versa. Ecofeminism uses gender analysis as a tool for interrogating "the varieties of ways in which the unjustified domination of women and other

subordinated groups of humans (human other) has historically been interconnected with the unjustified domination of 'nature'(nonhuman animals and the nonhuman environment)" (Warren in Madison; 91). In this way, ecofeminism can be seen as part of the study of violence itself concluding that "women's oppression is best understood as a specific example of an overarching cultural ideology that idolizes oppression in general" (Wood in Madison) and seeks to address "the very nature and practice of oppression in all its formations (91). Compared to other forms of feminism, Madison sees ecofeminism as a "more radical position" due to its emphasis on social justice relative to multiplication of oppression and their interconnectedness (91).

In *Dreams, Questions, Struggles : South Asian Women in Britain,* Amrit Wilson draws on the work of Allison Jaggar (1988) and defines feminists as "those who regard women as systematically subordinated and who seek, no matter on what grounds, to end women's subordination" (2006, 3). This systemic subordination is largely seen as due to patriarchal social organization where men hold the majority of power and control: conversely it can be defined as a system of social domination over women. Wilson, after her more than thirty years of activism, identifies patriarchy not as an autonomous system but as "patriarchal relations between men and women that subordinate women - as a core attribute of the vast majority of historical and existing social formations" (2006). To speak of feminism since the second wave is often to explicitly point to this oppressive patriarchy. Patriarchy, however, has and continues to take different forms in different socio-historical contexts, interacting and compounding with other ideologies and systems producing diverse expressions and experiences: "We have learned that there is no "universal sexual asymmetry" and "that the oppression of women is not one thing to all women everywhere" (Madison 92).

Intersectional feminism'- or "intersectional analysis" - builds upon the legal concept of intersectionality first introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw in her work "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (1989). Today, "intersectional feminism" is widely used to refer to a feminist analysis that considers the intersections and compounding of multiple forms of oppressions, including structural oppression, to produce particular social locations, vulnerabilities, and access to privileges and resources. This also highlights the ways in which

the interests of some women might directly contrast with that of other women due to these different social locations vis-a-vis social power:

> Feminisms can be antagonistic to one another, as a consequence of agendas that are based on patriarchal and colonial imperatives. Interventions of history and nation-identity inform, colour, and influence to a great deal analyses and understanding of feminism. As feminists we can agree on issues such as violence against women, pay equity, legal equality. However, experiences of colonialism, migration, discrimination, and racial profiling, as well as barriers to access due to language, race, and culture demonstrate that unless a clear understanding of difference informs our feminism, there can be no real substantive equality for women and between women (Dolores Chew, 2009, 84)

A major "crisis" in feminism and feminist anthropology has been in terms of the concepts of gender and sex themselves: what and whom are we referring to when we speak of "women"? Judith Butler's seminal work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) brought to mainstream feminist discourse (and queer studies) the fact that gender is a performance (socially constructed) and not tied to assigned nor perceived biological sex. Furthermore, in 1997, Oyèrónké Oyémumi wrote in"The Invention of Women" that Western gender constructs cannot be used to understand gender in non-Western contexts pre-colonialism, and challenged the ideology of biological determinism used in the Western construction.

In a way, gender can be understood as having similar characteristics as language: arbitrary, symbolic, productive and creative, social phenomenon, convention, etc. There are no inherent essential fixed feminine nor masculine qualities. Furthermore, not all societies have and/or have had the same gender categories since there is no "universal sexual asymmetry" (Madison 2005: 92). If "woman are made and not born" (Abu-Lugold), then this brings up multiple questions: Why and how are they made? For whom? How has the category changed over time, and why? Chandra Mohanty (1988) in her text *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* points to the social construction of the category of 'women" as "Other". In this socially constructed category, there is an embedded element of subjugation (Mohanty, 62). Like Yasmin Jiwani writes regarding race in the introduction to her book, *Discourses of Denial*

(2006), the fact that gender is a social construction does not change that it is also an embodied material reality that shapes and contours lived experience.

In terms of anthropological research and feminist methodology, Hunjan and Towson write that "the emphasis on the analysis of women's narratives reflects a feminist perspective" (2007, 54). Historically and contemporarily, social research (and social research funding and awards) has left out women's perspectives and concerns and this is still an issue many decades after the first appearance of women's movements in many disciplines. Focusing on women's voices and lives in academic research, which is itself an act that stands apart from the norm, can thus be considered feminist. According to Vijay Agnew in "Tensions in Providing Services to South Asian Victims of Wife abuse in Toronto", a feminist methodology "requires that research put women at the centre of inquiry, have the potential to benefit women and bring about social change" (1998, 157). As well, feminist research, according to Agnew "must make women active subjects in inquiry as opposed to treating them as objects or as mere data, and it must give them space to articulate their experiences (157). Still, Mohanty reminds us, "feminist scholarly practices exist within relations of power which they counter, redefine, or even implicitly support. There can, of course, be no apolitical scholarship" (1988, 62).

Writing 'Against Culture'

In *Writing Against Culture,* Abu-Lughod argues that the concept of culture "operates in anthropological discourse to enforce separations that inevitably carry a sense of hierarchy" (1999, 466). By using the examples of feminist and "halfie" anthropologists, Abu-Lughod unpacks how anthropology has traditionally operated through the centrality of a self vs. other binary paradigm. Anthropology, she underscores, is:

> a discipline built on the historically constructed divide between the West and the
> non-West. It has been and continues to be primarily the study of the non-Western
> other by the Western self, even if it in its new guise it seeks explicitly to give voice
> to the Other or to present a dialogue between the self and other, either textually or

through an explication of the fieldwork encounter [...] And the relationship between the West and the non-West, at least since the birth of anthropology, has been constituted by Western domination (467).

The hegemony of the self/other divide is shaken by "partial exceptions" and the realization that these two are not givens. Feminist theory offers to anthropology two key points: "First, the self is always a construction, never an actual or found entity, even if it has that appearance. Second the process of creating a self through opposition to an other always entails the violence of repressing or ignoring other forms of difference" (468). Both the feminist anthropologist and "halfie" shake the foundations of the "anthropological self" as they both cannot "assume it comfortably" (470). They "travel uneasily between speaking 'for' and speaking 'from'"(470). Thus, the issue of positionality becomes foregrounded - as it is within the work of critical ethnography. Despite a longstanding questioning of objectivity, and the ideology of science, cultural anthropologists still "seem reluctant to examine the implications of the actual situatedness of their knowledge" (468). Both feminist anthropologist and "halfie" (and/or native anthropologist) highlight the issue of partiality - both in the sense of subjectivity (or bias) and that of representing but a part. Although hegemonic anthropologic discourses would render these anthropologists "less than" - their particular positions actually highlight a major oversight by the discipline. The "outsider self" it so relies on is never fully apart, never really "outside" the matrix: "what we call the outside is a position within a larger political-historical complex. No less than the halfie, the "wholie" is in a specific position vis-à-vis the community being studied" (468). Ethnographic "truths", then, are always "partial truths" that are also "positioned truths" (469). Thus, relationships of self and other cannot be innocent of power. The experience of difference, of being made other, is also one of structural inequality and being "spoken for". Despite self-critical and self-conscious efforts in anthropology to address the power relationship between anthropologist over anthropological subject, the fundamental issue of domination continues to be "skirted", Abu-Lughod argues:

> Women, blacks, and people of most of the non-West have been historically constituted as others in the major political systems of difference on which the unequal world of

modern capitalism has depended. Feminist studies and black studies have made sufficient progress within the academy to have exposed the way that being studied by "white men" (to use a shorthand for a complex and historically constituted subject-position) turns into being spoken for by them. It becomes a sign and instrument of their power (469).

As anthropologists, we have unleashed the concept of culture, opened our very own Pandora's box, upon the world and continue "to construct, produce and maintain it" while making what is an ambiguous and hard to define concept have "the air of the self-evident" (470). Abu-Lughold argues that the concept "is important to anthropology because the anthropological distinction between self and other rests on it. Culture is the essential tool for making other" (470). She likens how the concept operates to that of its predecessor, race, with the noted 'advantage' of creating "multiple rather than binary differences" and "removing difference from the realm of the natural and the innate" (470). Despite this latter move, culture continues to be used and operates much like race: freezing difference with essentializing tendencies. Indeed, Orientalism, scholarly discourse which creates essentialized distinctions between "the Orient"(the East) and "the Occident" (the West), she argues, has shifted from race to culture as its subject of study.

The fictional anthropological "native", Apparadurai argues, is a "figment of the anthropological imagination" (in Abu-Lughod, 471). This "native" and his culture is "incarcerated" and denied dynamism, geographical movement, and history (471). Furthermore, there is a huge tendency "to overemphasize coherence" within cultural theories and to use this coherence to imagine and represent "communities as bounded and discrete" (471). Building on this, Abu-Lughod asks, what "stakes does anthropology have in sustaining and perpetuating a belief in the existence of cultures that are identifiable as discrete, different and separate from our own?" (472)

Abu-Lughold proposes three methods of writing against culture, which I have used as guides in doing this research: firstly, looking at practice and discourse; secondly, reorienting the problems or subject matter of anthropology; and thirdly, writing ethnographies of the particular (1991, 473). In the first case, this "allows for the possibility of recognizing within a social group the play of multiple, shifting, and competing statements with practical effects" (472). In the

second method, builds upon the work of reflexive anthropology to shift the focus to that of connection: various connections and interconnections, historical and contemporary, between a community and the anthropologist working there and writing about it, not to mention the world to which he or she belongs and which enables him or her to be in that particular place studying the group" (Abu-Lughold, 472). Furthermore, looking at connections (through time and space) also allows for the consideration of how the global and local produce one another, how the transnational and national are co-created through the particular lived and embodied experiences of people. Abu-Lughod's third method, writing ethnographies of the particular, addresses anthropology's "business of representing" and the need to subvert "the process of 'othering'" (473). Generalization, she argues, is not a neutral process but one which "facilitates abstraction and reification" of "conceptual entities" over "the complex organization of activities of actual individuals and their actual relations" (Smith in Abu-Lughod, 474). Abu-Lughod presents two reasons for anthropologists to be wary of generalization. The first is that the language of generalization is one of power. One who plays an important role in the "professional discourse of 'objectivity'" and creates a false "detached" mode of description and understanding that is located in the "the ruling apparatus of this society" (Smith in Abu-Lughod, 474). Abu-Lughod notes here how this critique is especially relevant to the discipline of anthropology whose origins lie in imperialism and colonialism. Professionalized discourses themselves, she argues, are by nature a means to assert hierarchy as they inscribe a gap between "authoritative discourse" and "the languages of every life". Thus, in this way, anthropological objects are constructed "as simultaneously different and inferior" (474). Another major problem with generalization is how it tends to produce "homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness" (475).

This thesis aims to heed Abu-Lughod's warnings despite the use of the term saturating field work conversations, academic literature across disciplines, policies, media discourse, and political public debates. Given this saturation, in addition to Abu-Lughod's proposed methods of writing against culture (within anthropology and academia), in this research, the phenomenon of the concept's use (within academia literature and, more so, beyond) became subject to inquiry in terms of looking at the complex and complicated role of its usage by different actors.

Studying the use and "deployment" of the concept in discourses follows suit to the work of Susan Wright who, in *The Politicization of 'Culture'*(1998), presented "contemporary advances" for one of anthropology's oldest concepts. In the 1970s, culture was understood as one of the most complicated words in the English language having nearly two hundred definitions (Williams in Wright, 7). The use of the concept, which Wright notes had seemed to almost disappear in the 1970s both in four fields anthropology in the US as well as British anthropology, is itself a 'cultural phenomena' which needs to be carefully studied. In the 1990s, Wright notes, culture made a "reappearance" outside the confines of "internal disciplinary debate" (7). Her study of this phenomenon looks at its use in the discourse of "many different fields of contemporary society" (7). Wright notes that "decision-makers and media commentators often claim legitimacy for their discourses by referring to 'culture, in an anthropological sense' - a phrase which closes off further explanation by claiming that there is one (their) meaning of culture which is at once too self-evident to warrant explanation and too deep to be delved into by non-anthropologists"(7). Wright noticed that, in the late 1990s, the use of the concept was being increasingly politicized and deployed as a tool into varied "fields of power"(7). In her text, Wright looks at how the concept was being used in three different fields at the time: by right wing nationalists in Britain, in organizational management (work 'cultures'), and in development discourse (following the UNESCO report entitled *Our Creative Diversity*). This research also aims to look at how the concept is deployed and in which "fields of power" it is being used, by whom, and what the consequences may be for the well-being of South Asian women in Montreal.

In her text, Wright summarizes and explains the transition from what she calls "old meanings of culture" and "new meanings of culture" in anthropology (8). According to Wright, Tylor's (1871) "notion of culture as a whole way of life of a group or society marked a point of departure for modern social anthropologists" (7). In the 20th century, this point of departure was not one of consensus however, and Boas, for example, rejected the social evolutionism espoused by Tylor, who placed different "cultures" at a different stage of evolution (towards European rationality). Boas "stressed the particularity of each culture as a result of the group's responses to environmental conditions and their specific historical development" (8). Citing other examples,

like Malinoski and his students, Wright underscores that at the time: "Anthropologists differed profoundly in their theories and in the aspects of western thought that they questioned, but they shared an idea of the world as made up of 'peoples' each with a coherent way of life, or 'culture'."(8) This old meaning of culture and the subsequent studies that created "fixed entities", by the 70s, were regarded as having been "crucial to colonialism": "By measuring categorizing, describing, representing and thereby supposedly 'knowing' others, the objects of that knowledge were made the subjects of new forms of power and control (Asad and Said in Wright, 8). In a similar vein, Wright notes that these meanings of culture had been used by extreme nationalists' "claims for independence and sovereignty but also to pursue the politics of xenophobia, exclusion and ethnic cleansing" (8). Old meanings of culture and its proponents were criticized for "having treated a 'culture' as a small scale, bounded entity organized through economic, social and political institutions which interacted as a self contained 'whole' sustained in a static equilibrium." (8) This was an anthropological fiction as was the notion, which many anthropologists adhered to, that culture was "as a set of ideas or meanings which were shared by whole populations of homogeneous individuals" - which empirically was not the case (8). Wright cites Asad (1979) who "argued that anthropologists had mistakenly endorsed, as 'authentic culture', historically specific dominant ideologies or authoritative discourses which were neither timeless nor uniformly shared." (8). Despite anthropologists, and anthropology as a discipline, moving towards new ways of understanding 'culture', the main features of old meanings "have percolated out from academic discourse" and "are still in widespread use in the public parlance" and 'fields of power'(8).

New meanings of culture, Wright explains, have come from changing political and economic conditions such as the " end of European colonialism and the continued expansion into new areas of relations of production and exchange based on capital" (8). More recently in history, this includes globalization, global north and south networks, international labour movements, and global communication systems. Wright specifically names Asad's text "Anthropology and the analysis of ideology" as being a departure point for new ways of understanding and approaching the concept of culture. For many years, anthropologists have argued and "Hall and other exponents (Morley and Chen 1996) of cultural studies in Britain have

made clear, [that] cultural identities are not inherent, bounded or static: they are dynamic, fluid and constructed situationally, in particular places and times" (Wright 9). What Wright calls "the fracturing of social anthropology's central conceit" forces anthropology to look back at colonialism and asymmetrical relationships of power" (9). Citing Merry's (1997) research into 18th and 19th century Hawaii, Wright describes the "new idea of culture as a contested process of meaning-making" (9):

> Contests took place between people in asymmetrical relationships of of power, over their multiple and contradictory cultural logics. Each actor endeavoured to manoeuvre, in unpredictable political and economic situations, to define or seize control of symbols and practices. Symbols and ideas never acquired a closed or entirely coherent set of meanings: they were polyvalent, fluid and hybridized. Key terms shifted in meaning at different historical times. When a coalition of actors gained ascendancy at a particular historical moment, they institutionalized their meaning of key terms in law (9).

Citing Comaroff and Comaroff (1992), Wright explains that "in its hegemonic dimension, culture appears coherent, systematic and consensual" (9). A hegemonic ideology "becomes so naturalized, taken for granted and 'true' that *[sometimes]* alternatives are beyond the limits of the thinkable" (Wright 10). Both new meanings and old meanings of culture are deployed into public debates and private spaces and are wielded by different actors for different aims.

Critical Ethnography

Critical ethnography, Madison explains, "begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain (2005, 5). The critical ethnographer "takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control" (5).

The critical ethnographer also allows the research question to arise from the field: "empirical methodologies become the foundation for inquiry, and it is here "on the ground of Others that the researcher encounters social conditions that become the point of departure for research'" (Thomas in Madison, 6). Furthermore, critical ethnography urges the ethnographer to "resists domestication" by using:

> …the resources, skills, and privileges available to her to make accessible - to penetrate the borders and break through the confines in defence of -the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach. This means that critical ethnographer contributes to emancipatory knowledge and discourses of social justice.(6).

In many ways, "critical ethnography becomes the 'doing' or 'performance' of critical theory. It is critical theory in action" (16). Madison locates critical social theory as evolving "from a tradition of "intellectual rebellion" that includes radical ideas challenging regimes of power that changed the world" (14). Citing Foucault's work, Madison describes the act of critique in nine points, one of which served as guide for the design of this research project: "Critique is to discern and unveil the relationship between mechanisms of coercion and what constitutes knowledge"(6).

However, Madison cautions, critique is not enough. Anthropology must go beyond politics: "Critical ethnography must further its goals from simply politics to the politics of positionality" (7). Reflection on the position of social inquiry taken up by the ethnographer and a recognition of the ethnographer as subject, then, becomes an integral part of the research process. According to Madison, "positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects" (8). Echoing Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, Madison cautions that ethnographers need remember that "belonging precedes being." Hence, who 'I am', and what this means in different contexts for different persons at different times, along with what I brought with me to the field site and to field relationships is an important dimension of the research. A dimension which ultimately, cannot be unwoven from this research: "Our position as ethnographers is to understand that we bring our belongings into the field with us, not only the many others who

constitute our being but how we belong to what we know, how our epistemologies are yet another site of our belonging with and for others" (8).

Critical ethnography emphasizes the dialogical aspect of knowing that takes place in social research, "critical ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides, in an encounter with and among others, one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in others' worlds" (Madison 2005, 10). The emphasis on the dialogue is not only the terrain of critical ethnography but also a disciplinary shift across many frameworks as anthropologists seek to unsettle the representational phenomena of the *'ethnographic present'* which has caused harm even as researchers sought to do the opposite. Dialogue moves us towards an *'ethnographic presence'* and does so, "by opening the passageways for readers and audiences to experience and grasp the partial presence of a temporal conversation constituted by others' voices, bodies, histories, and yearnings" (11). The dialogical stance as adopted by the researcher, Madison urges, resists finality: "It is a reciprocal giving and receiving rather than a timeless resolve" (11).

Doing critical ethnography is to engage wholly with the realm of ethics at all levels of the research starting by the subjects of inquiry we choose to the ways we conduct ourselves in the field to the works we produce to share what we have learned and beyond. Madison argues that "both the virtue and ethics as critical practice must also assume the responsibility of advocacy" (97). The emphasis here is on responsibility. By adopting a politics of positionality in our work whereby we make our subjectivities "accessible, transparent, and vulnerable to judgement and evaluation", critical ethnographers, "are inviting an ethics of accountability by allowing ourselves to be proven wrong" (9).

In her discussion of critical ethnography methodology, Madison introduces as an alternative methodology the work of Amia De La Garza (also known as Maria Crisitina Gonzales) who developed a "creation-centered cyclical perspective" approach to ethnography that is based on the "cycles of the Four Seasons of nature" (45). Madison synthesizes "The Four Seasons of Ethnography" where each season (Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter) can be understood to have its own 'related metaphors', 'basic nature', 'methods/tasks', and 'cautions' (45). This method was also used as a guide during the different phases of this research.

Last but not least, Madison reminds us that in critical ethnographic work, methodology "is not simply a means to an end [gathering data]. It is a meaningful and conscious enactment of learning from an entering into an ethnographic domain of immense possibilities" (49).

Anthropology of Violence

Violence is one of the key phenomena discussed in this research and thus, this work falls within the scope of the anthropology of violence. One could argue that since oppression is a form of violence, all critical ethnography contributes to the anthropology of violence. In his work entitled *Charred Lullabies* (1996)*,* E. Valentine Daniel, provides important insights on the limitations and realities of researching violence in its various forms:

> violence is such a reality that a theory which purports to inform it with significance must not merely 'stand under' but conspicuously 'stand apart' from it as a gesture of open admission to measure up to its task. I do not mean to valorize violence hereby, but to foreground it so as to make the more general point regarding theory: that it is often forgotten that even ordinary life is not transparent to theory. Violence just brings this point home. (6).

To do anthropological research on, especially ethnographies of violence comes with the risk of "parochializing violence, to attribute and limit violence to a particular people and place"(7). Daniel's solution is to reject ethnography as the appropriate term for conducting this kind of anthropology of violence and rather, proposes the term "anthropography of violence":

> Violence is not peculiar to a given people or culture; violence is far more ubiquitous and universally human, a dark wellspring of signs with which, to be true to ourselves, we must communicate, and also as a force we must hold at bay. By having said this, I must hasten that I write of the human condition, not its nature." (7)

By conducting anthropographies of violence, Daniel suggests we both demonstrate that violence is a human phenomenon not limited to particular groups or societies and that "changes in disposition toward violence on the part of a given people are every bit as possible among other peoples as well" (7). This particular anthropography of violence examines a specific subset of the phenomenon of violence against women in an effort to contribute to antiviolence work - which can be understood as work to change social dispositions to violence.

Violence against women has been recognized for decades now in global discourse. However, according to Sikkik and Keck, "violence against women is an issue that has arrived late and dramatically for the international women's movement, differing radically from the classic issues of suffrage, equality, and discrimination around which women have long mobilized" (1998,165). It was not until the 1980s that violence against women became a topic for movement and action and only became an object of United Nations activity in 1985, where it became a centre piece of the platform at the UN Conference on Women.

As a result of the work done by activists around the world, the first World Conference on Women was held in Mexico City in 1975. This led to the United Nations Decade of Women from 1975 to 1985 "which in turn catalyzed networks around women's rights" (166). The Decade of Women and the UN meetings (Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, etc) that were held during this time "served as locations to build and connect the emerging transnational network" of women's movements while revealing and producing tensions between them (166). During this time, in 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was ratified.

The international women's movements that created and participated in the World Conference held in Mexico (1975) and the following meetings comprised of actors from women's movements around the world. Despite the conference encouraging network formation, there began to emerge contestations and tensions between women from the global "north" and the "south": "The conference disintegrated into a heated debate among feminists from Western countries who stressed discrimination, and women from the developing world who stressed what they considered the more pressing issues of development and social justice that affected both men and women" (170). In 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial

Discourses," Chandra Mohanty points to the ways in which feminist scholars as well as actors in these early UN meetings held an "implicit assumption of the "the west" (in all its complexities and contradictions) as the primary referent in theory and praxis" and "the construction of the (implicitly consensual) priority of issues around which apparently all women are expected to organize" (1988, 62). The meeting in Mexico, she footnotes, "was 'American-planned and organized', situating third world participants as passive audiences" (83). Documents and reports that she cites from the 1975 meeting, "focus especially on the lack of self-consciousness of western women's implication in the effects of imperialism and racism in their assumption of an 'international sisterhood' (83). In her 1988 text, Mohanty also points to feminists from the West involved in the international women's movement producing discourses on the third world that were colonial and imperial creating the "Third World Woman" as a singular monolithic subject. Colonization here, Mohanty states, "almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination and a discursive or political suppression of the heterogeneity of the subject (s) in question" (61). The hegemonic discursive practices Mohanty "intervenes" in with her text, she argues, serve to "limit the possibilities of coalition building" (62). Indeed, international feminism's relationship with and its perception as being rooted in and emanating from a western imperialist agenda has ongoing consequences for women activists around parts of the world that have a history and ongoing reality of being colonized and/or made into "third world" countries (John, M. 1998).

According to Sikkink and Keck, by 1982, the issue of violence against women emerged as a common ground in the transnational women's movement to bring women together to work toward its eradication: "violence against women resonated across significant cultural and experiential barriers" (165). The general category of "violence against women" brought together "separate activist campaigns on specific practices - against rape and domestic battery in the United States and Europe, female genital mutilation in Africa, female sexual slavery in Europe and Asia, dowry death in India, and torture and rape of political prisons in Latin America" (171). The category "had to be constructed and popularized before people could think of these practices as the "same" in some basic way" and it "served some key strategic purposes for activists trying to build a transnational campaign because it allowed them to attract allies and bridge cultural differences" (172). Sikkink and Keck note: "the preservation of human dignity, including

physical abuse, appears to be a transcultural value" and "concern with bodily harm appears to avoid both the indifference resulting from cultural relativism and the arrogance of cultural imperialism" (195). This proved a turning point in development of a transnational women's movement where a "common advocacy position" around which women's organizations in many parts of the world could agree and collaborate" (195). Since then, various forms of violence against women have taken centre stage in terms of an international campaign addressing women's oppression in very diverse societies. Sikkink and Keck found that women activists and scholars have mobilized with this network through a human rights frame with some success to bring about mechanisms and machinery that works toward the eradication of violence against women.

As a result of the assessment of the United Nations Decade of Women, the United Nations recognized women's rights as human rights after an extended transnational campaign under the slogan of "women's rights are human rights." This enabled women and feminists to access mechanisms available to human rights to push for eradication of violence against women. Testimonies and personal stories played a major role in these processes and proceedings (176) including the Tribunal for Women's Human Rights, a "dramatic network activity" at the Vienna conference inspired by previous people's tribunals (Sikkink and Keck, 187). The major conceptual innovation that this brought to the international human rights discourse was the "new focus on violence in the private sphere" whereas previously the focus had been on "trying to get governments to stop doing something (for instance, torturing or imprisoning people)" (172). This, according to Sikkink and Keck, "implied rethinking the boundaries between public and private (as had the antislavery and anti-footbinding movements)" (173).

In 1993, the UN adopted the Declaration for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) meant to compliment and strengthen 1979's CEDAW. In 1995, The UN special rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Sri Lankan Radhika Coomaaswamy presented the preliminary report to the Human Rights Commission "which summarized and highlighted much of the information that academics and women's rights activists had put forward over the previous five years" (188). The report recognized that "though a source of positive values, the family was a main site for violence against women and for socialization processes that can lead

to its justification" (188). In her presentation to the Commission, Coomaaswamy "argued that negative cultures and traditions involving violence against women 'must be challenged and eliminated' " (Sikkink and Keck, 189). In 1999, the UN general assembly designated November 25th as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and it is now the yearly launch date of 16 Days of Activism Against Gendered Violence, an international campaign.

In the DEVAW, violence against women is defined as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual o psychological harm or suffering to women, including threat of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (United Nations 1993, 3). In *Article 2*, violence is defined as follows:

a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;

b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;

c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs. (United Nations 1993: 3).

Of specific significance for this research project, is the definition's inclusion of violence against women within the family, battering and marital rape. The DEVAW's definition draws attention to the public vs. private divide, recognizing its relevance to and importance in addressing this violence. Finally, the definition explicitly calls for the elimination of violence at familial, communal, and societal levels. Our research focuses on a very specific form of violence that exists, is maintained by, and is reproduced at all of these levels.

In her work, Neelu Kang explains that "violence is an expression of power and maintains unequal power relations. To maintain control of men over women, gender-based

violence has been sanctioned and perceived as normal conduct in most cultures worldwide" (2006, 148). In the introduction to their compilation "Ethnographic Notes from the Front Lines of Gender-Based Violence," Haldane and Weis define gender-based violence as "violence against an individual or population based on gender identity or expression" and that this violence "includes multiple forms of violence and reflects the political-economic structures that perpetuate gender-based inequalities among people and populations" (2005, 2). Gender-based violence is as a form of structural violence.

In his article *On Suffering and Structural Violence* (1996), medical anthropologist Paul Farmer reflects on structural violence through an interrogation of "the mechanisms through which large-scale social forces crystallize into the sharp, hard surfaces of individual suffering. Such suffering is structured by historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces that conspire - whether through routine, ritual, or, as is more commonly the case, these hard surfaces to constrain agency" (263). Structural violence is understood as systemic, upheld through social structures and institutions, and often "invisibilized" or "naturalized" by them. According to Farmer, to study structural violence "the analysis must be geographically broad" and also historically deep" (274). Researchers looking at notions of risk and suffering through this lens "study both individual experience and the larger social matrix in which it is embedded in order to see how various large-scale social forces come to be translated into personal distress and disease. By what mechanisms do social forces ranging from poverty to racism become embodied as living experience?" (261-262). Although, Farmer places a primacy on socioeconomic poverty in his research on structural violence in terms of who is "not only more likely to suffer, [but] are also more likely to have their suffering silenced" (280), he recognizes that:

> [f]actors including gender, ethnicity ('race"), and socioeconomic status may each be shown to play a role in rendering individuals and groups vulnerable to extreme human suffering. But in most settings these factors have limited explanatory power. *Simulateneous* consideration of various social "axes" is imperative in efforts to discern a political economy of brutality. Further more, such social factors are differentially

weighted in different settings and at different times, as even brief consideration of
their contributions to extreme suffering suggest (274).

According to Haldane and Wies, "situating gender-based violence as structural violence
has allowed scholars to move from individual pathology to social responsibility" (2005, 3).
However, Wies and Haldane take issue with researchers not "explicitly" interrogating "local-
level violence" as structural violence:

> The study of violence within intimate settings requires a framework that allows
> analytical attention to some of the hidden sites of violence (Scheper-Hughes 1992).
> The public/private dichotomy masks many forms of gender-based violence,
> particularly such acts as rape, incest, sexual assault, and domestic violence. Exposing
> the hidden sites of violence allows us to reflect on the structural factors that produce,
> reproduce, and exacerbate the suffering of the victim, and far too often, protect the
> perpetrator (3).

There are many terms and definitions used currently in the literature for the kind of violence that
occurs in "intimate settings." In "Understanding South Asian Immigrant Women's Experiences
of Violence," domestic violence is defined "as a situation in which one partner uses various
forms of abuse to systematically persecute the other" (Ayyub in Venkataramani-Kothari 2007,
11). Additionally, the World Health Organization (WHO) points out that domestic violence can
also "encompass child or elder abuse, or abuse by any member of the household" (2012,1).
According to the WHO, intimate partner violence (IPV) is understood as one of the most
common forms of violence against women. IPV "includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse
and controlling behaviours by an intimate partner" (2012, 1). Intimate partners here can refer to
"formal unions" and/or "dating" and thus open up the categories (2). Another term in the
literature is battering which "refers to a severe and escalating form of partner violence
characterized by multiple forms of abuse, terrorization and threats, and increasingly possessive
and controlling behaviour on the part of the abuser" (1). One of the wide range of acts involved
in violence against women is femicide which is "generally understood to involve intentional
murder of women because they are women, but broader definitions include any killings of

women or girls" (1). Intimate femicide is sometimes used to refer to the murder of a woman by her partner but can also be extended to include the murder of a woman by her family members.

Some of the earliest terms coined and used in the 1970s during the wave of advocacy to place this violence out of the realm of "personal problem" to "social problem" were wife abuse and battering. In her research, "The Social Construction of Wife Abuse: Experiences of Indian American Women in the United States," Mehorta (1999) engages with these terms and takes issue with and finds them "restrictive" labels only fitting a "narrow range of behaviours and people" (618). As well, Mehorta criticizes how these terms were constructed in the public imaginary through the creation of an imagined helpless "passive victim" and a socially unsupportable "transgressor" as part of the push for publicly funded shelters. The naming of a phenomenon is very important, argues Mehorta, as it "helps individuals define their personal experiences and choose a course of action" (Kelly in Mehorta, 619). Indeed, "the practice of naming and defining a phenomenon as a social problem is neither objective nor apolitical" as are the images and examples we use to "embue" them with meaning (Mehorta, 619-620). Quoting Loseke (1992), Mehorta argues that labels and "their consequent exclusions will be reproduced so long as diverse experiences of women are not taken into account" and the lack of recognition that "labels and what they represent are not constant" nor a given within and between societies (620). Along similar lines, Margaret Abraham (2000) argues:

> addressing marital violence without examining the experiences of different categories of women similarly leads to the false assumption that there is homogeneity in women's experiences of violence. While marital violence cuts across race, ethnicity, and class with devastating effect, the complex ways in which ethnicity, citizenship, and class intersect with gender must be examined if we are to make substantive progress in addressing the problem (xi).

In the 1980s, not long after the ratification of the CEDAW by the UN, a wave of South Asian Women's Organizations (SAWOs) were created across North America. According to Abraham, who writes mainly of the emergence of SAWOs in the United States, "two movements form the background" for their creation: "the battered women's movement in the United States and the

United Kingdom and the women's movement in South Asia" (Abraham 2000,154). These organizations were created out of the "increasing need felt by some South Asian women to organize and address the problems faced by women in their community" knowing that "the specific concerns of ethnic minority women had frequently been excluded by white U.S. feminists, thus marginalizing women like those who have immigrated from South Asian" (156). Similarly, in Montreal, the South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC) was inaugurated in 1981 and the March 8th Committee of Women of Diverse Origins (WDO) in 2000 (Hussain and Boti 2009). According to Dolores Chew, who is among the co-founders of both organizations, "[i]nvisibilization and an informed awareness of marginalization with deep historical roots was at the core of their creation of both SAWCC and the WDO. Women, through time, have been represented, spoken for and spoken too. Minority women, feel this even more" (2011, 1). Similarly to what Abraham notes for SAWOs in the United States, Chew writes that in Montreal "both organizations reflected the spirit of the times in their origins" (1). For this, she points to the UN's 1975 International Women's Year and meeting in Mexico City as well as the following Decade of Women as being of note along with a "new generation of activists" being born in the countries of origins of the founders as well as political upheavals with "transnational reverberations" in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan (1). Additionally, in the Quebec context, "nationalism had polarized politics and minority communities mattered only as populations who could be mobilized to boost pro or anti nationalist camps. Within women's organizations in Montreal, there was little recognition of and space for migrant and minority women. Even within so-called 'cultural organizations of their communities, South Asian women were marginalized" (2). Chew notes:

> Both organizations came into existence to fill a need. When the SAWCC began, there were few centres in Montréal for women, and those that existed, lacked the linguistic and cultural specificities needed to make them accessible for women from South Asia. When the WDO came into being, the vibrant tradition of celebrating International women's day in Montréal had stopped, and when it did resume, at the instance of large union centrals, issues relevant to migrant and minority women were either absent, or were there in token form (2011, 1).

Both Shamita Das Dasgupta and Margaret Abraham, each a co-founder of a SAWO themselves and whose research is rooted in the knowledge gained and work done by SAWOs over decades, note that when it comes to wife abuse and battering, the South Asian experience necessitates opening up the definition beyond violence done by the partner. In her work, Abraham (2000) uses the term 'marital violence' to "mean any form of coercion, power, and control - physical, sexual, verbal, mental, or economic- perpetrated on a woman by her spouse or extended kin, arising from the social relations that are created within the context of marriage" (2000, 3). For the purposes of this study, the working term for the type of violence examined shall be intimate gendered violence (IGV) which builds upon Abraham's definition of violence and broadens the context of the social relations, often in the space of the home (domestic violence) to those created through dating, marriage, and family while emphasizing the role of gender.

Building upon two major sociological theoretical perspectives, the family violence approach and the feminist approach, Abraham developed for her research of this violence what she terms an ethno-gender approach (2000, 5). Abraham's ethno-gender approach takes both ethnicity and gender as "significant analytical categories in the discourse on domestic violence" (6). Abraham intends the ethno-gender approach to "extend the existing framework of analysis by specifically focusing on the intersections of culture and structure in addressing violence against women" (6). However, Abraham does not wish to deny other factors at play. The full definition of her approach is as follows: "one that examines the multiple intersection of ethnicity, gender, class, and legal status as significant categories in the analysis of domestic violence with a special emphasis on the relationship between ethnicity and gender" (6). Defending her choice to highlight ethnicity and gender, Abraham explains that "cultural differences form an important basis for the social construction of a national culture in a foreign land" (7). Furthermore, "ethnicity is frequently the first explicit marker of differentiation that the dominant group and other groups use, especially women's physical appearance, and can be used as an easy source of distinction in the construction of the ethnicized other" (Abraham 2000, 7). In their work, *Domestic Violence at the Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender: Challenges and Contributions to Understanding Violence Against Marginalized Women in Diverse Communities*, Natalie Sokolof and Ida Dupont also underscore the need for both structural and

intersectional approaches when researching IGV (2005). Sokolof and Dupont write that Richie, author of *A Black feminist reflection on the antiviolence movement* (2000):

> challenges this notion of universal risk: Poor women of color are "most likely to be both in dangerous intimate relationships and dangerous social positions" (p.1136). She argues that the antiviolence movement's avoidance of a race and class analysis of violence against women "seriously compromises the transgressive and transformative potential of the anti violence movement's potential [to] radically critique various forms of social domination" (p.1135). The failure to address the multiple oppressions of poor women of color jeopardizes the validity and legitimacy of the antiviolence movement (41).

Sokoloff and Dupont continue by turning to the words of Incite!, an organization of Women of Colour Against Violence which organized a conference entitled "The Color of Violence" in 2000:

> That is, strategies designed to combat violence within communities (sexual/domestic violence) must be linked to strategies that combat violence directed against communities (i.e., police brutality, prisons, racism, economic exploitation, etc.)" (p.1). One without the other is inadequate; for battered women on the margins of society, the two are intimately connected (52).

Furthermore, this kind of intersectional approach also requires "antiviolence movements to address domestic violence in an honest and self-reflective manner" (57). Citing the work of P.H. Collins, "The Ties that Bind: Race, Class, and U.S. Violence" (1998), Soloff and Dupont write that "anti-violence coalition building requires a view of violence grounded in intersectionality, critical self-reflection by participants regarding their own responsibility for perpetuating oppression, and empathy (not sympathy) for the suffering of others" (57).

In terms of domestic violence research, Cousineau et al. (2004) look at working on domestic violence across cultures and transnationally in their summary of a conference held near Montreal entitled "Towards a Cross-Cultural Analysis of Family Violence." They flag issues with definitions and instruments of measurements as well as ethical boundaries with new conceptualizations. They warn about how "debates about the methodological issues associated

with determining the prevalence of family violence can overshadow, at times, discussion about intervention and prevention" and state that "researchers need consciously to help advance the programmatic and policy agenda, while resolving research issues" (943). Cousineau et al. argue that one way to improve quantitative research is to supplement it with ethnography and qualitative research (943). This echoes what Abraham (2000) does in her work deciding to focus on the voices of the women involved and using an anthropological approach to try and "effectively capture the subtleties of culture" (x). Cousineau et al. also mention the need to work with local practitioners and cultural representatives to develop the tools of research (944). Following this advice and the aforementioned analytical frameworks, I have chosen to try and make this as collaborative a research project as possible: a mixture of applied anthropology and critical ethnography.

From South Asian Community to South Asian Population

According to Abraham (2000), the term South Asian "is a social construct that refers to people whose ethnic origins are from countries known today as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and Nepal within the situational context of these peoples' immigration to North America in the twentieth century" (xi -xii). Although originally used as a result of American's view of these different peoples as homogenous, through the work done by the Asian American movement of the late 1960s and the subsequent community programs that were developed, the term became "a symbol of pride and a source for coalition building and political unity" (Abraham 2000, xii).

Presently, in the literature and in many cities across North America and in the UK, the term South Asian "is a label that has been used in different ways, including cultural identification, regional identification, and as the basis for collective action" (Abraham 2000, xi). Today the term South Asian is "used in popular parlance, though large segments of the South Asian population still identify themselves primarily in terms of nation-states" (xi). Noting the inner class, religious, and ethnic diversity of those people who fall under the South Asian bracket, Abraham "see[s] the community as different segments coming together, cooperating,

negotiating, intervening, and often transcending the tyranny of previously assumed barriers to exert greater influence in the shifting situational contexts of national and transnational structures" (xiii).

In her work, Fiore (2008) explains that ethnic communities need to be understood as dynamic sociohistorical and identity constructs in constant flux (2008, 118). Speaking of Indian and other South Asian "cultures," Fiore gives mention to their history of being colonized and subsequent processes of decolonization leading to the continuing construction of South Asian identity in the modern and post-modern world. The restructuring of identity occurs within the diaspora as well as in South Asia in relation to the various contexts of the host countries where South Asian immigrant communities settled. This is relevant to our understanding of South Asian populations or communities (if they do indeed consider themselves *South Asian* communities) and how they fashion themselves, their boundaries, and their transformations.

Currently, "South Asians from India, Pakistan, and the surrounding areas of Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka represent the second largest and fastest growing visible minority group in Canada" (Merali 2009, 322). In 2001, the South Asian population made up 3% of the Canadian population (Lindsay 2001, 9). In Lindsay's profile of the South Asian community in Canada as part of a series of ethnic community profiles for Statistics Canada, Lindsay describes the community as "growing", "mostly foreign-born", "a young population", "of diverse religious backgrounds", more likely to have a university degree than average population, "having an incidence of low income", and mostly living in either Ontario or British Colombia (5).

Historically, immigration to Canada by South Asians was fairly restricted until the end of the 1960s due to the adoption by Canada of anti-Asian discriminatory policies and laws (Fiore 2008, 122). This is similar to the history of immigrant policy described by Abraham(2000) in terms of South Asian immigration in the United States (51). Despite these barriers, a small number of immigrants did migrate to Canada, mostly to British Colombia, but most of them worked on farms under bad labour conditions. When these discriminatory laws were abolished, the immigration of South Asian persons to Canada was most pronounced in three provinces including Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec (Fiore 2008, 122). In terms of demographics,

British Columbia has a primarily Punjabi South Asian immigrant population whilst those in Ontario and Quebec are more diverse.

In her study, Fiore (2008) looks at the South Asian community in the province of Quebec and examines the specific pre-migration and post-migration contexts of South Asian migrants in relation to the changing contexts of Quebec. According to Census data, the number of South Asian immigrants to have settled in Quebec since 1991 is 47,805 (Fiore 2008, 122). The first waves of immigration in Quebec were mostly urban professionals until the 1970s, when those arriving are from more diverse backgrounds. Around this time as well, the first refugees from South Asia arrive. Understanding the immigration profile of immigrants arriving to Quebec is to see the way in which it is directly related to conflicts within South Asia including wars as well as economic and ecological conditions (132). After these significant waves, chain migration is responsible for growing South Asian immigrant population as family members sponsor spouses and extended kin to settle in Canada and its provinces (Merali 2009, 321). Most South Asian immigrants are concentrated in urban centers and thus, the Quebec South Asian population is densest in Montreal.

Assessing whether the South Asian community in Quebec is indeed a "community", Fiore used three indicators for her analysis. In a way, Fiore has tested the validity of 'South Asian' identity construct label at the local level. These indicators are "l'importance numérique," "la concentration dans l'éspace," and "le marquage ethnique des quartiers" (2008: 124). Fiore's findings indicate that there is an actual sense of community between South Asian immigrants in the region of Montreal, where immigrants are more spatially isolated than the native population (125) and yet share a variety of services (126). In terms of "marquage éthnique" or ethnic marking, Fiore cites the places of worship as well as businesses which began multiplying since the 1980s mostly in the Park Extension and Dollard-des-Ormeaux neighbourhoods (124). On the island of Montreal most South Asians live in underprivileged or deprived neighbourhoods including: Parc Extension, Côte-Des-Neiges, and Saint-Laurent (126). Fiore attributes the settlement into these neighbourhoods to the relatively recent immigration of the population as well as the economic situation, which is made worse by racial and religious discrimination and non recognition of foreign diplomas (127-128).

A large part of Fiore's argument for an actual South Asian community and identity is the creation of South Asian organizations themselves (128). These cultural, political, and/or religious organizations are part of the evolution of a South Asian community network which builds ties within the community as well as defines its borders including the building of partnerships and networks with host society organizations (128). She discusses the example of a traditional dance foundation Kala Bharati as an example of building bridges with the host community whilst fostering cultural tradition (130). Like Abraham (2000), Fiore sees South Asian community building and organizational development as a result of the immigration context and as an opportunity for greater political power and access to resources (2008, 130).

That being said, during fieldwork, participant observation, and throughout my interviews, I began to see that the term South Asian community might not be appropriate to describe the research demographic. Most events and organizations did not explicitly use the term South Asian and tended to use regional, nation-state, and/or religious identifications instead. More importantly, when the question of *South Asian* community leaders came up, almost every participant responded with a pause and then, said that "there are none". They would sometimes point to leaders within subsets of the South Asian population but again using different labels. Notably, the one instance where South Asian community and leadership was recognized explicitly as *South Asian* was in referring to the South Asian Women's Community Centre itself.

In "Reconceptualizing community," Vered Amit (2002) interrogates the proliferation of "community" as a prominent "form of sociality" used in scholarly work (1). The anthropological shift to studying communities is not a neutral one and seems to have occurred:

> when anthropologists began to shift their research to cities, where the populations they
> studied were incorporated into state systems and when they began to interrogate more
> self-consciously the limits of their field of inquiry; in short, when they converged on
> to the terrain of complex societies they had hitherto consigned to sociologists. In these
> circumstances, community resonated as a limited subunit, inextricably but also
> problematically embedded in wider social and cultural contexts, the antithesis therefore
> to antecedent characterization of "primitive societies" as unitary isolates (2).

Amit's main argument in the text is "to argue that the conceptualization of community in anthropological and related literatures has involved a marked shift away from community as an actualized social form to an emphasis on community as an idea or quality of sociality" and that "[i]n turn, this thrust towards ideation has been associated with a translation of community as collective identity rather than interaction" (3). Thus, not wanting to make the mistake of imposing, the reification of research categories nor to take community as a "neutral" analytical concept, it became important to use "population" and take the instances where there was explicit building of "South Asian" community to be itself an important research finding. The meanings that participants attributed to community is also of importance. What does community mean and who delineates it? This is not to say that interview participants and people who are within the South Asian population do not identify as such within certain contexts but not to take for granted that this is a defacto identifier nor that this identification necessarily translates into a "community." Rather, to see the moments in which "community" is mobilized by South Asian people themselves (and not researchers nor statistical data), when communalization occurs under this specific banner, as being itself of significance to the research.

From resiliency to well-being

In the beginning of this research project, I was interested in looking at the concept of building and supporting resiliency through looking at social determinants of health as per the approach of Laurence Kirmayer's work with Indigenous communities (2009). Resilience, although there are diverse definitions, goes beyond resistance and looks at "the ability of an individual, system, or organization to meet challenges, survive and do well despite adversity" (Kirmayer 2009, 63). Moreover, "Resilience is a dynamic process that may vary from one social context to the next and from one worldview or value system to the next [...] resilience reflects processes that draw from multiple sources of strength and resources to allow people to face, live with, manage, and overcome challenges" (69). However, some key problems with using this concept quickly arose: First, an increasing amount of criticisms from grassroots organizations and radical activists were

coming up of the way in which the concept was being used by politicians, the non-profit industrial complex, and policy makers to continue to put the onus on individual ability to be resilient instead of the resources needed for the structural changes required to end structural inequities (Neocleosm 2013). Secondly, as Prof. Hoodfar had warned me, when I spoke with women at SAWCC, and more specifically after a conversation with Mita, my key participant, the idea of resilience was unclear and conflated with and understood as "the ability to withstand the abuse for the sake of the family," or "the ability to endure" within the circumstances of abuse (Fieldnotes).

Addressing IGV against South Asian women entails working towards supporting their well-being. Mainstream models designed to address this violence rely on the assumption that what constitutes "well-being" and "empowerment" are homogenous for all women. To avoid making this assumption, the idea of well-being was one of the first concepts that I spoke with interviewees about. Their answers shaped much of the research and understanding of what factors were considered of most significance and they are woven throughout. In their Independent & Autonomous program pamphlet, the South Asian Women's Community Centre's defines well-being as follows: "Well-being is not just happiness, but it is about giving meaning to our lives. We want women to feel fulfilled and worthwhile." This is a guiding thread throughout research.

Mapping as analytical tool

"The notion of mapping evokes associations with geographers and mapmakers who chart the contours of particular terrains, identifying the rifts and valleys, the sites of excavation and danger." Jiwani, xii

This thesis draws inspiration from communications scholar Yasmin Jiwani's work *Discourses of Denial* (2006). Jiwani's research focuses on the "intersecting and interlocking influences of race, gender, and violence as they contour and texture the Canadian public imagination and, more

specifically, as they inform the lives of immigrant girls and women of colour" (xii.) Taking inspiration from the work of Sherene Razack (1995), Jiwani underscores how mapping has played a significant role in colonization. Jiwani explains:

> [Razack] positions her work as an "unmapping" of the spatialization of gendered racial violence. In her unmapping, Razack seeks to strip the colonial mantle and ogranizational structure that has constituted this spatialization. ... My aim is to map the discursive fields that govern the discourses of race and gendered violence, not so much in a spatial sense but in terms of highlighting the inundated and uneven landscape of these multiple and interweaving structures of domination (xii).

In a similar manner, this thesis aims to map out and render visible mechanisms of power that act as "barriers" to escaping such violence as well as reproduce and maintain it. As part of this, the thesis aims to also identify keys sites for shifting forces, transformation, and interventions to support well-being. As well, the maps aim to serve as a counter-map (or alternative map) of these factors speaking back to the mainstream domestic violence discourse that has left out the experiences of South Asian women in Montreal.

For this mapping, interviews with frontline workers and the stories, knowledge, and lived experiences of South Asian women are the prioritized source of data. According to Wies and Haldane, frontline workers "offer a unique perspective to our understanding of violence. While the perspectives of policy makers, victims, and survivors are critically important to how we conceptualize adequate responses to gender-based violence, they have only one story to tell: their own story of violence and survival to the story or the institution or organization they direct" (2011, 2). Weis and Haldane contend that anthropology at the front lines of gender-based violence not overlook the richness of working with frontline workers, who may very well also wear many hats as activists, educators, community members, victim and survivor. Frontline workers carry with them the knowledge of a multitude of stories as well as an expertise in their field. Frontline workers, Weis and Haldane describe, are "barometers" of gender-based violence and key to "mapping to scale and scope of violence in their communities" as well as knowing how policy changes shape and play out in day-to-day realities (2).

CHAPTER TWO: Acquiring and Analyzing Data

In the following chapter, the methods used for acquiring and analyzing data are presented: participant observation, interviews & personal stories, 'reeltime ethnography', textual and material culture analysis, as well as the role of the position of the researcher and the limits in scope and depth. These methods remained within the scope approved by two ethics committees (academic and community-based) while being responsive to the realities encountered (change in interview participant focus) and opportunities that presented themselves (reeltime ethnography).

Participant Observation

One of the three main methods used during fieldwork was participant observation conducted from September 2013 to June 2014 with the bulk of the work occurring between December and May. Once SAWCC approved my ethics protocol, around November 2014, I began volunteering regularly which provided one of the main and richest platforms for participant observation. I attended and helped with various workshops and events. Furthermore, I was asked to provide French conversation tutoring to SAWCC workers as well as English Level 1 language lessons to members. I was also increasingly invited to events as a participant (not to volunteer) including several potlucks and celebrations.

After a month of volunteering or so, I asked if I could attend some of the workshops offered by the South Asian Women Autonomous and Independent (SAWAI) project, which consisted of weekly two-hour English language classes and one-hour workshops in the Park Extension neighbourhood. The project coordinators agreed and I attended and helped support these workshops for five months. The SAWAI project provided the opportunity to observe and interact with a different demographic of women than those who came to the SAWCC's main office, which was in a more central neighbourhood. Travelling to the Park Extension and Côte-des-Neiges neighbourhoods from Montreal's downtown area also provided a lot of material for

reflection as well as a new field site in and of itself with new locations in the neighbourhood as well as a local community centre.

I found ways to make my job at the time (working at an anti-capitalist collective soup kitchen) relevant to my research by sitting on various committees working with refugees and undocumented immigrants dealing with food insecurity. Furthermore, I connected my work at the collective kitchen and volunteering at SAWCC by, for example, helping to provide food for SAWCC's end of year celebrations. The intersections between my work and research provided new entry points for fieldwork as well as enriching my knowledge through new vantage points (through food and other grassroots organizations).

Another important dimension of participant observation were meetings with Mita, a young South Asian woman interested in undertaking similar research. I met with Mita regularly, almost weekly, to discuss research, eventually forming a friendship and spending time with her to catch up with each other's daily lives. These meetings provided an important source of participant observation outside of the spaces of SAWCC. This also included attending protests together, discussing issues that she was facing as a recent immigrant and attending religious festivals together.

This fieldwork constituted anthropology 'at home', in the sense that I have lived in this city since 2004, and so the boundaries and notions of entering and leaving the terrain were complicated by it. The dynamic political landscape of Montreal provided an important terrain for fieldwork in and of itself and included large marches, protests, and public debates. Participation in these events, with South Asian women from SAWCC and other local grassroots organizations, and keeping au courant by observing local media on issues provided major insights and data for this research.

Interviews & Personal Stories

Interviews constitute the second major method for acquiring understanding. Interviews were a focused site for conversations as well as space to dialogue about concepts and observations with

participants to test the validity of my analysis. Through this process, a research dialogue emerged that directly shaped its parameters and analysis.

In total, 10 women participated in semi-structured interviews lasting one hour with two to three interview sessions each. Their countries of origin included Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. They speak a wide range of languages including Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Sinhala, French, English, Pastho, Urdu, Farsi, Dari, Chakma, Punjabi, Norwegian, and more with most of them speaking at minimum two languages. To preserve their anonymity, each woman was given a pseudonym: Mita, Deeba, Nabila, Charu, Harusha, Mehry, Pramiti, Vihbuti, Kushula, and Juhi. Their ages range from 22 to 53 with an average age of 39 and median age of 41. Their migration to Montreal occurred between 1994 to 2012 with six of them arriving in the mid 90s and four since the year 2000. Most were married, a couple had divorced, one nondisclosed, and a couple single. Most came to Canada through their husband as principle applicant, then as the principal applicant themselves and the rest, through their fathers. At the time of the interviews, six of the women had children and four did not. All of them, except one, had post secondary degrees before immigrating to Canada and a few held multiple degrees.

Their voices, concerns, and reflections are at the heart of this work. Their shared knowledge and stories are put into conversation with existing research (mostly conducted by South Asian women and racialized women) and are at the centre of its analysis. I have included, as small interlude boxes, certain stories (or cases) shared with me in in their entireties.

Dragonroot Radio & Reeltime Ethnography

Looking to learn about how local organizations and communities speak about gender-based violence and issues around immigration, racism, and feminism, I joined a project called Dragonroot radio in the spring of 2013. This radio collective was part of a collaborative project by Concordia's Centre for Gender Advocacy and CKUT 90.3 FM, McGill's campus-community radio station. Throughout the year, events were held by the Dragonroot project in which different organizations and groups were invited to discuss or hold workshops on issues related to gender.

Concurrently, the project provided radio skills training programs for persons interested in producing content related to gender. Those who were trained through the program became part of the radio collective, named Dragonroot Radio. The collective, in turn, covered the events held and aired these episodes on a weekly/biweekly basis. The first Dragonroot event I attended was held by SAY, a youth collective that emerged out of SAWCC's youth programming.

Eventually, the Dragonroot project changed formats and CKUT continued the radio skills training and collective portion of the project. As well, persons who had been previously trained could continue on in the collective programming and hosting the weekly airtime slot. This continued for a couple of cohorts but as the main coordinators and founders of the project moved away (or on) from their involvement with the project, it became more akin to the main format that the station's radio collectives take and less of a skills-based training program for gender-related content.

When I began my fieldwork, Dragonroot became an interactive tool for doing critical ethnography. I conducted my own interviews during the initial training and program and then focused mainly on programming for the next few years where I connected local organizations (including SAWCC) artists, speakers, and interested persons with the radio collective to discuss issues related to gender.

Dragonroot became a site where I could do field work and research in such a way where I decentered myself as an interviewer as the only recipient for/container for information, participate in media production, interventions around gender, and share discussions and knowledge in "reel time." In terms of the programming most directly related to this research some of these include the following episodes that functioned as "reel-time" ethnography: On January 14th, 2014, two SAWCC community workers were featured on Dragonroot to discuss "gendered issues within the South Asian community in Montreal" more broadly. Another episode, which aired on February 4th, 2014, featured Sarah Fathiya for a discussion about the launching of her zine entitled *Life Stories, on Being A Muslim Woman in Montreal: Struggle and Solidarity.* This zine was also presented at the SAWCC year end celebration and had come about from Fathiya's involvement with SAWCC, personal lived experience, and coursework at McGill in a class with Professor Aziz Choudry. The February 11th, 2014 episode featured content from

The Center for Gender Advocacy's *Thick Skin Series* event 'Reflections on Race, Gender, and Political Resistance- Islamic Feminisms'. And last but not least, on March 11th, 2014, Dragonroot radio featured Dolores Chew, a founding member of SAWCC, speaking about her work with the March 8th Women of Diverse Origins Committee and International Women's Day.

Textual & Material Culture Analysis

Textual analysis was another main method used for data collection. Throughout fieldwork, I came across a large amount of physical texts including a magazine titled "Shakti" published by the centre spanning decades, a small book entitled *Threads (*Chew et al.) , many pamphlets and resource guides used at the centre, 'zines' put together by SAY (the youth program), a series of posters and artwork exhibited both at SAWCC and at special events, statements and briefs on various issues, and monthly newsletters put together by SAWCC staff for their members. These provide a rich source of information including years of community work by SAWCC, organizational and activist memory, and the voices and stories of hundreds of community members. Furthermore, the way in which these texts are produced, used, and function is an important part of the work done by SAWCC to address violence and constitutes data in an of itself.

Additionally, mainstream media was another source of important data, including political and public discussions and "debates" around relevant topics, and constituted rich discursive fields (Jiwani 2006). These included newspapers, radio, blogs, and official statements on various organizational websites. Media itself and the texts produced also played various roles and functions.

Position of the Researcher

As part of a critical ethnography dedicated to vulnerability and transparency of my subjecthoods, I will use this section to share my positionality as this has shaped this thesis at every stage. I am

a white disabled queer Quebecois settler from Saguenay Lac St-Jean with mostly French and some First Nations ancestry. I have very little access to my First Nations heritage and am mostly coded as white and have white privilege. I have little experience with being racialized except in my childhood where at times, depending on the situation and context, people would inquire if I am "not fully white." Once, after many months of fieldwork at SAWCC during a potluck, I was asked by a member if I was the daughter of one of the staff, who migrated from Pakistan.

Although I grew up in a mostly French speaking region of Quebec, I attended English school for all of my education and was part of a small minority of youth to do so. Due to provincial legislation (Bill 101), I was able to attend one of Saguenay Lac St-Jean's two English language schools, one Catholic and one Protestant which eventually merged, despite tensions. This is because my mother, who was born and partly raised in Whitehorse (Yukon), had attended an English school in Quebec in her teens. I was of school age during the 1995 Quebec referendum on separation from Canada, a moment in which language tensions were re-emboldened as the area was and remains highly sovereignist. This left an important impression on me, as well as early questions about my identity as I had an English-speaking mother, who was considered an outsider, and a Quebecois father, who was considered an insider. I grew up with the sense of being more English, an outsider - perhaps. Later on, when I moved to Montreal for my studies and was matched for school residence with three young girls from Abitibi, I started to realize that not only was I more "French" than I had realized but also from the "regions." I began identifying more comfortably as Quebecois when attending McGill University and being met with stark class differences and anti-Quebecois rhetoric and attitudes.

I was not very vocal in the field about being queer in part because I did not know how this would affect my field relationships. I knew from my literature review that queerness might be a touchy subject (Choudhruy 2007) and felt that unless it was relevant or came up naturally, I would not bring it up. I did share this aspect of my life with Mita and some of the women I was closest with. As well, my queerness was known to some of the SAWCC youth organizers with whom I had overlapping organizational involvements in Montreal outside of SAWCC. Over the last sixteen years, I have been heavily involved in social justice, environmental activism, campus

queer organizing and feminist initiatives as well as solidarity work with Indigenous communities and activists.

A key aspect of my positionality that played a major role throughout this research project is that I am the survivor of childhood domestic violence, transgenerational trauma, multiple sexual assaults, and intimate partner violence. In my ethics review & interview with SAWCC's Board of Directors, I disclosed how these parts of my lived experience were important motivators in doing research in this area along with my commitment to anti-racism and social justice.

My life "outside of the field," continued to play a role in relationship to this research, and in many ways provided me with added participant observation insights into the pervasiveness of gendered violence, legal and social services responses to such issues, and the difficult experience of trying to access services and support during moments of extreme distress. I believe it also contributes to the understanding of how hard it is to "get back on one's feet" and the multiple costs of sexual assault - even when there is substantial privilege present in terms of language, ethnicity, and citizenship. It also explains the large time gap between the completion of my fieldwork and the final writing of this thesis. I share the following because it feels relevant to the research and its analysis:

While writing my thesis proposal in May 2013, I witnessed from my kitchen window an aggravated domestic assault with a weapon. As a formal witness, I was deposed by detectives and retained if the court needed me. The victim did not want to press charges but the Crown retained the right to do so. In November 2014, while walking home late at night near Concordia campus, I intervened in an aggravated sexual assault with a deadly weapon against a teenaged girl. My friend and I charged at the perpetrator to chase him away. He was then pursued and arrested at gunpoint by the police while my friend and I held the badly beaten survivor. This was a hard experience. In the later summer of 2015, I was sexually assaulted by two strangers and, as a result of compounding traumas, developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. As I was already a student with disabilities precariously balancing work and school, with the added stress of caring for a family member and the death of a childhood mentor, my life was subsequently derailed for the larger part of five years. Derailed is used here to describe the experience because that is the

closest word I can find to express the feeling. This, in large part, was due to trying to access services for survivors thinking they would support me following my sexual assault but finding them to be at the best, difficult and hard to navigate, and at worst, adding more harm to the situation. As instructed by the Sexual Assault Centre of Montreal (CVASM) workers, who came to take my rape kit in the hospital, I submitted a request for support to IVAC (l'Indemisation des victimes d'actes criminel) the office responsible for supporting victims of crimes. After four months or so, my case was accepted for right to compensation. However, it took the government service more than eight months before conducting an initial assessment for my needs. During this time, I had no access to therapy nor any idea of what services nor financial support I could access. Frankly, I was in "survival mode" and had no idea just how poorly I was coping. I had been convincing myself that I could keep working and catch up to come back to finish writing this thesis. The experience of the IVAC assessment itself could make for an interesting ethnographic inquiry. It was a distressing and gruelling three-hour experience. When I finally had access to services with the Sexual Assault Centre of Montreal (CVASM) for support by a social worker (9 months after the incident), they felt that I urgently needed to stop working and attend to my rapidly deteriorating mental health. I was diagnosed with severe PTSD. This social worker accompanied much of my early navigation of all the IVAC paperwork and requirements. I went on disability from my job while waiting for the financial compensation I qualified for from IVAC. Unfortunately, two months after I was supposed to receive my first compensation cheque, they disqualified me for financial assistance for several reasons. This was confusing and frustrating and left me in a very precarious position. Around this time, my CVASM social worker told me that their centre had adopted an informal policy to no longer direct clients to IVAC as this service had become increasingly more harmful than helpful. A month after I was denied my compensation, the Protecteur du citoyen, the ombudsman group that oversees whether Quebec services are running as they should be, released a long report condemning the "long wait times," "gaps in information to victims," "restrictive interpretation of the Crimes Victims Compensation Act" and application of conditions not found in the Act (Quebec Ombudsman, 2016). This investigative report called for 33 recommendations to be implemented by IVAC to better serve victims.

Over the next years, I would advocate for the revision of their decision for my compensation with help from the CVASM social worker at the as well as the Protecteur du Citoyen. More than a year after my appeal, the Ministry of Justice found that IVAC had not properly handled my case and the decision was overturned on all counts. Three years after this decision, despite constant delays and lack of communication, I finally received my compensation (in split amounts). The Ombudsman had to call them several times to find out when my money would arrive as it kept being delayed. I tried to return to school and finish my degree but delays with money from IVAC as well as the unexpected denial of my student financial aid based on its own arbitrary decision that I had used up too many semesters caused constant barriers. I have had to also appeal this AFE decision to a special derogation committee for several semesters for aid despite being recognized as a student with a major functional disability. Since 2017, these numerous financial and health factors kept me unable to return to school in productive ways. I would keep trying and falling short of having the necessary support and resources. It was a heartbreaking and disempowering process rife with shame, sadness, and anger. Advocating for myself would have been nearly impossible to if I had not spoken the languages (French and English), not had a lot of supporting documentation, access to a trusted medical professional, and had to contend with racism, family and community pressure, overbearing stigma, and, nearly impossible if I had not had status as a citizen.

Although not part of my official ethnographic experience, this personal experience is just one of many that speaks to the devastating impact acts of sexual violence can have on the life of survivors and how accessing services and navigating institutions meant to aid can, even in the supposed "best of cases" and many forms of privilege, add another layer of hardship to contend with during a time when support is most needed. Without the ability to work due to PTSD, I faced housing insecurity twice during this time. I had to use food banks and navigate food security services, which I luckily knew very well from my prior work experience. Without being able to eventually access social programs for sick leave from work (thanks to an understanding employer) and then employment insurance, I would have lost my home. I came close to losing hope of having any ability to get "my life back" in a meaningful way. I considered ending my life on more than one occasion. The key role of social workers like the one who supported me at

CAVSM, the crisis lines that saved my life when I despaired, the advocacy by the Quebec Ombudsman group, and the programming of survivor-centred events by grassroots organizations cannot be overstated in their importance in my case.

Limitations

There were significant limitations to this research. The initial research question was too broad in scope for the purposes of a Masters thesis. It took time to narrow the focus of what to include in this text and what could actually be addressed in any sort of depth given the multitude of factors identified. Even with this narrowing, to achieve the a representation in line with the analytical frameworks, only one of the three map layers could be penned. As well, with the sensitive nature of the research, it took a long time before women were comfortable enough with me to participate in interviews and even more so, for frontline workers to feel comfortable referring members for me to speak with. Another important limitation is that questions of sexual orientation, gender identity, trans experiences, and queerness were left out despite constituting important realities of gendered oppression. Furthermore, the majority of the research focuses on experiences of first-generation migrant women, with one participant identifying herself as between first and second-generation, and that all of the women I spoke with for the interviews had a form of legal status. This leaves out the first-hand insights of second-generation women and non-status women. The research leaves out in many ways the experiences of migrant girls. Last but not least, it remains important to recognize that this fieldwork was anchored at SAWCC and with frontline workers and "activists" and so, much of the knowledge gained is heavily influenced by this as well as my own positionality.

Women's Stories #1: Bosom Friend's Divorce

When Pramiti was studying at university, her 'bosom friend' Aadhira was considering marrying a mutual friend of theirs. This friend had quit college to study political books or "red books" as Pramiti described them. He was a communist, something that Pramiti and her friends respected. "I was fascinated about the communist ideology," she recalled. Despite his lack of higher education, Pramiti and her friends "took the decision" for Aadhira, who was "very obedient" to her friends, that she should marry him. The two got married and five or six years later so did Pramiti. After graduation, the friends all became busy with their lives keeping in touch once a year or so. Aadhira left her mother's house and moved in with her father-in-law. Then, things began to change. Pramiti felt that her friend was avoiding her. One holiday, Pramiti went with her husband to Aadhira's father's-in-law's place. Pramiti noticed that they lived in a similar arrangement: a four story building where Aadhira and her husband lived on one floor of the building with relatives occupying the other floors. Pramiti noticed "abnormal behaviour" from her friend who was acting very formal and not expressing much happiness at seeing a bosom friend. Pramiti felt that she was always trying to " balance her emotions in front of her family members." After this, Pramiti "kept aside from her" and didn't contact Aadhira but kept up with others from their college years. After four or five years, Aadhira's husband, who was friends with Pramiti's boss, came into Pramiti's office surprised to see that she worked there. Aadhira's husband asked Pramiti how Aadhira was doing which confused Pramiti. This angered the husband who felt Pramiti was pretending like she didn't already know they had divorced three years prior. Confused, Pramiti asked:'what happened to you and Aadhira? You were very good couple.' The husband replied that they had actually been in trouble and had "bad relation" and he blamed Aadhira for being selfish. After this meeting, Pramiti called Aadhira to ask what had happened. Pramiti blamed herself and called another friend who had also counselled Aadhira to marry. Pramiti felt responsible and angry. The two met at Aadhira's home, where her mother was staying with her. Aadhira's mother relayed the story: After the two were married, the husband started a business and became addicted to drugs. He soon lost his job and began asking Aadhira, who was a banker, for money. He even asked her colleagues. When Aadhira refused to give him money, he would beat her. Pramiti felt confused that Aadhira, "being an educated person" could be treated in this way. Aadhira divorced and five years later still, he had not come to see their teen daughter. Pramiti felt this was a type of punishment especially because he lived close by. Neither remarried. Pramiti felt this was because "their relation was so deep but the problem was addiction." The husband's family had held Aadhira responsible for not helping him recover from addiction. On her end, Aadhira did not know how to help him especially since he would beat her. She felt he was responsible for creating this situation. His family had "imposed embargo" on her so that she was not allowed to bring or invite friends. This was why she had acted so strangely when Pramiti had visited years prior. One night, when Aadhira's husband had beat her, he had pushed her out of the home yelling to her to go "back to her mother's house." She called her brother and her family insisted that she divorce since she had a good job, economic independence, and the family felt she had a good future and should not have to face this kind of violence. With this family support, Aadhira was able to leave. After talking about things, Pramiti and Aadhira's friendship came back: "we were like we used to be." Pramiti noticed that Aadhira had been very shy to tell her that she had faced this kind of violence and noted that Aadhira had changed: "she is totally different lady. She is very educated but very different. She's not like others like expressing herself, she is very introvert." Pramiti worries about when Aadhira's ailing mother passes since Aadhira's brothers have their own houses and families to care for. Pramiti feels Aadhira is not eager to remarry: "She is actually like a actress of novella. She wants to be alone. She always used to tell me that once it is wrong always it will be wrong."

Women's Stories #2:' Broken Trust

Juhi shared the case of a young Tamil woman in her twenties who had come to Montreal when she was sixteen. This young woman had lost both of her parents and was sponsored, along with her three siblings, by her maternal aunts and uncles. The four siblings were split amongst relatives since no one family could take all of them. The young woman was placed with her maternal aunt's family and began taking French classes. Then her aunt's husband began abusing her sexually. Juhi never probed about the nature of the abuse but the young woman told her the he was touching her inappropriately. When the young woman told her aunt, the aunt refused to believe her. One day, during her French class, the young woman was crying and a friend took her to see a social worker at the school. The social worker brought the young woman out of the house to a shelter and then to the YWCA. The young girl was diagnosed with clinical depression and put on medication. She had self harmed and was sent to the hospital by ambulance. Juhi 'pushed her' to come out and get involved in classes at SAWCC but noticed the young girl would find excuses every time. She seemed very afraid to cross paths with her aunt's husband and often said she had seen him at the metro and turned back home. Juhi had asked how the uncle would know her whereabouts since no one was supposed to say where the young girl was living. Juhi wondered if the young girl was having hallucinations or paranoia from her depression. Juhi's approach with clients is to treat them as she would a friend: "I take her out with me, we share meals together, you know. We buy one meal and both of us sit and share and talk. So, she's slowly became comfortable with me and then started coming for English class. It took me maybe five months to bring her here." Juhi had noticed that the young girl seemed a little bit happier now that she was breaking isolation and occupying herself. Juhi worried about the young girl's friendship with a white lady at the YMCA who seems to be controlling her somewhat. Juhi tried to remind the young girl not to let anyone control her and that she is an independent person and can do many things: "you are a bright girl you need to show your uncle that, you know. You can live on your own and you are doing good. Otherwise, they will say, 'oh you left us and you know, you went and that's why you are in this state'." The young girl was facing backlash from her brothers for the situation. Her leaving her aunt's house is seen as a disgrace by her extended family. The family did not believe the sexual abuse really occurred. The young girl was left "in a state that she doesn't trust anybody." The young girl had a limit on her stay at the YWCA and Juhi was looking for possible living arrangements for her. Juhi offered a few solutions but the young girl declined them. Juhi also preferred that the young girl not be constantly surrounded by other women with difficult stories. Hearing other women's stories had been difficult for the young girl who shared with Juhi that she had stayed up all night crying after a woman at the YWCA had shared her experiences with her. Eventually, Juhi offered her a living situation with an older woman she knows and the young girl said yes. Despite saying yes, the young woman kept postponing. The young woman's social worker relayed to Juhi that the young woman seemed not to trust Tamil people. Juhi asked her about this and the young girl confirmed this - while also making Juhi an exception to this mistrust. Juhi felt that part of this is fear of being asked about her past. The young woman also wont go to therapy and seems to want to avoid talking about things. Juhi felt it was important for her to talk about things freely so that the young woman could be reassured and convinced that she had not done anything wrong. The young girl's social worker had told Juhi she was worried about her. According to Juhi, the young woman seemed lost and hesitant to try things. Juhi had even offered to go with her to YWCA yoga glasses despite being exhausted from her own responsibilities and work day. When she would do so, the young woman would attend. Sometimes, Juhi shared, she noticed that as clients build trust and depend on her, they come to rely on her for small things like phone calls they would otherwise have done on their own. She understands this but also finds herself overwhelmed at times. In the case of the young woman, Juhi explained to me: "I think I will hold her hand 'til she is comfortable and she comes out of her loneliness and depression. Right now, I think she needs a lot of pampering."

Women's Stories #3: 'Violence Happens for Many Reasons'

In our second interview, during a discussion on divorce and fate, Pramiti recounted her experience with acquaintances of hers in Montreal who had a love marriage. Two to three years into the marriage, they began to fight. Both the wife and husband would reach out to Pramiti and her husband about this. The husband was a manager of a large business and told Pramiti that he would often get annoyed with his wife when he would come home from work. The Manager's wife would not have food ready for him when he would return nor ask if he would like any. "She never actually care about her husband but he expect always that his wife will prepare some food for him and they will eat together," Pramiti explained. The couple had a young kindergarten age daughter who didn't seem to go to sleep until past 10pm. This would also annoy the Manager who wanted to come home to a "quiet environment." The wife, according to Pramiti, seemed reluctant to take care of the daughter as she never imposed a bedtime nor made sure the daughter attended school. With the late bedtime, the daughter would regularly not wake up on time for school and received many absentee reports. Pramiti explained, "when the wife would regularly do this thing, then he actually used to beat her." Last winter, the police came because the "wife claimed that her husband had beaten her with his boot and the blood was coming out from her nose," Pramiti continued: "He had beat her because he was furious but the husband is very much rational, very sensitive, very much good person and very educated." Pramiti felt the wife was responsible for the violence in the home: "The wife is very much an annoying person, she never care about her husband." Violence, Pramiti underlined, "happens for many reasons." When I asked her why the Manager did not divorce his wife, she explained that the wife did not have citizenship. When the couple had lived in Vancouver, the wife had called the police after a beating. There had been a charge which had meant that the Manager could not apply for citizenship despite being there for eight years. Pramiti felt that the wife was "using the laws of Canada to force her husband to stay with her in that way." When I asked Pramiti whether the Manager had expressed feelings about his actions, she replied: "he feels bad. He always tell us that 'you tell my wife that when I come from office, if she angry with me, just she should avoid to telling this because, when I come from many things, I need some calm environment but she started talking talking talking and till midnight. She screams." Pramiti felt that the wife had some mental health issues. The wife's own parents, Pramiti explained, "never comes to her house because of her, she's the problem. So violence happens for many reasons." From the wife's neglect of the daughter, Pramiti felt the daughter was also developing mental health issues. I asked if the Manager helped with childcare and she responded "sometimes, sometimes no" because it was mainly the wife's duty. Social workers had been to the home and had recommended that the wife go to counselling but after one or two sessions, the wife had stopped going citing the high cost. According to Pramiti, social workers had told the Manager and his wife to get divorced: "otherwise we are coming one day and we are separating from each other." I asked if the social workers had also mentioned doing this for the well-being of the child and she nodded. In the end, Pramiti explained, "the police couldn't help them and the counsellor also couldn't help them because they don't want to solve their problem." The wife was "standing in her points" and the Manager did not want a divorce because he had loved her so much at some point. "How could I forget her?" he had told Pramiti and her husband. The Manager and his wife had what Pramiti described a "huge romantic history." The two had met on the internet and she had joined him in Western Asia, where he worked at the time, and the two had then married in their home country in South Asia. Pramiti felt like the fact that it had been a love marriage also kept the Manager from divorce: " His family will condemn him, look you didn't listen us so that is why the fate is, fate you have received for this."

CHAPTER 3: Norms and Gender Ideologies

"We will need to ask, as Leila Abu-Lughod did about the Bedouin communities she studied, how cultural responses work to sustain the power differences within groups, such as the difference in status between men and women. This does not then become a dichotomy between culture and gender but an interrogation into how culture is gendered and gender is culturalized"

- Sherene Razack

"No ideology, however hegemonic and entrenched in institutions and in everyday life, is beyond contest: 'culture' is a dynamic concept, always negotiable and in process of endorsement, contestation and transformation. Differently positioned actors, with unpredictable inventiveness, draw on, re-work and stretch in new directions the accumulated meanings of 'culture' -including old and new academic ones. In a process of claiming power and authority, all are trying to assert different material outcomes." - Susan Wright

In the first of our three interviews, Pramiti, who had come to Montreal from Bangladesh in 2012, was adamant that the root cause of intimate violence against women are patriarchal values themselves. Pramiti, who has a considerable background in development work and working with NGOs, felt that an ongoing process of empowerment was needed, and that, to truly work, it has to address these root causes and "meet the women where they are." Any change, she underscored, has to begin in women's homes.

Patriarchal values, Pramiti explained, come from the socialization process and, she emphasized, "should be knocked." Socialization of these values, she continued, is perpetuated not only by men, but women as well and begins, most often, in the home within the family, then throughout the community, through religious institutions, and throughout society in art and

cultural productions such as films. This socialization process transpires across genders - producing and reproducing gender norms. In the same vein, Margaret Abraham underscores that intimate gendered violence is "learned and cyclical" and not "deviant but arising out of the structures and norms that define women as inferior and promote aggression in men (2000, 5-6). In their seminal text, *In the footsteps of "Arundhati": Asian Indian women's experience of domestic violence in the United States*, Shamita Dasgupta and Sujuta Warrier's major findings echo Pramiti's insights: "the most important factor in these women's lives seemed to be the childhood indoctrination into the ideals of 'good' wife and mother that include sacrifice of personal freedom and autonomy"(1996, 238).

Gender ideologies (beliefs and ideals) are shaped by historical and ongoing contexts of patriarchy, colonialism, and imperialism and must be understood as dynamic (Wilson 2006, 13). Ideological systems intersect and compete transforming one another to produce particular expressions that are endorsed in varied ways by members of each society (and its subgroups) as well as regionally. For example, in my interview with Mita and Kushula, both in Montreal for less than two years, they explained that although they were both from India and from Brahmin families (the same caste), there were clear regional differences in how gender ideologies were adopted and practiced in the regions where they grew up:

> Kushula: She's from North India and specifically East India, and I'm from South India. It's like South Indian people are more conservative in compared to North Indian people but ...

> Mita: Too conservative! [laughs]

> Kushula: Yeah. They are.

During one of our lunch time French tutoring conversations, SAWCC staff discussion turned from Quebec's colonial history to some of the ways colonialism has impacted each of their respective home countries. This included discussions of sexual violence against women and 'human trafficking' around trading ports as well as the emergence of class divisions related to

mixed descent from waves of colonizers resulting in new expressions of colorism. South Asia, as a broad regional descriptor, has a complex history of colonialism and new imperialism and this has had an impact on patriarchal relationships along with race and class divisions including India's pre-colonial caste system (Wilson 2006, 13). In their text *Addressing Culture in Batterers Intervention: The Asian Indian Community As an Illustrative Example (1999)*, Almeida and Dolan-Delvecchio speak to some of the earlier origins of colorism and its link to caste, a system based on Hindu beliefs of "purity and pollution" (660):

> During the thousands of years of colonization by lighter skinned Persians and Aryans, caste and skin colour become increasingly linked in India. Harijas (untouchables), for example, tend to be of darker skin than the Brahmins. Moreover, religious writings about the forces of lightness and darkness in the universe have been interpreted to impart meaning to skin colour, with dark skin denoting evil and light skin rebirth and fairness (661).

From the 16th century onwards, imperialism and colonialism produced a hierarchy of human value "through a lens that privileged Western peoples, the colonial center, as the superior model of humanity," Julie Rajan writes in "Fragmented Self: Violence and Body Image among South Asian American Women" (2007, 96). Darker skin peoples became further inscribed as "aberrations of humanity" and "linked most closely with the animal kingdom", as part of an effort to assuage imperial anxieties and 'legitimize' exploitation: "racial difference, thus, produced a clear hierarchy of human merit, the increments of which correlated to moral and economic value to the empire" (97). Gender norms and "femininity" were also racially inscribed through this process. Pre-existing colorism, which informed gender norms and values, became further imbued with these dimensions of power within and outside of South Asia. The legacy of the imperial ideologies of racialized gender norms and their representations continue to shape gender in South Asia today as well as in modern-day Western societies.

In her chapter "The New 'Good Woman': Reconstructing Patriarchal Control," Amrit Wilson summarizes some of the key forces that have shaped South Asian patriarchal relations and gender ideologies in recent history. During the 18th and 19th century, "in the interests of siphoning off profits to Britain, the colonial politico-economic system restructured the Indian

economy," which was then composed of what are now known as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (2006, 13). Inequalities (class, caste, and gender) intensified as "changes in the economy were accompanied by the strengthening of an Indigenous elite through whom the British could rule" (14). Rural and urban relationships were also transformed through this. Following this, global capital and consumerism also had widespread effects on patriarchal relations. "In the South-Asian sub-continent, pre-capitalist relations have been incorporated into capitalist frameworks," Wilson writes citing dowry practices and remittance economies. It is important to recognize "how, in periods of social transformation, earlier patriarchal relations are often retained and incorporated alongside and in interaction with new structures of subordination" (3). Indeed, Wilson states, "the violence faced by women is now no less extreme but infused with the ethos of the market" (14).

Religious ideology is no exception in that it also dynamically responds to encounters with other ideological systems like patriarchy, imperialism, and capitalism. Religion and its institutions play a strong role in shaping and maintaining gender relations and norms, through 'prescriptions and proscriptions' and has done so across the world for millennia (Abraham 2000, 20). In this research, interview participants were from different religious backgrounds including Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism with varied adherence to practicing. Despite this, the gender ideologies they had been taught as young girls had strongly resonating similarities. The relationship between religion and patriarchal domination is pervasive in the global world and has been explicitly named by various movements. However, it is not and has not always been a given. Many religions have long traditions and symbols for womanhood that can be interpreted very differently. Indeed, in many cases, multiple and diverging interpretations of religious scripture and ideals have resulted in the fractioning off of multiple sects and, sometimes quite large, variations in practice. What are considered "fundamentalist movements" across the world are a good example of this. The key aspects to consider are who has the power of "legitimate" interpretation and how this shapes social life, how these interpretations are reinforced, and whom these interpretations benefit.

In her chapter, "The Many Faces of Domestic Violence in the South Asian American Muslim Community" Ruksana Ayyub points to how Islam "takes a very strong stand on violence

against women and categorically condemns it. However, a verse in the Quran has been repeatedly translated to justify beating of wives" (2007, 31). Ayyub views this as a truly "selective preference" of one verse amongst many contradicting others that overlooks "the true Islamic spirit of equity and fairness" (31). She notes that as more women are studying the Quran, this is resulting in new interpretations of religious text that begin to unweave patriarchal attitudes and "cultural distortions" from Islam (26). Quoting Mernissi, Ayyub reminds that "Islam offered women rights that were unprecedented, such as the right to choose a marriage partner, the right to inheritance, and the right to divorce" (25).

Similarly, Dasgupta and Warrier underscore the need for this patriarchal unweaving while speaking directly to their South Asian readers:

> This conflation of "culture" and woman abuse is dangerous to the health of our community. Undoubtedly, adhering to ones traditions can be a way of resisting the powerful assimilatory forces that permeate mainstream American society, but it is imperative that women's subjugation be separated from the content of our culture. To this purpose, only a continuous and lively internal critique can help us disentangle the parts of our culture that empower us from the more disenfranchising forces. In fact, Hindu traditions provide women with role models who are powerful and dynamic. For instance, the concept of Shakti, femininity in control of her own sexuality, and its real-life translation Virangana (the warrior woman), is a pervasive image that is widely accepted in Indian society (1996, 255).

Untangling patriarchal ideology from "the content of culture" as Dasgupta and Warrier write is no small feat but it is an impactful strategy. Using historical and religious symbols to subvert patriarchal interpretation is one of the tools used by South Asian Women's Organizations (SAWOs) in their activism. Indeed, *Shakti* is a resonating concept across SAWOs despite its roots in Hinduism and is the official namesake of SAWCC's quarterly publication which ran regularly from 1981 to 2011 (see Appendix A).

Conversely, even when religious edicts lack any obvious patriarchal ideals or interpretations this does not necessarily result in the lack of patriarchal values in practice and day-to-day life nor in the absence of gendered violence. In "Ahisma and the Contextual Realities

of Woman Abuse in the Jain Community," Shamita Dasgupta and Shashi Jain explore 'woman-abuse' in the Jain community, a South Asian religious community which adheres to "radical nonviolence" or *ahisma* as one of its main principles (2007, 154). Dasgupta and Jain wanted to "test whether religious endorsement of nonviolence can erect a protective buffer against domestic violence" (153). Some of their main findings were that "religion, however much it sanctions nonviolence and requires strict adherence to peaceable ethics, does not inoculate individuals against woman abuse. Neither does it add protective factors to woman's lives" (161). In concluding remarks, Dasgupta and Jain posit that the "gendered differences in response and the divergence between belief and behaviour indicate that cultural nuances and patriarchal entitlements, rather than religious edicts, might be influencing the treatment of women"(161). This example demonstrates the complex ways in which differing ideologies simultaneously shape social life even when they may contradict one another.

Gender Norms: "Good Girls" & "Tiger Men"

In our interviews, I asked each participant what they had been taught growing up about the ideal woman and ideal man. Mita, a Hindu woman in her late twenties, responded by sharing the ideals for a "good girl":

> Mita: Oh that's very simple. A good girl - you have to listen to your parents, you have to obey them, you have to respect your elders, you have to always be attentive to what your parents are saying, be good girl, do your studies at good time, be religious, definitely.

A "good girl", she added, is expected to participate in *pujahs,* religious occasions, and be mindful of who she socializes with and how:

> Mita: Birth of this, birth of that, we have lots of gods right, so we have to be participating. A good girl shouldn't mix too much with boys, but if we mix we should maintain our

decency. We should be ladylike, wherever we should go. We should get married to someone who is good and my parents can be proud of.

Kushula, a Tamilian graduate student also in her late twenties began her response by clearly stating to me her disapproval of the ideals she had been taught. She then explained what a 'good boy' should act like:

> Kushula: Yeah, the boy like he doesn't do any work, and any work meaning household works. He should act as a man, he should always be dominant, like whenever he is with any girls, he will be the dominant one.
>
> Mita: The decision maker.
>
> Kushula: yeah, the decision maker, so even in family you have one daughter and one son, they'll give preference to son so that shows that you are on step higher than the daughter. Um, good man, obviously if you are married you shouldn't look at other girls, you shouldn't like talk too much with the and -
>
> Mita: - and then if you talk you should report it to your wife.
>
> Kushula: Basically, you should take care of your family like you should earn for your family and you shouldn't allow your wife to go to work or children to go for work.
>
> Mita: You have to be a totally family man.
>
> Kushula: You should have all the responsibility in the family.

Juhi, who came to Montreal as a refugee from Sri Lanka in the 1990s and is in her mid 50s, shared being taught similar gender ideals:

> Juhi: For a girl it will be cooking, cleaning, keeping everything nice, look good, be nice, polite, not talk to talk back, be soft, those kind of things. For a boy, mostly it's to be brave, responsible, and education. That's all. Nothing much for men. But they all expect men to be brave and strong and responsible.

Pramiti, who grew up in Bangladesh and is in her early 40s, began by describing the ideal man as needing to be "like a tiger" and the things that should be available and accessible to him as a man which include acting on his desires:

> Pramiti: Ok, ya, ya, ya. Ideal man is like he should be, he should be aaah he should deal many things like a tiger, he can do many thing at once. He can drive a car roughly, he can um run a - he can deal an office, and quickly, he can marry even four wives if he demands. He can cheat. He can actually tease a girl if he wants 'dans la rue', I mean, in the road, mmm. He can actually grab a woman if he wants, not in that sense, but he has the right. People actually - when women actually wants to do like this the whole society will be against her, but when a man actually wants a woman because of her beauty because of her, many thing, and society just keep quiet. 'Ohhhh it happens', 'its natural', 'Why the beautiful women um actually walk in this road in that way?' 'Why she open her ... ?' mmm many things. Soooo, it's natural men will be attracted and grab here. It's the phenomena is like this. So man has the permission to do many things and allowed to do many things and is very agile.

Men, notably, have rights over the women in their lives including their movements and major life choices.

> Pramiti: Man has a right to keep wife in house, to keep his daughter in house. Man has the right to give many orders, hmm, to his wife or his daughters like 'not to go there', 'not to come here', 'not to go love'... not, not not, many NO he can put in front of his daughter, of sister, of her.
>
> Pamela : So he must be respected?
>
> Pramiti: He MUST be respected, so this is the ideal man.

In her experience as a young woman, Pramiti noted that before her menses, she'd never really taken note of gender. This embodied social marker, sharply began for her a process of being

inscribed with, transformed, and contained within the meanings of "girlhood" and "womanhood":

> Pramiti: I had my menstruation, my mother told me, from today you should not go outside alone. Because any time you could be abused by any man and you'll get pregnancy. And that day, still I can remember, it was a very ... what I should say, memorable, yes of course memorable. Panic. Panic, yes of course.

> Pamela: Did you know about menstruation before it happened?

> Pramiti: No, and when my mother, my elder sisters are teaching me how to, actually manage this things. Wow, it was, tremendous different, actually it has changed my life that, the first time, I felt. And then I was becoming introvert like, I was becoming keep me aside. Keeping me aside from the outside people. However, I felt that um, everywhere when I am going out/growing up I was going out I felt many many things, I saw many many things which actually force me to, force me not to go outside. Even I was scared when I see a group of, boys chatting in a group, talking in a group. I actually, I keep me aside. I always kept me aside. And, and in night I never went out home, outside the lawn. Always my mother and my father forced me to bring my brothers, who were smaller than me. 'Don't go alone. Take your brothers or take your um um sisters to go outside with you.' So, right now, I felt funny when I actually memorize those days. That how funny to me and my mothers and my parents did with me. My brother he was five years old or six years old. How could, how he can protect me? If anything happen to me... how he could protect me? Is it possible for him to protect me? Or, actually, why is happening? Because of socialization process. Women, the girl, she's not going outside alone, she's taking someone with her, so the girl always should be accompanied by a man no matter if he is five years old or ....

This process and "gendering" was, for Pramiti, intertwined with a growing awareness of the inherent danger that comes with being "woman." Along with this, came the ideals she was taught, which she described should be the "reverse" of the ideal man:

> Pramiti: And a woman is the reverse like, she should talk mildly, hmm. In my culture the girls shouldn't talk loudly, so that people will tell that the girl is not obedient. Very

sweetly. Hmm, you should walk like cats. You should, you should keep yourself very nicely so that men will attracted to you. Men will attract to you. You should get a boyfriend, hmm, raise his family so that he will give you many things. She will not be actually self reliant. The man will make her happy. Man will give her. So society actually makes the daughter not independent but dependent.

The participants explanation of the gender norms and values they were socialized into had common themes across generations (their ages), linguistic and ethnic differences. These norms are also similar to what is found throughout the literature and research conducted with South Asian women in other (mostly) North American cities over the past three to four decades (Abraham 2000, Dasgupta 1996, Pinnewala 2009, Kang 2006, and more). In their text, Dasgupta and Warrier (1996) cite Battacharjee (1992) on the ideal woman: "the model Asian Indian female is being defined as chaste, virtuous, traditional, nurturant. and obedient" (242). Much like what interview participants shared, Dasgupta and Warrier noted that the South Asian women they interviewed "learned to associate femaleness with subordination" and that they are socialized in preparation for marriage and childbirth from an early age (246). The "highly restrictive roles" offered to South Asian women through this process are of "devoted daughter, nurturing wife, and sacrificing mother" (246).

In her text *Good Women, Martyrs, and Survivors: A Theoretical Framework for South Asian Women's Responses to Partner Violence*, Parvani Pinewalla emphasizes the way in which men are socialized to have the entitlement to control and that South Asia's various subcultures share the normalizaton of "male privilege and dominance" (2009, 84). Participants noted and previous research underscored that men are also socialized to have the right to monitor and impose restrictions on women's personal mobility as well as who women can fraternize with (Dasgupta 1996, Pinewalla 2009). In terms of the construction of masculinity, Dasgupta and Warrier note: "[A] central theme of the norms and guidelines for proper female behaviour, especially in the male-dominated classical literature, is that men must control women and their power" (242). In her article *Sexual Abuse in South Asian Immigrant Marriages*, Abraham explains that "femininity in South Asia is defined both in terms of submissiveness and power" (1999, 595). Despite this, emphasis in the socialization process for women is on

submissiveness and virginity ('purity'), something which ultimately benefits patriarchal relations" (596). Abraham underscores that both "patriarchal authority and control of female sexuality are important values related to the construction of masculinity and femininity (591). Participants shared themes for men that emphasized dominance, responsibility, and the right to decision making as well as to women's bodies. Like what Pramiti shared regarding men's right to "grab," Abraham notes that what is considered "acceptable levels of sexual aggression by men" impacts the ways sexual violence becomes normalized within social life (591).

Identity through Family

Across regional, national, linguistic and religious differences, "South Asians have a shared cultural value system that is characterized by a strong family orientation" (Merali 2009, 322). Agnew, citing Papp, writes that "the South Asian family is very traditional, authoritarian, and patriarchal in nature" (1998, 161). Abraham names the South Asian family as a key 'cultural institution' that vehicles patriarchal socialization: "The notion of family orientation is really one that is structured to benefit men more than women. Family orientation is in reality synonymous with the interest of men" (2000, 19). Dasgupta and Warrier go further, citing Kishwar, and find that "the present family structure in India ensures the subordination and exploitation of women" (1996, 239).

The South Asian family tends to "emphasize [s] interdependence among family members, with younger family members being expected to defer the authority to make major life decisions to older family members, who are perceived to have the wisdom and experience to recognize their best interests" (Merali 2009, 322). In our interviews, Nabila described the salience of age and authority in the following way:

> Nabila: Age gives you power. As you age, here in Canada sometimes I find that a person
> who is aged, the youngsters tell him 'oh you are old, you are old fashioned, you don't
> know what's going on, you are the old generation', which implies that we are more

knowledgable than you so we are more powerful in that sense because we are younger. In South Asian cultures, even if you are a silly person, as an adult the moment your hair all becomes white suddenly that whiteness of hair gives you the power to be the wisest.

Nabila: I mean age is one thing. A woman might might have gone through violence in her life by her husband, husband dies, woman becomes an old grandma and suddenly she is at the top of the family controlling everybody. The same woman who was you know, silly has no wisdom, has no nothing, now because age also as a factor.

There is a marked hierarchy within the family along both age and gender lines (Almeida 1999, 662). In our discussion about the causes of violence, Charu, who immigrated to Canada as a toddler, brought up this hierarchy and how it persists:

Charu: I think, it's lack of or inability to be able to cope with what's going on and like also, I am assuming that usually the violence comes from the male figure than the woman. I guess that's where the whole idea of the hierarchy comes in. Patriarchy still exits and still so prevalent in the community and so important. And other than that, I think, I think it's just a way of thinking that, - I don't know if you know but in the South Asian community parents have also be known hitting their kids to discipline them. So I guess that's why like, maybe it's just part of the community, but I think it's horrible and they should learn different ways of give the message and stuff but maybe it's just remnants, well not remnants because the patriarchy it's still there. The idea of the authority is still there. I feel that it's aligned with that, these ideas, like the family system and what's ok and what's not. Like the woman always come after the men, you know.

The South Asian family structure idealizes an extended family model where "women are relegated to the home in rhetoric if not in reality" (Abraham 2000, 20). Speaking of Indian family patterns, Almeida describes the family as "an elaborate network of male-centered relationships" where "the household supports the male siblings and their families, unmarried sisters, and aunts from the father's side as well as the parents" (1999, 663). Households will often be made of up of a combination of the husband's relatives and joint family homes between brothers where the eldest is the head of the home are not uncommon (Agnew 1998, 171). Once married, women leave their natal or family-of-origin and are brought into their husband's

extended family. Once in his home and "because men, not women are expected to provide economic support for this entire lineage, money earned by women is thought of as belonging primarily to the husband and his family" (662). It is considered legitimate ('culturally approved') for a married women to turn to her father and brothers (natal family) for support in times of crisis but this may not always be straightforward nor possible (Agnew 1998, 171). In the case of her husband's death, widows are expected to be cared for and supported by the husband's family.

According to Agnew, "[p]ower in South Asian families is held by the eldest male, but women also have a sphere of influence - for example, maintenance of the home, care of the children, and decisions regarding matrimonial alliances"(171). The existing spaces for familial power available to women within the family can become a "common source of conflict" in the form of a rivalry between a man's wife and his mother and between his wife and her sisters-in-law" (171). Agnew describes the hierarchy between the women in the family as being dependent on "the age and status of the individual: mother, wife of the eldest male sibling, married daughters of the family, and unmarried daughters" (171). Almeida mentions that women are expected to "defer to their mothers-and older sisters-in-law to prepare them for living in their husband's home and for child-birth" (1999, 662). Although men have the ultimate power and authority in the family, they often defer the role of controlling younger women to older women" (Abraham 2000, 108). Abraham cites Mies stating that "in India a married women's primary relationship is to her mother-in-law rather than the husband, while her husband's is to his father. Therefore the mother-in-law exercises considerable power over her daughter-in-law on the basis of her position as the husband's mother in a patriarchal society" (109). Even though she occupies a position of subordination and little power within the family, a new young wife may be "considered an outsider who has the potential to fragment the family unity by taking her husband away from the joint family to start their own family unit" (Agnew 1998, 171). This young wife may be treated in a certain way until she is no longer seen as a threat to the family unity. According to Agnew, "[a]buse in South Asian families results not only from the desire of men to control and dominate his spouse, but also from the desire of other women to reinforce their own authority within the home" (171). Merhorta refers to this family power structure as complex "gendered generational heirarchies" (1999, 627).

In our discussions Mita underscored that from one family to another the "family culture" varied with adoption and practicing of norms and traditions. Pramiti in a discussion on what she felt the ideal relationship between men and women should be, mentioned the importance of respect between them as well as in family relations and in-law relations. She shared some of the differences in the 'family cultures' of her family of origin and her husband's family around gender norms and some of the tensions produced by this:

Pramiti: In my perspective, I believe that every man and woman should be respected by each other. Even within - in a family, within a society, and within a in-laws relations also. In my sense I'm very much gender sensitive person. I never actually take lightly when my husband consider me as a woman. When in any case if he expressed anything in that that way, that you are a woman, I actually I got furious. I got furious totally because I can't stand anymore that I'm a woman. I can't do that. You are a woman you cannot go there alone. If he is tell me like this, I can't stand. But my husband is not everywhere. Because I have to, mmm, maintain other relations also. With my parents, with my brother, with my in-laws, in-law sisters, every every where. So I face actually many problems with my sensitive attitudes. Actually, I came [to Montreal] with another reason that is to avoid my husband's family members. Where they are very much patriarchal than my family.

Pamela: To create a bit of distance?

Pramiti: Yeah to create a bit of distance because I can't stand their actions like, always they they question - especially my not my mother in law, she's died, she's dead now, she passed away in last two years back, but before that with my sister in-law's - although I was in a very good job but when you come back - we were living in a four story building my father in law's building. My father in-law is owner of the house. So, every level we stayed like - my father in-law in the second floor, third floor my brother in-law, and then fourth floor me, husband and fifth floor it is rented to others. So we have a common building. So, every time when I go to office, I used to go to office, I should tell my mother in law I am going. When I coming I have to meet her I come, I come back. So what she likes to have and I go to my apartment and I ask to prepare something for snacks like snacks. I used to tell my maid because in Bangladesh maybe you know we have maids. I have permanent one maid who actually, who is to live with my apartment as permanent family member, and two are coming and going, coming and going, and helping like clothing, washing, many things. So it's, it's very common. So, I used to tell

my maids like prepare this thing, this thing and send to my mother in-law's house, apartment. Two level, level two. So it's happening and when I actually I couldn't do that sometimes for many reasons I couldn't do that, I hear something bad, gossiping like. 'Oh Pramiti is now not coming to mom's house like', my sister in-laws were talking a lot lot lot and it's like making family crisis. I got furious why they are always intervening in my family issues? But they are actually not attaching with their family in-laws family this, no, they are not maintaining their relation with their husband's families.

Pamela: Their husbands are living with them?

Pramiti: Ya, ya.

Pamela: Is that common or usually is it usually husbands move in with the woman family or woman move in with the man's family?

Pramiti: Women move with their husband's family is common but but very uncommon the husband comes. But, my father in-law is very, was, he died also, he was very rich person. So that is why his daughters were very proud of themselves, so that's why.

Pamela: And that's why the husbands moved in with them?

Pramiti: Mhmm. So, these type of things happen. Actually it, it bothered me a lot. I am also sister in-law in a sense of my brother, because my brother has his wife. So, I always avoid to maintain imposing somethings on my sister in-law. I always keep, maintain the stance from my mother's family, also. When my brother got married, I came, I keep aside myself. I always keep aside myself .

Pamela: You are trying not to -

Pramiti: - not to intervene, not to intervene, always. Although, my mother was very dependent on me. I supported them financially like buying medicine, going to a doctor, I always take them to that their doctors. But I always tried, I have always tried to keep me aside. That is my strategy because I I think that the ideal woman or man should actually respect himself or herself. That and, after that she will be respected by the others whether she is man or woman. But the things are not um happening in my ways.

Amrit Wilson explains that a South Asian woman throughout her life "is regarded a belonging first to the men in her family, then to the men in her husband's family but never to herself" (2006, 9). Looking at where the ideology that women 'belong to' comes from, Wilson refers to the feminist theory that the "origins of male dominance were connected to the struggle over women's productive as well as reproductive labour" (8). This was "intensified and institutionalized as societies based on class and private property emerged in which accumulated property was transferred from father to son" (9). Patrilineal line became threatened by the idea of 'illegitimate' children and so "female sexuality was therefore strictly controlled and regarded as unruly and inherently dangerous" (8). In what she refers to as 'patriarchal peasant communities' in different South Asian countries, "women were and often still are seen essentially as the property of the family and the community" (9). This means that "-irrespective of their own desire and wishes - women's bodies are made available to certain men and at the same time are unavailable to others" (9). According to Wilson, 'belonging to' in these societies means "having the protection of'"(9). Industrialization and urbanization have, as mentioned earlier, produced new manifestations of these patriarchal relations of control and "infused [them] with the ethos of the market"(14). There thus exists a slippery boundary between women "belonging to", "having the protection of", and "being a possession of" the extended family and the community (Wilson 10-11). The gender norms on mobility restriction are a good example of this. Restrictions on women's movements, such as having to ask permission before leaving the house, can be understood as being used to control her and contain the patrilineal line (her sexuality) while also stemming from a material need for safety. This slippery boundary came up in a few interviews. Below are excerpts from Nabila's and Charu's interviews as examples:

> Nabila: I know there is a difference between boys and girls, girls are much protected even if they are loved, they are protected, they are kept inside the house, thats the term they use "protected." Because... um it's not safe to go out for girls sometimes back home. Um, here it's different if I want I go watch a movie at 9 and I return home 12 and there's no problem me coming alone taking public transport. There's no way I can think of doing this back home. Uh, crime rate is high anything can happen so many people say it's protection that they are giving. Boys are allowed to go out and do anything, girl's aren't.

> Charu: Yeah, I guess in the SA culture, parents will always be more lenient with their sons than their daughters and like in a sense, woman have like the role of perpetuating the culture also, and like. I guess, it's also because of like woman, and then there's this whole idea of protection, if you're a woman, if your daughter dates a guy it's worse than if your guy dates a girl because like the virginity of the daughter is so much more valued and like emphasized upon.

The South Asian emphasis on collective identity, subordinate position within the family structure, and construction of womanhood with an emphasis on her "identity as wife, mother, daughter before self" (Dasgupta 1996, 254) contribute to the "missing independent identity of the South Asian woman" (Kang 2006, 155). This "missing independent identity" plays a significant role in "preventing women from leaving abusers for fear of leaving their network of relations, which are tied to their status and identity" (155). Writing on this subject, Dasgupta explains: "An Indian woman is not perceived as an independent entity. Single status for a woman is normally not possible in an Indian community where social, psychological and economic dependence on a man is the norm. The decision to leave an abusive relationship therefore means developing an entirely new approach to life" (1996, 254).

In our interviews, Deeba, a community worker who came from Pakistan to Canada in 1996, described how helping women develop this 'new approach to life' begins with a new approach to selfhood. This process, she described, is a very difficult one:

> Deeba: The woman is especially if they are came from our countries their state of mind is very different. They don't see themselves as an individual, they see collectively. This is a kind of a part of that collectivity - running the home, doing things, but even credit of that, they don't. I still remember one time back we arrange workshops and we thought at that time, there was other workers also, that we should have a workshop to keep training our understanding to women about self care, self understanding, self esteem also. So during the workshop, the workshop stated that 'who do you love?' Everybody said 'I love my parents, I love my children, I love my husband'.

> Then, 'who do you trust?'

'I love my husband, I trust my husband.' They are not able for one question they say, yes I trust myself. So the animator, 'let's ok, got your responses so we will stand in a circle and because we do so much let's say to ourself we love ourself. I love myself.' Nobody can say that. In a group of, I think there was twelve or thirteen women and first she said ok repeat after me: 'I love myself.' They repeat it but then she say ok, now [one by one] I love - 'my children!' 'I love.. my husband!"

They could not say because it's kind of very bad thing if you are loving yourself if you are taking care of yourself and you are putting yourself before everyone else. So for these women, bringing them to a point that they start making decision that suits them, how difficult it is.

They are supposed to love others. Not, yourself. So this is something you know, how can you raise it [she motions with her hands around her heart] and bring a new thoughts. It can't. It's embedded, embedded, engraved, engraved.

Similarly, in my interview with Vihbuti, an Indigenous woman from Bangladesh who immigrated in 1996, we talked about the lack of discussion by South Asian women about their own well-being and mental health:

Vihbuti: No, exactly. As South Asian women, we always have giving, giving, giving. We don't consider that what I want as a South Asian woman. In general, they are mother - maybe sister - they are always giving. That is kind of traditional. They see their mother, their grandmother, always giving, even they have little time, they will that 'Oh what can I do in that time to give somebody something.' So they don't think about their well being, that's true.

The valorization of sacrifice, suffering (Goel 2005), and martyrdom (Roy 2012) in South Asia combined with fatalism and karma (Kallivayalil 2010) also shape gender roles and how women see themselves and what is possible for them. According to Goel, the "valoization of suffering is deeply embedded in South Asian cultures. Women are expected to suffer without protest and are even revered for their capacity to endure" (1111). This was echoed in my conversation with Mita (mentioned in Chapter 1) around the concept of resilience: where I attempted to describe

resilience as being 'able to keep a light inside, like a lit candle, despite and make one's way through hardship' and Mita interpreted this as meaning a woman's capacity to endure abuse to keep the family together. Despite religious differences, Dasgupta & Warrier (1996) argue, that in the case of India, Hinduism has had a significant influence across religious subgroups in terms of it's icons, symbols, concepts and ideals. In her article *Sita's Trousseau: Restorative Justice, Domestic Violence, and South Asian Culture*, Rashmi Goel looks at the "stories to live by" that shape what women see as possible for themselves both "consciously and subconsciously" (2006, 646). These stories to live by include religious mythology as well as those shared and upheld through films and media. Goel argues that "perhaps nothing more greatly affects the Indian's vision of the perfect woman than the story of Ram and his wife, Sita" (646). Goel points to the fact that despite there being other mythical heroines, Sita is often chosen as women's favourite and pointed to as "whom women are taught to emulate" (649). Goel underlines that "[t]he primary qualities she exhibits are sacrifice and forbearance. Through Sita's example, women are taught what it means to be not only the ideal wife but also the ideal way to endure adversity. It is not only that Sita suffers but that she suffers silently, through all manner of injustice" (649).

Along with belonging to the men in their family and as a result of their identity being tied to role in the family (both natal and filial), South Asian women's actions reflect on the reputation and social standing of the entire extended family. Status, reputation, and honor are three other dominant values in South Asian societies that significantly shape gender ideologies, practices, and behaviours. When Nabila described her home country, Pakistan, to me - she described it as a patriarchal society divided by status. In her research and 30 years of activism in with South Asian women in Britain, Amrit Wilson found that the "issues of *izzat* (honour) and *badnami* (bad reputation)" are pervasive across all of South Asia: "They are common in Lahore, Jullunder, Sylht and Ahmedabad, and also in the communities in Britain which link these places" (2006, 3). Mehry, a frontline worker at SAWCC originally from Afghanistan, shared that "in South Asia, reputation is first thing" taking precedence over everything, including at times one's life. According to Rajan (2007) in "Fragmented Self: Violence and Body Image among South Asian Women," South Asian societies are "rooted in the principles of shame and honor which demand the subjection of individual desires in favor of those of the family and the larger

community" (94). Rajan finds that this framework "affects myriad social constructions in order to stabilize patriarchal norms" (94). According to Almeida, "control of female sexuality is the foundation of male honor" (1999,663). Abraham cites Sherry Ortner's discussion of the 'virginity complex' that all 'complex agrarian societies' have been "based on the importance of connection between inheritance and legitimate birth as a criterion for determining status inequalities" (2000, 89). Women's reproductive labor, in a sense, maintains the boundaries of social class (and, for Hindus, caste). Whom she marries or has children with must be controlled and not only the men in her life but the larger community if the hierarchical status order is to be maintained. In terms of honor, Abraham states that "a man's honor and his own legitimacy rest upon the control of his female relatives, while a woman's honor is linked to her own sense of shame" (89).

Mechanisms exist to keep the status quo or reinforce boundaries, such as shaming and gossiping: "the community talks" as Mehry put it in our interview. Hunjan and Towson, in their chapter, refer to shaming as a 'societal control mechanism' (2007, 57). Gossip, which can be considered a monitoring and shaming practice, is naturalized as part of daily life so as the make it effective. In a discussion with Mita and Kushula, I asked both of them what their current ties with their home community were like:

Mita: Current ties? Home community? They are good.

Kushula: Yeah, good as well. I see local news, in weekend, not every day, weekends I see some of my, my local language programs and everything. I know, I am up to date about my, yeah, city.

Mita: I am not up to my city's news, because I am very lazy at reading news, but I'm quite up to date, little up to date about my country's news.

Pamela: What about your family?

Mita: Family? I'm always up to date.

Kushula: Yeah. Neighbours, what's happening here, what's happening there.

Mita: Most, we always gossip, get to know what's happening, who's getting married, who's not.

Further in our conversation while on the topic of differences for second generation women, Mita shared about a relative who was allowed to have a part-time job. This story exemplifies how a young woman's actions are then reflected onto the family's social status and can put into question the very manhood of the head of the house:

Mita: My relative, my sister-in-law, they stay in Netherlands. So they earn their own money, they do, she does part time job as a waitress and she earns money. In India if you are a waitress, and you are fourteen -

Kushula: - they will dispute.

Mita: You are hmmmm this, you will pulled and taken back to home [motion to pulling by the ear].

Pamela: Oh yeah?

Mita: Yeah it's, if you are from a good, well settled family, not rich.

Kushula: It's like you are spoiling your family reputation.

Mita: If you work in a restaurant as a waitress.

Kushula: But it's actually not.

Mita: In a restaurant, or you doing a kind of low class job. It's a kind of euh, bad, bad reputation to that family. So they won't allow you, never.

Kushula: But actually it's good -

Mita: - better that you stay home. It's better for them if you stay but not to work like these things. Because why? If somebody sees me working in a restaurant my, my relatives, they

will go and complain 'Oh my god, what, what kind of you are doing?' So you know, the gossip goes. She's doing it and my my uncle aunt think that's super good, super good. She's independent, but she stays with her parents.

Kushula: But they will think like, they will ask, they will tell their parents, you don't even have money to support your kids? You are asking your kids to go to work and get money for your living? Like is it what you do? Like it's good for a man? They ask these thing. Like if the breadwinner, has to do, take care of everything all needs, family needs. But, if he allows his wife or daughter to work, in some other company or get money for them, it will be like euh. They will treat the man as like he is not a man like, if he is a man, he wouldn't have allowed his daughters to.

Mita: You know, if I were in India right now with my husband, he would never allowed me, not, obviously in India I wouldn't do these [service] jobs, like I would have got a good job. But still, for him, he can't allow me to do because he will hear, to listen a lot.

Kushula: - but I think it's good, independence.

Mita: Even he is open, even he tells me go go ahead. I know he is very open hearted but he knows that people comes to see me doing a low job they will keep on pinching him. So even if he is happy, he can't, he will say stay back, look for other job.

The fear of losing status for oneself - and thus, the extended family - is a key factor that Daguspta & Warrier identified amongst their respondents (1996, 255). The pressure to prioritize and maintain family reputation and social class permeates all facets of life. When a woman breaks the norms, through prioritizing her desires or with steps towards independence, she must weigh the place of her family in society and duty to "guard her family honor" (Rajan 2007, 54). In our interview, Deeba shared a recent experience she'd had with a second-generation woman in Montreal struggling with what the community might think:

I just met a young girl and she was giving me a story about her situation. I felt that she was afraid of being called somebody who is not following the norm. She knew her right is there but still she was afraid, and she is second generation here. And the way she was

brought up at home, she thought if she put words to her thoughts or what she feels that she will be seen as a traitor - as a law breaker. This is how it is.

Pre-eminence of Marriage and Motherhood

From a young age and throughout their lives, women are socialized to see their value primarily in marriage and motherhood (Dasgupta 1996, 246). According to Abraham, "whatever the variation in term of class, religion, or region, South Asians see marriage as an essential institution and one that defines the social status of women irrespective of the economic worth of her labor" (2000, 22). There is substantial social and familial pressure to marry and remaining unmarried comes with stigma (22). Although there have been recent changes in practices, South Asian marriages continue to differ significantly from current dominant Western understandings of marriage in terms of whom the alliance is between:

> Unlike the United States, where there is an emphasis on the notion of romantic love and independence in choice of marriage partners, among South Asians marriage is an alliance between two families. The assumption is that such an alliance allows for greater long-term security and stability for families, because part of the choice of a spouse involves various rational criteria evaluated by families, such as economic worth, social status, education, appearance, and family background, rather than the emotional criteria of love between two individuals. As opposed to the West, the assumption is that as long as the larger familial issues are covered, love will develop after marriage as the couple negotiates their relationship. (Abraham 2000, 19).

In our one-on-one interview, Mita, who had been married for two years at the time, underscored the alliance of the two families as being at the core of South Asian marriages:

> Mita: Relationship breaks at the end of the day, creates more confusion, creates more problem, tension and it affects the whole family. It's not about the husband and the wife. The whole family unit, the whole connection breaks because in South Asian community the thing is that when you are married it's not a marriage between a wife and a husband it's a marriage between two families. So this problem happens, the whole bond of two families breaks. Which creates big trouble, big big trouble.

Partly, what Mita referred to here by "creates big trouble" is the fact that South Asian marriages are considered unbreakable alliances that persist even beyond death (when one is widowed). In our interviews, Pramiti explained that for South Asians, compared to North Americans, marriage is considered a permanent contract no matter what may occur:

> Pramiti: This is the culture actually. The culture actually, here [in Canada] romance and relation exist but marital relations doesn't exist a lot. Because marital relations means relation for their whole life. In South Asian perspective, I get married, that it means I I will live with the person till the last date of my life. What actually make pressure on the family because in the Western culture even in here it it means marriage is not permanent contract.

> Pamela: there's a high divorce rate here.

> Pramiti: yeah, marriage is not permanent contract. In our respects, in our culture, marriage is a permanent contract. I don't support this permanent contract. I don't like to see this type of contract . Where there is a contract, contract means, there is a possibility to break it. All contract when contract happen, when there is a fear that relation will be broken, then the contract happen, it means it permits it could be broken. So contract could be broken but in our culture it doesn't permit that.

Marriages are largely classified in the literature and in my research conversations as either "arranged" or "love" marriages. Of the seven interview participants who had married, five had arranged marriages (Juhi, Deeba, Nabila, Mehry, and Vihbuti), one had a love marriage (Mita), and one had a mix of both (Pramiti). In South Asia, arranged marriages are the norm where "various criteria such as wealth, education, appearance, age, and family background are used to evaluate the relative worth of the woman and the man and by extension their respective families" (Abraham 2000, 21). Various systems are used to assess potential matches from professional matchmakers and brokers to horoscope matching, which Mita mentioned in our conversations around marriage practices. Mita's mother and father had had a horoscope match, whereas Mita's husband, a post doctoral scientist, was not fond of the practice and so, they had not assessed their horoscope compatibility. Whatever the system or methods used, the arranged marriage process is

one through which the "two families mutually evaluate each other" for compatibility for an 'unbreakable' social and economic bond (Abraham 2000, 21). According to Abraham, this mutual evaluation "is inherently unequal since the position of dominance lies primarily with the prospective groom's family" (21). Family negotiations very often "are expressive of the power and control exercised by the man's family (Van Wilingen and Channa in Abraham 2000, 21). That being said, arranged marriages should not be conflated with the notion of forced marriages. Approval by the potential spouses is sought and even considered desirable, however ultimately, duty and obligation to the authority of parents will take precedence (Lalonde in Saima 2010, 42). As for love marriages, which are becoming more commonplace but remain counter to the norm, they "are those marriages in which the woman and man date each other and make their own decision to marry rather than having it determined by their respective families" (Abraham 2000, 41). Love marriages are those in which love often precedes marriage whereas the understanding with arranged marriages is that love will follow through shared experiences and partnership (Saima 2010, 42).

Ultimately, no matter the type of marriage, "good" marriages are meant to protect class boundaries and social standing while also introducing the possibility of upwards mobility through the marriage bond. Social class is one of the key factors taken into consideration in terms of supporting a union. For example, Kushula and Mita mentioned in our interview that neither of them gave much importance to the caste system and that it seems to be "rightfully fading" with newer generations. Despite this, in terms of marriage, they both agreed the caste system still "very much matters" in their communities. Amrit Wilson writes "the delineation of who she can and cannot marry serve as a marker of the boundaries between communities and castes" (2006, 11). Social ostracism "often follows" an upper-class and upper-caste woman who marries a man of "low socioeconomic means and lower-caste status" (Abraham 2000, 21). In our conversations, Pramiti named large economic disparities as a key source of tension within marriages. She noted that this is especially true when the woman comes from a lower social class and, in these cases, there is a high vulnerability to violence.

Economic tensions between the marital families are a reality even amongst families of similar classes as the marriage bond entails both social and economic expectations. These

includes the exchange of valuables beyond that of the daughter herself from her natal to filial family. Marriage ceremonies and customs vary across region and religion including the practices of *dowry*, which was at one time mostly a North Indian high caste Hindu custom that spread to other regions and even other religious groups, and the Muslim practice of *mehr*, a predetermined sum of money meant to be given to the wife by her husband. These practices can be distorted and/or abused by the husband's family, since broken engagements tend to mostly affect the reputation of women and their families (Wilson 2006, 107). The dowry is a custom in which "the bride's family gives gifts and money to the groom's family" (Abraham 2000, 21). During certain phases of the engagement, the groom and his family make demands, asking for money, property, and goods either explicitly or implicitly. Dowries are an important class signifier. Even when demands are not articulated, families will tend to still provide a large dowry: "because it 'may be expected,' or to "show respect" for their daughter's future in laws, or sometimes even in the hopes of ensuring that their daughter is treated well after marriage" (Wilson 2006, 106). In some cases, the groom and his family might continue to make demands after the wedding, pressuring the wife and her family (Wilson 2006, 108). Although, this custom predates capitalism, dowry is "now often deliberately used to acquire money and consumer goods" (Wilson, 2006, 15). Despite legislation against non-voluntary dowry existing in India since the 1960s, the practice continues (Sukumar 2017) and so to dowry-related tensions continue to be a source of domestic abuse, harassment and attacks, and, even, femicide. Kushula, named this during our interview: "dowry system in India, you can also see. Like they will say it's a suicide of the bride, suicide, and but it's actually not. [The husband's family has] done something. Even kerosene fire, like. There are a lot of stories." As for the *mehr,* Abraham writes that in recent times, the sum originally meant "to economically protect the woman" has become "treated more as a symbolic gesture and only a minimal amount is set aside" (2000, 21). Abraham points to pressure from the groom's family on the bride's family to accept a token version of the *mehr* "to show that the alliance is one that [the bride's family] are confident about" (22). The consequence is that the bride is left with nary a safety net.

Since a South Asian women's social standing is tied to her status as wife and mother, there is substantial 'anxiety' around getting a daughter married as soon as possible (Wilson 2006,

105). This is due to a few reasons including mitigating the risks of premarital sex and unwed pregnancy, to find a suitable match or engagement prospect, and to enter into marriage negotiations when she is considered at her most valuable. A daughter's eligibility to find a "good" marriage is based on many factors, many of which are viewed as directly tied to her age. In our socialization discussion about her younger brother being told to protect her, Pramiti recalled the moment when her father told her it was time to get married:

> Pramiti: My father, told me, when I passed my secondary exam, I should get married: when I was 16. So my brother told 'no no no not this time, she has to educated, she has to be educated'. And then I got my high secondary examination results, very good, very good results I did. Then I got my university admission and then I did my masters and then I got married. However, came this time, I face a lot of trouble why I'm not getting married because I'm getting older. People think that after 16 or 20 the girl should marry within this period. Other than that the girl would not get a good husband a good family. So here the socialisation process also, the age of a girl matters because of the condemnation outlooks: like girls are an object of sex.

In patriarchal societies, the age of a woman is directly linked to desirability. There are different theories as to why this is but there is no denying that the desirability of women is skewed towards youth (the cusp of womanhood), virginity, reproductive capacity, and often, an added element of power over her by her husband (whether it be age, class, education, etc). According to Abraham, "marriage usually occurs between the age of sixteen and twenty-four years. Today with many women working outside the home, the age level has increased slightly. The older a woman gets, the lower her eligibility" (2000, 30). The longer a woman remains unmarried, the more likely the perception that "something is wrong with her" and thus, by extension, her family (22). Although there initially may be some room for her to decline matches, as time goes by, and, especially if she herself is met with rejections, the more potential humiliation her family faces (31). There is also the element of shame about remaining "a burden on one's family" and potentially blocking younger siblings from securing marriages themselves (30).

Linked to her age but apart from it, a woman's education levels are also contained within the marriage eligibility framework. In our interview, Kushula, who is the first daughter in her

family to complete a doctorate, had to convince her parents about continuing her studies due to concerns from her relatives:

> Kushula: In my relative circle, they started asking if you are allowing your daughter to move and stay there for four years, how will she get married? When will she get married? Can you find the same like, - it's also like, if I do Phd, the guy should also have a Phd.

Mita & Kushula explained that in arranged marriages, if a woman has a masters degree, a match with a masters or more will need to be found. For a woman with a PhD, a concern will be finding someone with a PhD as well as her age since diplomas require time - narrowing the pool of potential husbands:

> Kushula: like inferiority complex and superiority complex, all those things, like usually a male in India is like.. India is a male dominant society. I think it's common in like everywhere, but more in India. Nowadays, guys are changing but like your parents time, they always think the thing like okay the guy should be the same level. [..] Like I said it's male dominant society right and so they will always try to dominate you in every other case.

Similarly, in their research Daguspta and Warrier found that their interview participants, twelve highly educated women from India, "received the unambiguous message from their parents that education was secondary to a successful marriage" (1996, 245). If sought, education was not expressed as a way to "lead to economic independence or fulfilling careers" but "promoted as an asset to garner an eligible marriage partner" (246). Like Kushula's experience, several of Dasgupta and Warrier's participants also shared that their families worried that "too much education" could be "a serious threat to a good marriage" due to the husband possibly having a hard time 'adjusting' and the possibility of the wife's 'ego becoming too big' (246). Careers should be sacrificed in favour of a harmonious marriage (246). Due to this messaging received from their parents and community and despite their high levels of education, all the women they interviewed, "believed that their personal identities and social standings were tied to their husband's approval and satisfactions with the relationship" (246).

Beyond the emphasis on the importance of getting married for her social standing (and her family's), marriage is presented to young South Asian women as a sort of "fairy tale" (247). In one of our interviews, Deeba explained that marriage is often presented to daughters as a 'dangling carrot' of sorts as if it will be the moment when she can finally experience some freedom from her natal family's rules and take more power over her decisions:

> Deeba: This is what has been done, when a young girl is in a parents home if she wants to put on make up lets say, for example. That she is always told, 'once you go to marriage then you go to your own home you can be at liberty to do anything you want'. So she keeps all those desires 'til for that time. After that - I don't know what kind of a husband she is going to get - he may not like it. Somethings, husband says: why are you putting on make up? where are you going? whom you are pleasing? They can say things like that. Parents always put this kind of hope in their mind and after marriage they will be independent whereas it's not like that.

There can be substantial disappointment or 'let down' when these built-up expectations of freedom through marriage and reality do not match. According to Abraham, it is actually within this institution "that patriarchal control is exercised over a woman on the basis of her multiple subordinate statuses as wife, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, and mother" (2000, 22). It is through marriage that "men dominate, exploit, and demand various rights and privileges in their position as husband and son-in-law" (22).

When violence occurs, according to Kallyvyalil's reseach *Narratives of Suffering of South Asian Immigrant Suvivors of Domestic Violence* (2010), women felt a strong sense of betrayal:

> betrayal of the faith women had placed in their husbands and in their extended in-law families and also the sense of betrayal by the institution of marriage itself (arranged marriage, in particular). Women spoke of feeling cheated and used by a system and by people whose role was to protect them. In other words, in addition to the feeling of betrayal by an intimate partner, they felt a breach of a social contract had occurred (796).

In Pramiti's sharing of her bosom friend's divorce, she expressed a sense of responsibility for her friend's situation due to her and a few other close friends having "taken the decision" that Aadhira should marry her now ex-husband. Even in cases where the betrayal is recognized as the husband's violation of the social contract, Rashmi Goel in *Sita's Trousseau: Restorative Justice, Domestic Violence, and South Asian Culture Rashmi* found that South Asian women still hesitated to ask their parents for help out of recognition of the power imbalance between their own parents and in-laws and to protect their parents from feelings of having failed them:

> In arranged marriages, parents have done their best to find a suitable groom. They have tested and interviewed, researched and inquired, and finally, with an anxious heart, spent a lot of money and bid their daughter adieu. Most women feel that revealing the marriage is abusive will only make the power- less parents feel they have failed their daughter. Strangely, in love marriages (i.e., nonarranged marriages) that turn abusive, I have observed that the daughter chooses not to go to her parents, feeling guilty and responsible for her own situation." (650)

Abraham (2000) noted a similar theme from her interviews regarding love marriages and self-blame for having "failed" or chosen wrong. In Women's Stories #3 'Violence Happens for Many Reasons', Pramiti recounts that the guilt or shame of having had a love marriage that didn't work out was one of the major reasons why the Manager would not leave his wife despite having become violent with her.

Motherhood, like marriage, is valued and upheld as what amounts to a sacred role and duty. Motherhood is presented to women as a means by which to gain respect and some forms of power through their reproductive and care labour. Once she is married, there is substantial pressure on a woman to become a mother. Mita, in our conversations over tea, shared that during a trip back to India to visit her and her husband's families, she received questions and comments about when they planned to start having children countless times. At the time, she and her husband had been married less than two years but she was approaching twenty-seven years of age and this seemed a preoccupying factor to all their relations. According to Roy, "if marriage defines a South Asian woman, motherhood is her raison d'être" (2012, 1111). Motherhood by

producing sons and thus continuing the patrilineal line, gives a woman a form of recognition while a woman who births only daughters may be seen as less worthy (Wilson 2006, 27 and 43). Hunjan and Towson underline that "women gain respect and power through their sons and later trough their position as mother-in-law" (2007, 58)

Despite the "glorification of the role of mothers in the community", pregnancy and motherhood will not protect her from abuse (Kallivayalil 2010, 804). In her research, Abraham found that pregnant woman were more prone to being abused during pregnancy (2000, 99). Abraham writes that "a husband's assumptions of his right to control his wife's sexuality often extend to include his power to manipulate her reproductive rights" and this control is "viewed as part of their entitlement as husband and patriarch" (2000, 92). Kallivayalil found that "reproduction and motherhood crucially affected significant aspects of abuse" and that it consisted major themes in her interviews with South Asian survivors in New York city.

Both Abraham and Kallivayall, who conducted research in the U.S., identified the control of and abuse of a woman's reproductive rights as a significant form of sexual abuse that includes denial of motherhood, denial or forced use of contraceptives, forced abortion, forced pregnancies, and even battery leading to miscarriages (Abraham 2000, Kallivayalil 2010). Sundari Anitha, whose research was conducted in the United Kingdom, had similar findings (2011, 1273). Kallivayalil notes that due to the role of motherhood in South Asian communities, this specific form of abuse beyond the physical sequela can "be particularly emotionally traumatizing for South Asian women" (2010, 805).

Along with the abuse, Kallivayalil noted that motherhood and reproduction came up as major themes from women in some key ways:

> For some women, reproductive issues were the center of their suffering. For other women, their role as mothers was an ever-present reminder of how trapped they were and would continue to be because of their lifelong connection to the father of their children. For some women, their culturally sanctioned role as mothers was necessary and so beyond question that it needed no mention or interpretation. They did everything for their children and put themselves second, as motherhood was part of the fabric of their daily lives (803).

Kallivayalil's interviewees also spoke of how abuse interfered with their abilities to fulfill their duties as mothers due to depression and other health consequence and about the immense guilt and shame that this brought up for them given the primacy of this role (2010, 804). Roy writes of a mother's prescribed role as follows:

> As in many cultures, a woman in a traditional South Asian marriage has many expectations placed on her as a wife and a mother. [...] Among women's many "duties" are expectations to act as the primary caretakers of children and elders in the family. The expectations of the woman's role as a "good wife and mother" can be coercive and stiflingly demanding. Although a woman may have a full-time job and career, the burdens placed on her in terms of domestic responsibilities are vigorous (2012, 1111).

Wilson sees the domestic labour of a wife and mother as consisting of three main elements: "These are first, reproducing the family from one day to the next (otherwise known as housework) which include of course, cooking, cleaning and the care of the young, the elderly and the sick; second giving birth to sons; and then socializing their children to obey patriarchal rules (2006, 27). Of these three, Wilson considers the socialization into the patriarchy to be the "most difficult and perilous of a woman's tasks" (31). Since mothers must answer to the family and community for her daughter's behaviour, "if the daughter steps beyond patriarchal boundaries, both mother and daughter may face violence and humiliation" (31). In her text, Wilson explores the question of why mothers remain silent and/or participate in (sometimes fatal) violence against their own daughters. Wilson posits that "fear may be a reason" and that power relations too may play a role (33-34). However, Wilson thinks there is more going on here and cites a conversation between herself and several interviewees on the subject of so-called "honour killings" from which she concludes:

> The ideologies and concepts that proclaim the inferiority of women and demand their submissiveness and obedience to men have here been deeply internalized. Daughters therefore are worth very little - few mothers would participate, for example, in violence against their sons, let alone kill them. And if daughters are worth so little, what does it say

about women as a whole - including the mother herself? With this comes the erosion of all identity other than that of a wife. The mother who is able to attack her daughter may be unable to leave her husband, however violent he may be (34).

In addition to bearing children, Pinnewalla states that "the good woman is premised on the construction of women as the keepers and bearers of family, community, and the nation's integrity. South Asian women are held responsible for initiating, maintaining, and developing the well-being of family members, often at undue personal, psychological, emotional, and physical cost to themselves" (2009, 82). In our interviews, Deeba spoke to this when we were discussing the case where a woman whose husband had been serially cheating decided not to leave him:

> If a marriage is successful it's seen that a woman was the one that made it successful. If it's not, they say ohhh if she could have bared with this, if she could have bared with this, then marriage wouldn't have been broken. So these kinds of lots of things, when they hear from here and there, it really make them shaky to make any decision. That it will be seen as my fault.

When it comes to marriage and the family, even though all South Asians are "taught to cherish these two mainstays of South Asian cultures, the main responsibility of saving both institutions is placed squarely on women. Thus women are adamant about keeping their marriages intact at all costs lest they face kin and community pressures. Their failures to do so are sanctioned emotionally as well as materially" (Roy 2012, 1110). Similarly, Abraham notes that "the importance of the woman as the glue that holds the family together is constantly reinforced by religious leaders" (2000, 120).

One key aspect of "maintaining the sanctity of family is to make clear distinctions between insiders and outsiders" and keeping problems within in the family (Roy 2012, 1110). Roy notes that problems within a marriage and/or family are meant to be "closely guarded and inviting outside intervention or mediation, even in dire circumstances, is rarely approved or welcome" (1110). Seeking outside help and sharing "family secrets" is considered a transgression punishable by "banishment from the familial fold" (1110).

Women's Stories #4: Meeting Clients Where They Are

In our interview, Deeba explained to me that since SAWCC offers activities, classes, and various programs, women will often come to know of their services for family violence when they come for other services. Many women, Deeba explained, initially think the centre might be a school. Conversely, when a woman comes to the centre for family violence, she will often come to know of the rest of the programming. One woman who was coming to the centre for language classes started coming to see Deeba during breaks. Deeba started to feel that perhaps there was something the woman wanted to talk with her about: "So what I have learnt over the years is that it's always good to give them time to talk. This way they realize that they have somebody with whom they can share without being, having the fear of heard by others. Because they don't want to share with people who they think is going to spread out, are going to share their things with others." The woman started coming by early for her classes to speak with Deeba but still wasn't saying what was happening. With time, the woman worked up the confidence to ask Deeba a question "Do you think if a man is doing this and a woman does this, this is wrong?" When Deeba responded and the woman became comfortable. "But, sometimes people don't want to do anything to change their lifestyle, what is happening, they just want to share", Deeba explained to me. Over a long period of time, Deeba listened to the woman who started calling Deeba from home. "In my heart", Deeba said, "I felt she should do something about it. This is not right. Because being a woman, being a human being, she has rights which I tried to explain it to her and which she very well understood but when he comes to practice she doesn't have the courage." This case happened at the beginning of Deeba's career at SAWCC and, at the time, she couldn't understand why the woman wouldn't act: "I was feeling 'why can't she do it?' I was kind of a in dilemma that I'm telling her everything and giving her. Still, she can't do anything. I was not looking beyond that." Over time, Deeba began to realize that what the woman needed was someone to listen and acknowledge that her fighting back, defending herself, when her husband abused her, was not wrong. Deeba explained to me that she wanted to mention this particular case for a reason: "there are situations where you can't do anything. No matter how much frustrated you are. No matter how much you feel that this woman need to change her situation but she is not ready. So we cannot make decision on somebody's part."

Women's Stories #5: "Their last resort"

When I asked Deeba if the police had been involved in a particular case, she explained to me what tends to happen when women call the cops:

> Their last resort is to call cops. Once she calls the cops, when the police comes, right away this woman starts feeling guilty. Husband on the other hand will start putting that look, this is what you want? you want them to take me? She has young kids and children starts crying. Even if they are not crying, she starts feeling insecure right away. Right away. And right away, she would like want that whatever I have said I should take it back. There are situations like this arrive many times.

Since December, Deeba had been receiving phone calls from a woman telling her about her husband actions. The catalyst has been the woman taking steps to have a separate bank account. The husband was really upset with her saying all kinds of things and threatening her. The woman put her foot down and putting earnings in her account. "But," Deeba said, "things were not all jolly jolly there. Things were really bad." Deeba explained to the woman that in her home country she would have the "luxury of calling your extended family: you can call your parents, you can call his parents, that look this is what he is doing and so you have an intervention already that you would be able to use." Deeba felt that the woman wanted Deeba to call the husband to tell him not to do these things. "I don't have that role to play," Deeba explained, "I never thought even for a single second that if a woman asking I should talk to her husband. If her husband is insulting towards her, he can do the same thing with me if I call him." Deeba told her that she could not and that if the woman wanted these thing stop, she would have to call the police and tell them what is happening. The woman would always say to no to calling the police until one day, something happened that made her call. When the police came, they told her that they would take the husband and that she would receive a call for a court day. The next day, Deeba recounted, the woman started hearing from other people telling her what a bad thing she had done and telling her: "Now look, what is going to happen with you?" Deeba explained that since in cases like these the husband can often make a phone call, it is not unusual for him to call her and threaten her to take her complaint back by telling her what will happen if she doesn't. "So, she is now in her own mess thinking that oh my god, what have I done?" Deeba continued, "And she expect from the outside community to pitch in for everything what she is doing. It doesn't happen here." In her home country, a woman could lean on her extended family to help with responsibilities. Deeba explained, "Here, because you are alone, you don't want to take a step. If you take a step, you want that everybody should be at your side. Nobody can do that here. Even we as community workers cannot just leave everything and go and sit with them."

Women's Stories #6: A Big Change

When we were discussing the efficacy of therapy with clients, Mehry recounted a case in which she witnessed a great change in a woman named Bahar, who was from Iran. In her first six months in Montreal, Bahar was always at home and her husband would not let her go outside. He took her passport and all her documents. One day, he put her in a car and sent her back to her home country. For three years she was hospitalized. Within a month of her being sent off and institutionalized, Bahar's husband went to court and divorced her despite her not being able to attend the hearing. When the women first met, at a time when Bahar was staying at the YMCA, Mehry remembers Bahar crying uncontrollably. The second day Bahar came to the centre, she stayed the entire day and was "completely down and so depressed." Mehry helped her find an apartment and took her to a welfare office to open a bank account, to English language class and computer class. Bahar's husband had been very abusive. With time, Mehry saw a huge change in Bahar who used to ask for accompaniment for most appointments. Bahar had been too scared to go on her own for fear that her husband might see her as he didn't know she was back in the country. Mehry felt that he was a kind of "shadow" that Bahar feared. Mehry reassured Bahar of her rights in Canada. "Slowly, slowly", as Mehry put it, Bahar began to gain confidence. "When I see her now," Mehry recounted, "she is coming laughing, you know? She's speaking of friends and she makes herself busy." When asked what the key factors are that helped Bahar have this courage to grow this way, Mehry points to knowing and having "her own rights, her rights in Canada." Mehry had conversations with Bahar about her rights as well as possibilities for taking language classes at the Centre or through the government's French language program. Mehry noted that these possibilities and avenues seemed to spark the realization in Bahar that she is a person of value and that men and women have equal rights. In terms of returning to Canada, Bahar had the support of her family and her father. He had encouraged her to come back to Canada since health care is covered here and she was severely depressed at the time. When Bahar arrived to Canada, "she was completely broken," Mehry recounted, "and now, when I see her, she's like another person, she's more independent."

CHAPTER FOUR: Taboos and Pulling the Roots

"We live in capitalism. Its power seems inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human

power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art,

and very often in our art, the art of words." - Ursula Le Guin

"I want my daughter to be a free bird" - SAWCC Workshop Participant

In the conversation that became the seed for this research, Nabila mentioned the lack of
resources that she could refer South Asian women to that would be able to "keep in mind the
language barriers, the cultural differences, [and] the taboos." Taboos have long been considered a
"classical anthropological topic" and, according to Edmund R Leach, are "simultaneously both
behaviour and linguistic, both social and psychological" (1964, 154). Taboos are restrictions
"that are explicit and which are supported by feelings of sin and supernatural sanction at a
conscious level" (155). For the purposes of this research, we can define a taboo as a prohibition
on some aspect of life (food, expressions, behaviour, etc). Violations of taboos are considered
serious transgressions and come with (often dire) social and material consequences along with
notions of contamination by association. In this section, four off limit terrains of social life are
presented as salient to understanding the context of South Asian women facing violence: divorce,
sex, mental health, and violence.

DIVORCE

The first taboo to consider when supporting South Asian women facing intimate gendered
violence is that of divorce itself. Since marriage is considered a permanent contract between two
families, a woman who divorces her husband often bears the stigma of having violated this

sacrament. Even when it is her husband who divorces her, she is then stigmatized for having failed to make the marriage work.

In my interview with Pramiti, when discussing if a husband's violence towards his wife constituted enough of a reason for the marriage contract to be considered broken and for a divorce to be considered socially acceptable, she explained:

> Pramiti: That's not the way it is, when there is a violence no. When there is a violence, the woman should absorb the violence. Because this is your fate. You cannot actually. There is no religion, religious barrier that you have to continue with your husband but social pressure is like that. When a husband divorce a wife, his wife, it's normal, but when a wife divorce her husband it's abnormal.

> Pamela: When a husband divorce a wife, what happens to the wife who's been divorced? Does she lose reputation?

> Pramiti: Yeah, reputation and nobody, even her family members, consider it as illegal or unnatural and unacceptable. Her father's family never support her. And when she came back to her family, mother's family, she has her brother sister in law and her other family members, sisters, they treat her like she's a garbage like, like.

> Pamela: Like she becomes at the bottom?

> Pramiti: Bottom, yeah. She has no identity now. She has no umbrella on her like things...

> Pamela: I wonder if this is because the conception -

> Pramiti: But this is old conception. In my family if I - old but it exist. It's changing... even in my case sometimes, I, for many reasons, I don't want to continue with my husband. I felt sometimes but I can't tell, even I can't utter this. To my friends and family, if I left, if I sometime smile and talk laugh at my husband or talk, my mother always always told me you shouldn't tell like that. My sister in law they won't accept if I any ways if I leave my husband. I will not be considered as a good woman. And my sister always tell me, if you tell like this, like that, it means you are not belonging our family culture. Because in our family no women actually was divorced or get divorced.

Pamela: Then, it creates pressure?

Pramit: Tradition... yes create pressure.

Pamela: Yeah and then I mean there are many reasons to divorce. Doesn't have to just be violence, right? There are many reasons.

Pramiti: No, no, there are many reasons.

Pamela: If there is a divorce because the man is very violent against the woman does it happen that people support her?

Pramiti: Ummmm. Fifty-fifty. Because, I told you that if your husband beat you or he actually harass you in many ways it means it's your fate. Because it is permanent.

Echoing, Pramiti's point on lacking an "umbrella" or protection, Wilson notes that divorced women also commonly face sexual harassment: "They are regarded - in all classes and across communities - as sexually available and may have to fight off sexual advances. In addition, because divorce is often regarded as a blow to *izzat* or reputation for the husband's family, a woman who divorces her husband is often considered 'immoral' and deserving of punishment and frequently accused of adultery" (2006, 21).

Goel refers to the stigma that divorced women face as an "intergenerational one" where "the stigma extends beyond the divorcee to her parents, siblings, and children" (2005, 654). Unmarried siblings of the woman, especially other women, may have their marriage prospects impacted, since the divorcees immorality may be attributed (through gossip) to a family trait or lack of good raising by her parents (654). According to Abraham:

South Asian women who leave their husbands can experience extreme hardship in multiple ways. They are frequently labeled "loose," "immoral," "unlucky,", "a burden on the parents", "selfish" and "uncaring" and are socially ostracized. This labelling and the accompanying exclusionary practices cause divorced women to experience social and psychological isolation. The social ostracism is usually extended to the woman's family. For example, if a divorced woman has unmarried female siblings, the stigma associated

with divorce will have negative ramifications on the marriage eligibility of unmarried sisters. The probability of such social ostracism of the entire family can thus inflict mental trauma and increase the vulnerability of a woman's position in her affinal home (2000, 19)

Goel writes that "parents whose children divorced will feel tremendous guilt, whether or not the marriage is arranged" (654). Parents may try to arrange a second marriage for their daughters. However, much like Pramiti mentioned above, even when there are explicit strong explanations as to why the marriage ended (i.e. the husband is an alcoholic, the husband had an affair, etc), second marriages rarely occur and the weight of the stigma tends to remain with the divorced woman (654). Given all of this, fear of divorce for their daughters remains a strong factor for parents. Kushula, who was twenty-two and in Montreal on a study permit at the time of our interview, explained how diasporic parental adjustments to allow for some dating and love marriages seem to draw the line at high risks for divorce:

> If I say to my mom [who is in India] that I have a boyfriend and I want to marry this guy. She wouldn't allow. But here [in Canada], they have to allow. You know why? Like, if the boy is from like same, say India, or like same from SA, they can allow. But if this from the other side, like say white guy, they will bring up 'like ok, she might get divorce in the future.' My cousin she told me, she told me directly that 'um I'm ok with my girl dating an Indian or South Indian. So I don't want her to date a white guy.' Because parents always think about when their daughter will get a divorce and all this. Since we are not used to those things, so it's kind of like emotional.

SEX

"The same patriarchy that socializes women to powerlessness contains a paradox, the patriarchal belief that women do have power, that their power is located within their sexuality, and that this power must be controlled" - Hunjan and Towson

One of the taboos that came up most frequently was that of sex - extending to all topics pertaining to sexuality. In our discussion about gender roles and norms, Mita mentioned that Kushula had grown up with two brothers. Kushula then shared some of the ways she was raised differently than her brothers and referred to the restrictions placed on some women during their menstrual cycle:

> Kushula; Yeah my relatives and all they used to tell me you don't do this, let him [her brother] do that, you shouldn't do that. We do have the menstrual cycle and that prob ... like it's not a problem but you are not supposed to do certain things during that time. Let him do. You shouldn't do, you shouldn't touch this, you shouldn't touch the plate, all those things.

> Mita: You mean they did that you? Oh.

Menstrual taboos exist in many societies across the world with various observances and practices as well as varied explanations for why they originated and why they are still practiced today. Irrespective of their origins, menstrual taboos are often a significant part of the socialization around menses. Menarche often delineates a marked change in treatment for young girls, as Pramiti shared earlier, since they can now become pregnant. According to Rajan, "[f]rom the moment of birth, a South Asian women's social, political, economic and spiritual disenfranchisement is rooted in patriarchal mechanisms that require the control of female sexuality" (95). In big part through these early experiences around menses and new restrictions on their mobility, young women simultaneously learn to associate shame and fear with their sexuality. On the other hand, what young women are not explicitly taught, what they learn must not be openly discussed nor knowledge sought about, is also a key mechanism to control their sexuality: "the topics of sex and sexuality are considered taboo in most South Asian cultures. Although the proscription against speaking openly about sex applies to both genders, traditionally women are particularly targeted for this prohibition." (Roy 2012, 1115). This being said, Abraham notes that there has been some recent change in regard to this taboo in terms

discussions with elders, parents, and in schools about sex during the socialization process (1999, 597).

Given the sensitivity of the topic and the strong taboo, I only felt comfortable asking Mita, whom I had developed a friendship with, about her early experiences:

Pamela: How did you, as a young girl, learn about sex?

Mita: Ahhhhh, oh my god.

Pamela: Like you and your friends?

Mita: It's just as you grow up you talk to friends, to girls especially, we can't talk to guys about these things. We are not that open. So I talked to friends, I came to know. Then you see movies. You can kind of get an assumption. You see your friends having romance then you, if you know, ok this is the way romance happens. Oh that actress did this thing to the actor, that's sweet, that's nice. You feel something good about it so that's starts to think about the romance. With internet, everything, you come to know about sex. What sexuality is. What's a relation between a man and a wife becomes at the end of the day.

Pamela: -and your parents don't talk to the children very much about this, like moms? mothers?

Mita: No, it's, not in at a particular age, we don't talk, but later on they talk to make them aware of themselves if you don't, don't understand at all that's also very harmful thing. If you are a girl and you don't understand your sexuality and what are the things a boy might desire out of you it will be very difficult for you because you have to, even if you don't like the guy you should know about what he is thinking of you. f you are sitting at one place and I'm thinking of you in a bad way, you should have that sense of understanding what that guy is thinking. You should react either you should go out of that place or you should tell him to not. Yeah, you know, these things should be made aware.

Pamela: so yeah, women are sensitized to possible sexual assault?

Mita: Yeah, yeah, that's also sexual assault if they look at you in a very bad way. It's a sexual assault right? They are treating you like ....

Pamela: They are making you uncomfortable.

Mita: Yeah, they are making me uncomfortable. So, if I don't make them, um, if I don't try to tell girls that this is a way of you know, assaulting you, they will never understand and will think the guy is looking at you 'awww so sweet' but no it's not that!

Pamela: In the books that I'm reading for this research, the two main ones they talk a lot about how for a lot of women the first time they have sex is marriage, right? [M: yeah] 'Cause they are told to stay 'pure' and virgin [M: mhmmm!] and all that stuff, but that can be very shocking to like not know..

Mita: It's not shocking. It's that maybe, it's maybe that it's the first time they are actually coming euh into a relationship with a guy. What's the guarantee of having sex with the guy before marriage and he ends up not marrying you? So you give him the most important thing of your life, your body and he used it. He didn't worship it. He used it and then he left. So that's a kind of you know kind of considering as used and thrown like some object.

According to Roy citing Dasgupta, the taboo on speaking openly about and learning about sex is directly linked to the emphasis on women's premarital 'purity': "For women, chastity and virginity are the crowning glories of character. To keep women sexually pure, the South Asian female socialization patterns emphasize naiveté about the subject" (2012, 1115). Ignorance about sexuality thus becomes linked with the idea of virtue which reinforces the imperative to keep silent on the subject (1115). The result is a marked increased difficulty "for women to recognize and talk about sexual assault and/or seek help after being violated" (Roy 2012, 1115).

Like Mita mentioned above, lack of formal and or familial education on sex and sexuality means that many young girls learn about sex through films and popular culture. Abraham notes that this education through popular culture comes with some clear patriarchal messaging:

Because the normative order denigrates sexual activity by unmarried females, understanding one's own sexuality and the nature of sexual interaction is drawn, at times, on stereotypes from popular culture[..] Until recently, popular films continuously

presented icons that focused the viewer's attention on the relationship between men and women, portraying specific qualities such as self censored sexual repression as essential for women, glorifying chastity, and condemning premarital sex (Dasgupta, 1994). These popular images, especially in South Asian films, illustrate punitive outcomes, both personal and societal, for sexual transgression. [...] Sexual purity is understood as the burden of women, for the honor of men, family, community and country (1999, 597).

These mainstream films and popular culture also notably operate under a pre-assumed and compulsory heterosexuality that erases and silences the existence of other forms of sexuality reinforcing them as tabooed within a taboo. In her chapter, "The Violence That Dares Not Speak Its Name: Invisibility in the Lives of Lesbian and Bisexual South American Women," Pranja Paramita Choudhrury writes that this society wide erasing and silencing of the existence of bisexual and lesbian women is "the most common and pervasive violence, the one underlying the other forms of violence" (2007, 127). Violence against queer South Asian women, Choudhrury writes "is the concomitance of human rights abuses against sexual minorities and violence against women" (129). Lesbian daughters are especially at risk of violence from their family of origin, "often stemming from fear of their own daughter's marginalization," which includes the risks of being thrown out of the home, forced to go to "reparative therapy", "tortured or held captive by their families while the legal system and authorities support the right of families to do so", compelled "to submit to an arranged marriage through physical violence or threats of violence" and/or the withdrawal of financial and emotional support (132).

Men's sexuality is portrayed in these same films and popular culture in terms of virility and access to fulfilling their needs (Abraham 1999, 597). Hunjan and Towson, in their chapter "Virginity is Everything: sexuality in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence" (2007), add that these same films "often eroticize and legitimate violence against women and portray women as sexually exploitable, with rape scenes a common part of the script" (60). Hunjan and Towson state that "the social stigma against any kind of premarital sexuality is so strong that women are held responsible for any assumed promiscuity, including rape" (54). When it comes to rape and sexual assault, Wilson writes that sexual abuse is seen as the woman's fault and that it is common for the woman to be blamed for the abuse she has suffered and be "accused of being a

seductress" (2006, 36). Furthermore, the woman will be considered "damaged" and anything that is done to her, or perceived to be done to her, which "breaks [patriarchal] rules is also a blow to her family's honor" (13).

Aside from learning about sex through popular culture stereotypes, Abraham notes that introduction to sex can also come from "coercion from a family friend or relative" (1999, 597). The strong taboo on sex, the tendency to blame victims, and the link between virtue and sexual "naivité" reinforces the vulnerability of children and youth to sexual abuse. Although not a specific research question, this topic came up several times in my interviews in terms of women's stories that had been shared with interview participants. A good example of this is 'Broken Trust' (Women's Stories #3) shared earlier. In her chapter "Silences That Prevail When The Perpetrators Are Our Own", Grace Poore (2007) looks at what she terms incestuous child sexual abuse (ICSA) or incestuous sexual abuse (ISA). Poore names that a key element and site for intervention is the lack of language around ICSA and ISA itself: "In many South Asian languages, sexual molestation is minimized, even joked about as indiscreet touching, rather than being named for what it is: abuse, violation, rape" (110). Sharing an anecdote about working with hired linguists to translate her film *The Children We Sacrifice* into Tamil, Hindi, and Bengali:

> They declined to translate certain portions of the dialogue or on-screen text that described the nature of the abuse. They insisted on retaining the English because they felt there was no culturally appropriate way to describe explicit acts of sexual abuse without resorting to street lingo that would offend the audience, or clinical jargon that no one would understand. The conflict between me, the producer, and these senior movie industry scriptwriters came down to willingness versus unwillingness to talk publicly about something that was perceived as private and shameful. They would not give themselves permission to communicate the profane, while my goal was to destigmatize sexual violence for survivors so that shame could be detached from victimization and disclosure. Eventually, Indian feminist scholars resolved the stalemate by finding the right language to convey specific violations without disguising or turning away from what was being being described (e.g., "penis put in mouth," "pinching buttocks and breasts", and "asked to touch abuser's genitals." (111)

In her chapter, Poore explains that perpetrators of ISA and ICSA "take advantage of family connection where members are related not only by blood but also by marriage and/or historical ties" (107). Poore adds that "the in South Asian households, the notions of family include current and past family friend, frequent visitors to the house, distant cousins, and houseguests who may or may not be biologically related or even closely connected to the family (107). Poore underscores that "cultural mandate that predetermine rights and privileges of those who are older, irrespective of blood ties" can mean that "ICSA offenders often do not need tactics that involve overt force or terrorization because the balance of power already favours them" (108-109). Poore, who is herself an incest survivor, notes that "those who commit ICA are part of our families, our communities, and our culture, they know how the power dynamics within families operate, and use it to their advantage. Furthermore, cultural silences around sex and sexuality create an atmosphere where children can become easy targets for abuse" (122). Children of both genders, Poore writes, "are frequently insulated from the knowledge that sexual abuse could happen within the family" (109). However, South Asian girls, Poor writes, also have to contend with the additional pressure of gendered upbringing" (109). Gender norms on the "good", "dutiful" and "nice" girl increase the vulnerability of young girls and women to abusers. Looking at the gendered application of the Tamil concept of *Naat Kunamam* (Four Qualities) as an example, Poore finds that the "nexus of chastity and virtue, and virtue and femininity" acts as "a convenient mechanism to hold women and girls responsible for sexual abuse consequently letting sex offenders of the hook and pre-empting victim disclosure and perpetrator accountability" (112).

Marriage, Hunjan and Towson explain, "serves as the border between childhood and adulthood, between asexuality to sexuality" for South Asian women (61). Men are not held to the same prescription and their "sexual knowledge prior to marriage may be drawn from pornography or limited sexual interaction with women, who are constructed as the sexually exploitable other, based on their caste or class status or a man's perception of a woman's morality" (Abraham 1999, 598). For women, Roy underscores "sexual awakening and knowledge for women are allowed only after marriage and only by husbands" (2012, 1115). The "sex talk" can often come in the form of "cursory instructions prior to her wedding night

regarding her wifely responsibility to satisfy her husband's sexual needs" (Abraham in Hunjan and Towson 2007, 61). Deeba, one of the frontline workers I spoke with who had spent the longest time in the field, shared similar observations in our interview:

> Deeba: [Sex education] is not being given the way it should be properly. Because sex is a taboo topic. And, especially let's say if I, my age, when I was 13 or 14, we cannot ask our elders. If you do, you are seen as somebody who doesn't have respect, understand? Many things you come to know when we are married. I know I went to college, I went to university. I studied, I got to know many things but till then were book knowledge, right? So practical knowledge you don't have. You don't know and then once you get married, you are told that you are the one to give pleasure to the husband. And whenever, whatever husband asks, you have to do. You don't know whether if you like it or not because I don't know but personally that right away you start liking having sex, it's not, it takes time. Sometimes, if a woman is not showing that kind of pleasure she will be seen as maybe something is wrong with her.

In her work, Abraham points to the wedding night as one whereby "sexually inexperienced" and "emotionally unprepared" women will often come to expect the kind of intimacy portrayed in "popular culture, such as films and books that romanticize and idealize the wedding night" while remaining somewhat vague due to leaving out explicit details (1999, 600). The reality, however, may not come anywhere close to this, with potentially devastating effects. "Often", Abraham writes:

> rape occurs on the first night, with the husband justifying the woman's silence as shyness. Given that women are supposed to be virgins when they marry, men confuse or attribute a woman's lack of sexual experience, her reluctance, or her silence at his aggression with shyness on the part of the bride. The assumption that nonparticipation culturally implies shyness in the case of woman and must be overcome by the husband is closely connected with cultural notions of femininity, masculinity, and gender role expectations.(600)

In both her article and book, Margaret Abraham takes an in depth look at different expressions of marital sexual abuse and identifies four major categories. The first is "marital rape as marital

right". This category is based on how "[t]raditionally, men are taught that sex is their masculine right as a husband, and little attention is placed on socializing them to fulfill the sexual desires and needs of their wives" (2000, 90-91). Combined with this is the way sexual intercourse is conceptualized: "within the context of traditional South Asian patriarchal marriage, men initiate the sex act, define its nature, and determine when it ends, whereas women have very little say in the matter" (603). Discussions of consent and mutual pleasure or absent. This kind of sexual act is one in which "women are silenced, controlled, subordinated and experience bodily alienation" (603). Beyond the "shyness justification" and men's belief in sexual gratification as a marital right, maritial rape can also be "justified" and used as a "punitive mechanism" by the husband (603). The "punishment" might be for a women's perceived immorality or a transgression of some sort, for her husband to regain control of her body or sexuality, and/or seen ass needed to reaffirm his masculinity (603).

According to Roy, "although a woman might recognize being coerced, she might not identify her spouse's behavior as "rape" or "sexual assault," as she may believe that women do not have the right to deny their husbands' sexual demands" (2012, 1115). Meeting her husband's sexual needs may also be seen by her as part of her marriage duties whether or not she consents at the time. Added to this is the constant way that women are socialized into the idea that keeping their husband's needs before their own is "the glue that holds their marriage together" (Abraham 1999, 601). Overall, a wife may also feel that she has less sexual rights as her husband since marital rape is normalized in society and has historically been left out of legal and social sanctions.

The second category is "sexual abuse by controlling women's reproductive rights" which was discussed in an earlier section. The third category identified by Abraham is "sexual abuse by flaunting the sexual other" whereby:

> a man sexually abuses his wife by manipulating the "other woman" factor as a means of sexually intimidating her and exercising power and control through sexually appropriating or rejecting his wife. By insinuating, threatening to, or actually having a sexual relationship wth another woman, the husband makes the wife feel sexually inadequate and alienates her from her own body. This also includes the process by which

a husband humiliates his wife by flaunting that others are sexually more desirable than her (607).

This is especially salient because, as Deeba who has a masters in psychology noted, in patriarchal societies women are consistently given the message that they "exist to please men" - for all spheres of life. Women must do so, Deeba said, "by being docile, being a good cook, by being a good housewife. These are the characters men want from a woman. That my wife does everything." During this conversation, Deeba recounted a common example that happened at a family gathering. A man was complaining to the group about the chores he had to do upon returning home from work. Another man spoke up and told the group how when he comes home, his wife would have a plate of food ready for him and would serve him. "Everybody said 'oooo lucky you!'," Deeba explained, "But for him to let everybody know, look my wife is doing everything for me. And wife is sitting little further away and was feeling that 'oh look he is saying things, good things, about me'. [The wife] was reinforcing in herself that she's going to do more of this." Although a small perhaps innocent seeming occurrence, this shows how women come to associate and internalize that how well they can please their husband's needs is a direct reflection of their worth or value. Beyond cooking and serving a husband hot meals, Deeba added that this extends to sex:

> Deeba: No matter how many times your husband - because in our culture it is usually the husband who is asking [for sex], there are situations like boyfriend and girlfriend but the percentage is not that much high. For a woman, this is something, if a husband is asking her, as many times, it is showing that she is appealing to him. Even if she doesn't feel like doing it, she will not say it.

Given this context, "the flaunting of the sexual other" to abuse a wife, has the potential for many harmful consequences including "loss of self esteem", "sense of emotional and sexual inadequacy", feelings of "failure as a wife", as well as being forced to have sex or perform sex acts that she is not comfortable with (for example watching pornography) out of fear the husband will have an affair (611). From the women's stories shared in Abraham's work as well as across

the literature, confronting a husband about an affair is a very high-risk moment for increased violence (2000, 101-103).

Abraham also notes an extra layer of consequences when, in the South Asian immigrant context, the construction of the sexual other, often a non-South Asian or "western" woman, is that of being "more sexually permissive" and "sexually accessible" (1999, 608). Making the non-South Asian woman "the foe/ intruder/ sexual competitor, diverts some of the resentment by the wife against her husband toward the foreign other. It hinders the potential solidarity among women of different ethnicities and classes by defining them in terms of sexual competitors" (611).

Last but not least, the fourth category is that of "sexual abuse by significant others" whereby sexual abuse may not be limited to the husband but also "may get extended to other significant males" (2000, 103). This may occur during the marriage such as when upon seeing abuse or neglect by the husband and a lack of support network present, other men in the family take advantage of a woman's vulnerable position. Another context occurs when a woman seeks to leave. As noted above in the divorce section, a woman who is seeking to divorce her husband or has divorced him can become perceived as being "sexually accessible" by other men. The immigrant context complicates the situation in some ways including when a woman comes to the new country on her own without members of her extended natal family around. Abraham summarizes this category as follows:

> Significant others take advantage of these women's vulnerability and assume that they won't be held accountable for their actions. It's the abuser's belief that he has economic, social, and emotional power that allows him to take such sexual liberty. In Shahida's case, a man counted on her silence, her affection for his wife, and he desperate need for support and dared to sexual abuse her. Under the guise of protector and confidante such men may sexually harass women, sometimes as in Shahida's case, with the excuse that it would improve her health. In Yamuna's case, the husband of the family she lived with did not touch her but constantly looked at her in ways that made her feel sexually objectified. Financially and occasionally trapped, se had no alternative but to stay with the family (2000, 105).

Regardless of the category or if it occurred within the context of marriage or outside of it, due to the taboo nature of the topic, Hunjan and Towson note that in terms of intimate gendered violence, South Asian "were most reticent about talking about their sexual abuse" (2007, 63). Similarly, Roy reports that "even when they might talk about physical abuse, South Asian women are exceptionally hesitant to disclose marital rape or sexual assault (2012, 1115).

MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Another significant taboo that emerged during the research was that of mental health. In her chapter "Mental and Emotional Wounds of Domestic Violence in South Asian Women", Diya Kallivayalil names that attitudes towards mental health in South Asian include silence, shame and stigma (2007, 82). These attitudes, she writes, are also present in South Asian communities in North America (82-83). The taboo on mental health was named early on in the very first of my interviews with two of the frontline domestic violence workers at the South Asian Women's Community Center (SAWCC): Harusha, who is in her 50s and immigrated from her home country of Bangladesh to Canada in 1995, and Mehry, who is an Afghan Canadian in her mid-thirties who immigrated in 1999. I asked about mental health, how they understand it, and how the literature seemed to say that the topic is an uncomfortable one in South Asian communities and likened to a 'Western' phenomenon. Mehry responded that when South Asian people come to Canada, the discourse around mental health is that these are 'serious illnesses'. In South Asia, on the other hand, she explained:

> If somebody has [a mental health issue]. First of all, she or he cannot discuss that 'I have this problem'. Even the family they are hiding. Because there, you know, as you also said, that you know here is different than there you know. Here people are talking but there they are not.

Mehry continued by giving a hypothetical example of a woman facing a domestic violence situation in which a husband might be "beating, threatening, controlling everything". This woman, Mehry explained, might face not being able to go back to her natal family due to the

pressure of keeping the family reputation unblemished. Even if this woman, Mehry continued, became in very serious mental distress it would be difficult to get her to go for therapy. The family would hide her issues as well if they began to notice. She might be labelled stupid or that something is inherently wrong with her, Mehry added noting that this example was a generalization and that some educated people might not react this way. Mehry explained that the root cause of this woman's distress or possible environmental or genetic factors may not be considered. For Mehry, the difference between how mental health and other disabilities are treated here versus back in South Asia ultimately shows how the value of a human being is considered by society. Mehry, who has two children, explained this by giving me the example of how the well-being of an autistic child at a school here might be addressed and dealt with seriously by a team of multiple people, including specialists and regular meetings with parents. When seeing that someone is in a harmful situation for their mental health, Mehry shared that she sees the attitude here as something like: "'Okay we have to help. If she is not in herself or something, we are in ourselves. We know, so we have to help her. We have to support her. Because if that woman is in that situation and she has three, four children, how come she will give a healthy life to her children or to husband? So, this is the difference, yeah."

Even when it comes to mental health issues and illness, no matter how unequipped the family might be to deal with the severity of the case, the "proscription" about not discussing problems outside of the family applies. Here, mental health falls within the scope of "intimate problems and emotional difficulties," rather than 'serious illness' as Mehry put it and so, Kallivayalil notes, the course of action considered to be correct is still that of "family as most appropriate support structure for individuals" (2007, 82). As Mehry noted in our interview, at the same time, the family also has the imperative to maintain it's reputation and often will find ways to actively "hide" or downplay any mental illness within the family. Roy also names this: ". The topic is so fraught with shame that people tend not to discuss it in public and individuals suffer-ing from mental illness are hidden away by the family" (2012, 1114).

Since mental health and psychopathology are stigmatized, which Kallivayalil posits may be "due to lack of awareness and education on the complex dimensions of mental health," even

the simple act of seeking counselling can result in being seen as "insane" or having a "severe mental health problem" (82, 93). This stigma will then affect a woman's family's reputation:

> Mehry: The community will talk, of course. Even here [in Montreal]. For South Asians, reputation is first thing. Even like as I said in the previous interview even for therapy. You know in here it's so common for example sometime when we go with a woman if she has like appointment with psychologist or something you know. Then when we go, we see lots of young people. Once I went and there was two student. The boy said 'yeah because I was so depressed I had exam, this, you know, so, it was difficult to concentrate'. So he came for psychologist. Here, if you become a little bit stressed, right away you go for therapy or something that happened to you. But you know, in South Asian culture, unfortunately, I could say unfortunately, because from depression, lots of thing, for example if her mother is weak and she's depressed and she could not take care of herself. Then it will be difficult it will affect all the family, children, husband, but at same time she could not say 'oh, I need to go to psychologist'. Or a therapist. The response would be something like 'oh, you are crazy or?'

Mehry continued to explain how the fear of word getting around when a woman seeks support is so strong that at times, that women contacting SAWCC will ask not to speak with a South Asian worker who is from their own regional or ethnic community:

> Mehry: For example, from a Bangladeshi woman. She contact me. I am not from Bangladesh, but you know if she speaks english, then if I say 'I know my colleague she is from Bangladesh also, from Pakistan or whatever'. Then she say 'no no no, I don't wanna talk to her because if community knows, you know'. Then they come to me or to my other colleague you know.

> If another, if a woman that she is from my own country that she contact me, she's from my own country, she may talk in english but you know right away. Here I can not say 'Oh I am from this country'. I just say if I am Sud Asiatique[1] worker. If I say 'there is an Afghan woman that she is working here and if you want she will help you'. She say 'no no no I don't want'. If the community knows, then it will be so bad for me, I don't want that everybody knows about my personal life.

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[1] French for South Asian.

Then she say, 'oh if there is another woman from I dunno Pakistan or what'. 'Cause most Afghan know Urdu cause they were refugee there or even in India. So then I transfer to her and she did. [...] But I see reputation, even if they might die, they are saying 'ahh I don't want that society knows, I don't want that people know'. And for therapy as I said, here it's so common, but there as I said. You know, now it's changing. I cannot say like 100%. There are woman especially, here [in Montreal], they are going [to therapy]. There are some [South Asian women] that they go but they don't say to like friend or outside [of the Centre] like that 'oh I am going to therapy'. They hide [it].

Another consideration for why there may be fear around speaking about mental health for South Asian women facing intimate gendered violence is that the stigmatization itself as well as the psychiatric apparatus may "collude" against women in various ways. In *South Asian battered women's use of force against intimate male partners: a practice note*, Roy similarly underscores that due to the stigma surrounding mental illness "[b]attered women showing even the slightest signs of emotional disorientation and mental illness are peremptorily dismissed as malingerers and their veracity about the abuse is questioned skeptically" (2012, 1115). In her chapter "Psychiatry, Violence, and Mental Distress, Wilson (2006) explicitly names this collusion, along with racism, in terms of South Asian women's experiences of the mental health and psychiatric systems in Britain. Here Wilson brings up the fact that what is considered normal or abnormal behaviour is not a neutral concept but deeply rooted in perceptions of what a 'good woman' should be including how this affects her capacity for labour (domestic and otherwise). Being labelled 'mad' can be a way to discredit a woman who goes against the grain, justify how she is being treated[2] as well as to a way to lessen rights and/or agency over her own body and choices(127). Kallivayalil names this as well in terms of the:

very real risk of turning protest to pathology by mental health professionals' focusing on the internal emotional problems of women, rather than the larger patriarchal structures that maintain and condone violence (Dava 1999). This is a particularly salient issue for survivors of domestic violence, because being labeled or diagnosed, even with good

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[2] This may be partly what is going on in Pramiti's sharing of 'Violence Happens for Many Reasons' (Women's Stories #3) when she is speaking about her friend, the Manager, and his wife. Pramiti notes both the wife's lack of fulfilling her role as a mother as well as names how the wife might have mental health issues in what might be read as justification for her friend's violence.

intentions, may undermine a woman' credibility in the community at large and the legal system when fighting for custody of children (82).

In literature, fieldwork, and interviews for this research, I encountered a number of cases where women were forcibly institutionalized whether they were actually facing mental health issues (or distress) or none at all. In both categories, however, institutionalization was used as a means of control or punishment. Indeed, feminist and non-feminist research and literature is rife with examples of the many ways in which psychiatry is no stranger to being used against women (as well as supposed moral transgressors) in such a manner (Showwalter 2020, Ehrenreich 2011, Foucault 2006). In speaking with frontline workers, two cases of forced institutionalization were shared with me including 'A Big Change' (Women's Stories # 6) by Mehry. Roy had similar findings in her research:

> Several women have reported to me that their abusive husbands have fabricated the circumstances of their mental illness to make others in the family and community believe their use of force has little to do with systematic experiences of abuse. The abuse is compounded when husbands justify their own violent behavior as a response to their wives' erratic conduct, which is falsely attributed to a "preexisting" mental illness. At times, men have forced their battered wives to be assessed by mental health practitioners who have no knowledge of South Asian cultures and/or the dynamics of domestic violence and then coerce them to take medications. Some women have also been forcibly committed to psychiatric hospitals. (2012, 1115).

Although there is a risk of 'collusion' and compounded violence when using psychiatric and psychological tools, Kallivayalil warns that the solution is not to minimize psychological harm resulting from intimate gendered violence (2007, 83). Along with how reactions to violence, symptoms, and coping vary with time and context, Kallivayalil reviewed mainstream literature, based largely on studies with white American women, and names the following psychological harm outcomes:

> (in addition to extremely severe injuries), depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTD), anxiety, panic attacks, and suicide as the significant mental health outcome of

domestic violence (E.g. Jones et al. 2001). It also indicates cognitive distortions (including memory distortion and loss), the disruption of relationship, and feelings of worthlessness and self-blame as common outcomes of experiencing trauma (Gleason 1993; Walke 1984) (95).

Go et al., who conducted their study in Chennai, India also emphasize the need to recognize "domestic violence has a profound effect on women's mental and physical well-being" (2003, 394). They found that "early experiences of physical and sexual violence in marriage mutes sexual desire and significantly reduces women's future enjoyment of sex" (394). They also note that intimate gendered violence is associated with depression and suicide. On top of the physical injuries sustained, "women who have experienced intimate partner abuse are more likely to have reproductive health problems including chronic pelvic pain, infertility and adverse pregnancy outcomes" (394). As well, "domestic violence can increase women's risk of sexually transmitted disease (STDs) including HIV" (394). Although some of what Go et al. list can be considered physical ailments they can be closely tied with certain kinds of distress in the context of the primacy of motherhood and taboo around sex.

Last but not least, what may be informing attitudes about mental health is that "western model of individual psychotherapy can be unfamiliar and threatening to members of the South Asian community" considering that two the model's major goals include "individual self-actualization and self-disclosure" (83). This may be at odds with the way in which South Asians have a strong family orientation (focus on collective identity) that favours identity through family, especially for women (83). It may also be that it is seen as a "Western" help-seeking solution or tool, as compared to "non-psychological options like family members, primary care physicians, and community religious leaders", and seen as a sign of 'acculturation', which can be frowned upon. There have been studies that indicate that there is a link between acculturation and seeking mental health services (Sheink in Kallivayalil, 83). Furthermore, psychology and psychiatry have inherent ethnocentric bias and so too the definitions of the illnesses and disorders within their manuals and treatment models. Citing Kleinman, Kallivayalil underscores that the "explanatory models or beliefs about illness and treatment are community specific" (86). Given this Kallivayalil states "the study of local conceptualizations of mental disorders is

important in privileging local knowledge and leaves open the exploration of whether these conceptions connect to traditional notions of symptomology in a meaningful way" (86). This locality includes recognizing and making space for the vast diversity in South Asia. For her research, Kallivayalil interviewed a psychiatrist working with South Asian women who reported that "her clients were not used to be asked about their feelings and did not always understand some of the routine assessment questions placed to them" (87). This echoes Deeba's recounting of the self-esteem workshop given by SAWCC and the difficulty of having women focus on themselves and their feelings. In her own research Kallivayayil identified certain tendency for patients to avoid, be puzzled by, or quickly move on from answering questions about their emotional or physical problems or concerns. Despite all of the above, Kallivayalil, speaking to other mental health care workers and/or to other South Asian community workers, reminds that "if our task is holistic empowerment and recovery, expressions of subjective suffering must be given the space to be articulated" and to resist the tendency of focusing on pragmatics needs ('financial and survival issues') only (93). Kallivayaylil writes: "pragmatic needs must be addressed, but denial of emotional needs is part of the stigma" (93).

Community workers continue to find ways to combat the stigma creatively. Speaking with Mehry, I asked if in her experience women spoke of or mentioned their mental health when coming to SAWCC with domestic violence issues:

> Mehry: They are not, because you know in that situation, they cannot see that they have a problem or something, you know. Because mostly they will talk about their own situation for example if they have problem with husband. Their own situation with life. Then for us we see that 'oh this woman is very stressed'. Then [SAWCC] we are asking, we have with us a therapist that each Tuesday she is coming, and they are informed that they are coming, so we have among these women that are coming on Tuesday. She's a couple therapist as well as for woman also. So, if there is a woman we explain you know. So, some they are ready and they say ok yeah and they are coming [to therapy] and they are happy. So it depends.

For other cases where there is severe violence, Mehry says, they have to find ways to bring up mental health and well-being in different ways that might be less straight forward. The staff

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discusses how to work collectively and find a solution. Often, they will contact the woman to come participate in Tuesday activities, programs as well as their regular potluck, a good opportunity to connect with other women:

> Mehry: Maybe she will find like meet other people, because potluck is a good opportunity to find even friends and also to share, to see her own community's people. We give all the information, the services. Some women, they are like 'you know, I was staying for ten years here and I didn't know this center their doing, giving lots of services'.

Both of these examples speak to a recommendation made by Kallivayalil that "activists ad others who do direct work with survivors of violence should consider and not deemphasize the potential need for therapeutic assistance and make appropriate referrals, as many women simply do not know where to go for help" (93) as part of fighting the silence and stigma around emotional needs, mental health, and well-being.

Making the space for women to discuss and focus on their own well-being is paramount, albeit difficult when women are constantly told theirs should come last and that they need to downplay their needs. Charu, who is starting a masters in psychology, pointed to the centrality of the role of women as caregivers "for everyone else in the family." Charu explained, "meaning the person who takes care of the husband's well being, of her parents and in laws' well-being, her children's well being. It's really emphasized socially." Different people, within and across different communities, need different things for their well-being and will define it in varied ways. As part of the research, I made sure to discuss the concept of well-being with each interview participant in terms of how they defined it either in relationship to themselves or their work at SAWCC.

Juhi, who had been married for over twenty years, explained what she felt and observed that Sri Lankan Tamil women needed to have well-being:

> Juhi: They need respect from their husbands. Not all of them, some of them get respect. Some of them say they need the husband to be more responsible. There is a client comes to me, the husband doesn't care about anything. He goes to work, comes and sits home. She has two small babies, like two years and three months old. Husband never talks about

their birthdays, baptism, etc. [...] As a mother she has a lot of expectations, right. So, um, that they need. You know? To be responsible. Um, they expect the men to be a role model for their children and a lot of them need peaceful home. Peeaaacefffulll. No shouting, no yelling.

In response, I noted to Juhi that everything she named depended on the husband's actions. She explained:

Juhi: They expect him to be responsible because even if they have a better freedom[3] than the other communities. You cannot do, make a big decision without him. That you are not allowed. I mean in the society, so, if you do the others will name you as not respecting the husband. But if the husband doesn't do, somebody has to do it, right? And if you do it, when he doesn't like it, then he gets angry. 'Ok, she is not listening to me, she is doing it on her, she doesn't care if I am there or not...' So that's that's a problem. So, I mean, they are not house bounded like, they are not like in house, they go for shopping, they go for schools, they do work and everything but still under the control of men.

As for Vihbuti, mother of two school age children with a sense of humour I particularly enjoyed, she spoke of mental health as having "peace of mind" when "you are not stressed." Mental health, she added, "comes only when you are well enough with your life". As for this wellness and well-being, she understood it as being "comfortable where you are" and like Juhi, noted that respect was needed:

Vibhuti: It includes your shelter, food, everything, you have comfortable in your life and what you are doing. That's for me the well being. Well being is a really broad. I would say that just basic needs, if you are comfortable with that then, of course you need education, you need good job, you need respect, if you are in a relationship it has mutually understandable. So all those factors, means well being for me.

Nabila, Pakistani mother of two teenagers and whose daughter I was mistaken for during a community event, associated well-being with feelings like "contentment", "satisfaction," and

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[3] I understood freedom here to mean less control over movements and containment to the household.

"calm". For her, well-being means "general wellness" which "includes health, physical health, mental health, environment, having a secure environment." Nabila added: "Well-being includes being stress-free having the feeling that my family, my children, my spouse, everybody is in a safe environment".

As for Pramiti, whose family immigrated to Canada through her via the skilled-worker category, well-being is when she is "feeling good and well, with all sorts of facilities." She added that well-being for her is "whatever I want, I can buy. Whatever I want to see, can see, whatever I want to wear, I can wear." Choice and freedom were key themes for her. Like Nabila, Pramiti noted the importance of security which for her were needed both in and outside the home

For Charu, who was mostly raised in Canada, to have a sense of well-being and not "live your life sad," there were two things she shared are needed. The first was: "Having goals and accomplishing them, especially because I'm not religious so like I don't have necessarily something tangible to hold on to, like a broader belief. So I think that having goals for yourself it's like a way to give meaning to life. So you have something to do and something to hope for and like, improve on." The second is "social support" and "having good meaningful relationships." Charu's response approached the one in SAWCC's Autonomous and Independent Program's pamphlet shared in Chapter 1: "Well-being is not just happiness, but it is about giving meaning to our lives. We want women to feel fulfilled and worthwhile."

Last but not least, for Harusha, who I'd observed was very well regarded in her communities as well as one of the more experienced community workers at SAWCC, she responded:

> Harusha: For me, as you ask what would be the well-beings of women. I should say if her basic needs fulfilled, her rights is well established, and she is being respected. This is the well being, the definition of well beings in my opinion. And, according to our work [at SAWCC], we are helping women to empower them to establish their rights according to their needs and give them the information regarding the system in Canada, to break the isolation, bring them out of their home, and not to protect family violence.

VIOLENCE

During my interview with Deeba, I took a moment and thanked her for her participation, noting my gratefulness for all the participants, given the sensitive nature of discussing intimate gendered violence and the difficult subjects related to it. She responded:

> Deeba: It is important. It's very important because you know when we go and talk with other women's centres, women from [Quebec] are having the same problems. Women are going through so many difficulties. When we see that those women have been brought up in a very different society, they don't have barriers as far as language is concerned, but still they are facing problems. They are having similar problems, they are having similar hesitations in breaking their marriages, they have similar barriers. But, they are not shy to talk about [the violence]. They talk. For our women, they are shy to talk about it. They don't want people to know about it, what is going on. Their main fear to come and talk to us is that nobody should know about it.

When it comes to intimate gendered violence, the stigma that seems strongest is around the disclosure of violence (Pinnewalla 2009, 89) rather than the violence itself. When are actions (or non-actions such as neglect) considered violent? What kinds of actions can be considered violence? What are acceptable forms of violence and at which thresholds is violence considered taboo in a society? And last but not least, how can we transform dispositions in such a way that acts of intimate gendered violence would be considered something akin to taboo or 'a transgression of the sacred'? Would the perception of material and social consequences of taboos be enough to act as a buffer against this kind of violence?

In *'Violence is an International Language': Tamil Women' Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence,* Robin Mason et al. (2008) conducted research with Sri Lankan immigrant women in Toronto to explore how they understood definitions of violence as well as what constituted specific behaviours they understood as forms of abuse. As part of the interviews, women were asked about "behaviours and acts that were considered acceptable in their country of origin that are labeled abusive in Canada and vice versa" (1403). In our interviews, Charu provided a good example of this. The example she provided was of the physical disciplining of

children through acts like spanking and ear pinching. In her example, Charu, sharing her disapproval, spoke of how for South Asian parents this might still be considered acceptable while in the context of Montreal and Quebec, it is currently considered unacceptable. However, it was not long ago in Quebec that corporal punishment, as it is often referred as, of children was considered normal. This is a good example of types of acts that in some contexts and at different points in history are considered non-violent while in others are considered not only violent, but taboo. As well, when a practice like this is widely accepted as 'disciplining' and not violence, this means that for someone to cross the threshold into the sphere of violence their use of physical disciplining would have to fall clearly outside the norm to evoke the ire of taboo.

In our interview, I asked Kushula and Mita what were some problems they felt South Asian women face in their daily lives. The resulting conversation provided insights to the high threshold for certain kinds of violence against women in South Asia in the public sphere. Kushula answered in the context of her life in India: "so many problems, safety and harassment, sexual harassment." Mita added:

Mita: What is it called when people, when people give you say look, gods, or taunt you with words while you are walking?

Pamela: Oh, cat call?

Mita: Cat calling yeah, street harassment, cat calling?

Kushula: Yeah exactly, oh god, you can -

Mita: - you are walking and they say, gonna say how do something to you and it will be embarrassing to you but -

Kushula: - it happens, even in university colleges everything it happens.

Mita: Safety is the most important because imagine to be out of home at 9pm?

Kushula: I took a train at 9pm, my university is like very too far form my place, it will take around like two hours to reach my university. So that one day, it was really late so I

was in the train at 9pm and it was empty. The woman compartment was empty and I was a bit scared, so the station is also like empty, nobody goes there. Here if it is empty means you will empty but there it's like some other trouble.

Mita: You have to worry or you have to run, either of two.

Kushula: Yeah.

Pamela: Oh yeah? Wow.

Mita: Yeah.

Kushula: Yeah, so I saw one guy like coming into the like getting into the train and euh four other guys like four other guys they also came in the the same compartment. I got really scared, I literally euh like euh -

Mita: - thought of jumping?

Kushula: I did! Train was about to start and I just jumped off the train and then I got into the next compartment. Actually that was a ladies' compartment that I was in, they get into the ladies compartment.

Mita: To harrass.

Kushula: Yeah, maybe, that's should be their intention.

Pamela: There's a difference between ladies compartment and men?

Mita: Ya, ya, ya, ya, ya. We have ladies compartment, gents compartments.

Kushula: Ya, it's because of these rubbish things, that's been happened, it does happen.

Mita and Kushula shared that being groped was a common occurrence and that it represented a constant danger for girls to be aware of while perpetrators seemed unaffected by any kind of sense of shame or stigma. Kushula shared: "You know what. I scolded many boys but they don't

have that shame, they don't have that sense this girl is scolding me in front of all these people, they don't have the sense, they don't have the shame." Whether a woman wore "a very very very very short skirt and thinking of doing some fashion" as Mita put it, or "even if you cover you're whole body," there is a notion that men see these actions as permissible, often even during broad daylight. Returning to the question about the safety of being out past 9pm, Mita added that her husband, a doctoral student, had recently spoken to her about how this was not as much of an issue in Montreal:

> Mita: My husband was telling me one day that if you go out at eleven o'clock, twelve o'clock, if you come -
>
> Kushula: -in the night, in the night?
>
> Mita: In the night. twelve o'clock you can come from home. Or, if you are to go somewhere at the 6 p.m., 6a.m., I am not scared. I know you are safe. But if this happens somewhere like in the US or in India, I'll be scared.

In their research for *Crossing the threshold: engendered definitions of socially acceptable domestic violence in Chennai, India* by Vivian F. Go et al., conducted research among 14 focus groups of women and of men in low-income communities within Chennai. Their goal was to look at determinants of marital violence (individual, relational, community, and societal) and identify interventions that could lower the "threshold of socially acceptable violence" as a way to "alleviate the consequences of violence" (2003, 393). Both women and men reported that men held the decision-making power in the "economic, social and sexual spheres" of life and the household (393). Go et al. found that across gender, focus group participants felt there was a baseline where "husbands regularly hit their wives and that this is to be expected" (198). Go et al. asked their respondents if they knew of any man who did not beat his wife and the group responded that "[i]t is difficult to name this type of man" with only one woman stating that her husband had not harmed her. Focus group participants reported that "violence within marriage was unidirectional: from a man to his wife. The only rare exceptions occurred in self defence" (398). However, even if their respondents felt that "wife-beating was the norm, the

acceptable intensity of violence varied by gender" (393). Notably, woman reported more incidents of severe and non acceptable violence than the male focus groups and also named that marital violence constituted a major community issue and "they perceived the community's levels of violence to be unacceptable" (403). Men reported that 'acceptable' violence was perceived as a necessary tool that "served to discipline wives and ultimately enforce gender norms" (393). Some of the men referred to this as an "unpleasant duty" they had to perform (393). Overall, Go et al. identified five trigger categories for 'violent conflicts' from their focus groups: "(1) wife speaking out of turn; (2) wife's neglect of household duties; (3) suspicion of wife's infidelity; (4) wife's refusal to have sex; and (5) husband's alcohol consumption" (399). Alcohol was also linked to the severity and frequency of violence. Community level and societal level factors such as poverty, insalubrious living conditions, and unemployment "exacerbated" other triggers for violent episodes. Outside factors and stressors such as these came up as so-called 'justifications' for bouts of violence according to both the men and the women. This "justification" or "excuse" for violence is one whereby men were understood as "needing" to release their frustrations about outside circumstances and that their wives were considered (by some men and some women) as acceptable outlets for this (Mehorta 1999, 624). Mehorta considers this to be tied with the overall normalization of male aggression and how wives are socialized, as part of their duties, to accept men's anger. Even when wives did not consider themselves the appropriate outlets for frustration, this was still presented as "excuse" of sorts and the solution implied by Mehorta's participants was that men needed to find appropriate outlets for their aggression such as sports (625). Mehorta noted that the idea of such violence understood as misdirected normal male aggression or frustration overlooked the gendered power and control dynamics within marriages themselves (626).

Despite there being a "normative threshold of acceptability", Go et al. also found that there was a realm in which "violence becomes objectionable" (2003, 403). For this realm, "intensity, justification, and frequency" were important dimensions for establishing when violence went from acceptable to "objectionable": "For example with respect to intensity of violence, 'hitting with the fist, but not very had was acceptable, whereas 'pouring kerosene an torturing was not.' (403). Go et al. noted a clear gendered threshold of acceptability amongst

their focus groups and that men "theoretically agreed that frequent, severe and unjustified beating were unacceptable" (403). However, men did not admit to crossing this boundary, with the exception of one man. This indicated to Go et al. that there was an overall minimization of violence in the community by men, especially given what women were reporting which was that violence frequently crossed this threshold. Go et al. found that "societal and gender norms allow the existence of accepted thresholds of violence against women" (405). Ultimately, Go et al. argue that "establishing the presence of a socially acknowledged threshold of 'acceptable' violence is fundamental since it is based on the underlying belief that violence *can* be objectionable in this setting. Expanding on this premise, behavioural interventions can be developed to express the notion that any form of violence is unacceptable" (404).

Although Go et al.'s research undertook their research in low income neighbourhoods, it is important to name, as Dasgupta and Warrier do, that "Indians commonly perceive wife abuse as a lower class phenomenon that coexists with poor education level, economic impoverishment and women's lack of autonomy" (1996, 242). Although these are indeed significant factors to consider, it is crucial to remember that intimate gendered violence "affects all social, economic, religious, ethnic and cultural subgroups" in South Asia (Pinewalla 2009, 82). Mehorta also warns that the normalization of male aggression she observed in her respondents seemed to feed into "the myth that wife abuse is limited to lower-income groups because educated people 'know-better' or possibly have other outlets like going to the gym" (1999, 625). The perception and 'myth' that intimate gendered violence exists as a "lower class phenomenon" reinforces the overall communal denial of this societal problem, especially considering the importance of status in South Asian societies (625). In their research for *In the Footsteps of 'Arundhati': Asian American Women's Experience of Domestic Violence in the United States,* Dasgupta and Warrier found that there was a strong perception that "because the Asian Indian community is highly educated and skilled that community members believe that wife beating cannot occur (1996, 242). Having worked with and conducted research with survivors this community, Dasgupta and Warrier underscore that status and education are not buffers to violence when "wife-abuse is the by-product of patriarchal structures that are based on asymmetrical gender relations" and violence is about "consolidating power and control over [one's] wife" (241). Dasgupta and

Warrier noted that the perception of 'wife abuse' as a lower class and 'uneducated' phenomenon has also interestingly led many Asian Indian immigrants to "believe that such violence occurs mainly in India where gender discrimination is more visible than in the United States" (240). Consequently, they generally assume that their move to the less restrictive United States has led to a more democratic family structure, thereby eliminating family violence from their ranks."(240). As Dasgupta and Warrier put it, the reality of violence in immigrant South Asian communities, "of course, contradicts this" (242).

So then, what happens when violence occurs? Go et al. found that in cases where violence that is considered non legitimate by the women in their study, "[they] seemed resigned to admit that there was little recourse for them. A few women suggested retaliation by hitting or pinching or even sending the husband away; however the majority of participants felt socially and financially constrained from doing anything" (2003, 404). Some of the men "tended to suggest that third-party interventions might be possible" (404). As previously mentioned, one of the most important things is that any problems, even violence, must be handled within the family (Roy 2012, 1110) and that the privacy of the family be upheld (Abraham 2000, 19). In our conversation, Mita and Kushula were discussing how violence mostly happened within the home and was "hidden from public view," including friends. If a husband and wife were fighting, they explained to me, the wife would mostly likely complain to her own parents and they would try to help "fix it within the family." I asked them what happens if the problem was too bad to fix within the family and Kushula offered an example within her own family:

> Kushula: I saw a problem in my family. My sister, she didn't have kids for a long time - four years. At one point of time, my sister's mother-in-law started searching for a bride to marry that guy. Fortunately she got like pregnant after four years and then like, it was more like, after that it was, but before that it was, that period, like they literally started searching for another girl for that boy, and without even telling my sister.

> Mita: Yeah this happens. They were looking for a bride, because they want to find someone to, or someone to tie the name. If you can't reproduce, then there is nobody to carry the name right? People, the have to look for someone.

Kushula: They will expect you to give birth to a baby as soon as you get married, within one year.

Pamela: So then, if she hadn't gotten pregnant then she would have been left? Then her reputation would have been bad.

Kushula: Yeah, exactly.

Mita: ya, obviously, who will marry her?

Kushula: so that was like a bad thing. They really like started all the ... problems. And then, when my sister's parents got to know about that they had a like big fight. They sat and then they discuss about that and everything. So after she got pregnant, so everything was good. So that is also another problem.

Mita: But when problems are goes too high, they try to solve it within the family, explain the husband trying to talk with, negotiate with their mother,

Kushula: ...they wont explain nothing to husband..

Mita: But then try to negotiate mother-in-law, father-in-law, but they wont, they wont listen and they wont care also at the end of the day.

Kushula: No ultimately, they will ask the girl 'see you have to, you are living under his shade, okay you have to adjust with him, you have to adjust whatever he says, you should be like a -

Mita: - you should do -

Kushula: because if you come out of this relationship, this marriage, nobody will be able to marry you.
Mita: You should be more. What's that word..

Kushula: say it in Hindi.

Mita: You have to compensate, no, no, no, what's that word, you have to always -

Kushula: - compromise.

Mita: Compromise, that's the word. You have to always compromise. No matter what happens, even if you go to your parents' family, they will also tell you, try to compromise, try to make him understand, try to fix the problems.

Kushula: You understand him, you should understand him, they will tell like.

Mita: They will keep on telling 'you should trust them, you should understand'.

Kushula: They will not tell boys that, boys. He is a boy. You should understand. The girl. They will not tell like that, they will tell the girl, you should understand the boy.

Mita: Yeah, because the girl will go, nah because she is not getting help when she goes to her parents when she goes to ask, help, her parents will also not go talk to the boy, cause they are scared.

In *The Social Construction of Wife Abuse: Experiences of Asian Indian Women in the United States,* Mehorta also notes that "involving family members or close friends whom the husband respected" as one of several strategies women employ to end or reduce abuse (1999, 635). Roy writes that traditionally "when intervention becomes absolutely essential, elders in a family are expected to counsel and resolve conflicts" (2012, 1111). This strategy can at times be useful in offering some form of mediation and reducing violence. Alternatively, seeking help from family and friends may also increase abuse, as was the case for one of Mehorta's respondents after her husband was "reprimanded by her family" (1999, 635). Abraham also notes this but underlines that friends and family may actually act as a barrier for women seeking help (2000, 118). Abraham explains: "Many abused women are reluctant to seek out friends and members of the community after their initial attempts are then rebuffed or met with sympathy that is soon followed by advice to be stoical so as to preserve the family." Similarly, Roy finds that "[d]ue to the high worth attributed to maintaining family integrity, within-family advisers pressure women toward reconciliation, as divorce and/or separation are generally unacceptable choices and

considered only the very last resort in the grimmest of circumstances" (2012, 1111). As well, Abrahram found that one of the things that kept abused women from reaching out to friends is they "fear that, rather than getting support from friends, they will be blamed or the abuser's behaviour"(118). Conversely, friends who want to help may also be hesitant to support and abused women due to fear of social and economic ramifications such as being told not to "interfere in family matters", "trying to break up the family" along with having to provide temporary shelter and economic support.

Still considered somewhat "fixing within the family," religious practitioners like preachers (Christianity), imams (Islam), pundits (Hinduism), pujaris (Hinduism), and bikkhus (Buddhism) may also be consulted to resolve family conflicts including violence. Abraham says "[i]t is not uncommon for the clergy, when called upon in cases of domestic violence, to intervene in ways whereby the husband is lightly reprimanded but the woman is pressured to try to keep the marriage together at all costs. This is especially true in cases where children are involved" (120). Children are frequently wielded as a way to pressure or shame women into 'enduring violence'. This is a reason why SAWCC's *How to Help A Woman In Difficulty* pamphlet section on what not to do when helping a woman explicitly states not to tell a woman to stay for the children. Religious leaders, Abraham writes, constantly reinforce "the importance of woman as the glue that holds the family together" (120). In her interviews with women, abusive husbands tended to use religious community as a way to pressure and/or manipulate their wives: "All too often, rather than addressing the issue of abuse, pastoral support goes to the perpetrator on the basis of his religious affiliation" (121).

Even though it is considered a serious transgression, women will often, because of the aforementioned, have to seek help outside the family. Doing so puts her in a vulnerable position since as Roy states "[s]haring family problems with the community, advocacy organizations, women's shelters, or counseling services is viewed as a breach of sacrosanct family privacy and the woman who draws such outside attention to the family is marked as a traitor."(2012, 1111). Seeking help from the police, as Deeba states in Women's Stories #5, is often women's last resort to trying to stop the abuse. On top of the taboo against seeking outside help, the police may not be considered an option:

South Asians tend to carry strong distrust of the police and the legal system. To a great degree, this suspicion is the result of the colonial past when the police carried out brutalities against citizens at the request of the colonizers and the legal system was implemented at the will of the foreign rulers (Dasgupta, 2007b). Even after gaining independence, the police in most South Asian nations have remained vicious and venal, while the judicial systems have gained infamy as corrupt and serving the interests of the rich. In most South Asian countries, neither system inspires trust and faith among the people. (Roy 2012, 1113)

When speaking with Kushula and Mita, Kushula mentioned that importance of women in Montreal knowing that the police and emergency services here were different than in South Asia. She explained that getting immediate help from the police is not accessible there. She added, "even if you get help from police and police station, they are not good all the time." Kushula explained that the police "abuse, they sexually harass even policemen so that's why there is a law that women don't need to go to police station after 6pm in India." If asked to come to a station for inquiries, she explained, a woman can refuse if it is past 6pm. This law was created because of policemen sexually harassing women. Given what Kushula shared, it would be understandable for women not to consider police as a safe resource to turn to when violence occurs.

Women who do call the police will most likely face considerable pressure and guilting from family, as well as the husband. Calling the police, like in Anuja Baskaran in the introduction to this thesis, may end up being used as a justification for and/or escalation of the abuse. According to Roy:

Inviting law enforcement into the home is deemed especially shameful. South Asian women who have sought help from the police assert that they are blamed harshly by family members for bringing detrimental attention to their home and family. With any law enforcement intervention, family members become worried about spiteful social repercussions demonstrated in statements such as "What will the neighbors think of us now?" "What will the community members think when they hear that there were police at our home?" "How could you shame our family by bringing police to our home?" (2012, 1111)

As discussed earlier, if calling the police is women's last resort, then divorce is considered the 'unthinkable.' Abraham notes that the majority of her interview participants pointing out, "the importance of marriage for South Asians and the fact that women's social standing is intricately tied to it make women and their families view divorce as one of the last options available." (118). In a conversation with Mehry around lethal cases of abuse, she shared with me that the taboo on leaving is so strong that some women consider suicide more possible:

> Mehry: The woman also you know they told me, I mean in some cases that 'oh, it's better to die, instead of living like this'. And the other thing, you know, because of the children most woman they want to live. If we say, okay, if we have this kind of life, what you want, do you want to stay like this? They are like you know that we are happy to be divorced or separate but you know because of my children, because of my children, you know. They are crying and they are saying it's better, you know. They say OK, my husband he did this I wanted to kill myself but when I saw my kids. You know, this is always 'but but but', you know. And there are some cases that husband killed the wife.

Women are most at risk of being killed when they leave their abuser: "It is in this period - when a woman leaves a violent relationship - that she is most likely to be attacked by her husband and his family, because the very worst sin a woman can commit, in the eyes of the patriarchy, is to attempt to free herself or to question the sources of her oppression as a woman" (Wilson 2006, 35). Perhaps leaving also seems impossible since time and gain, stories of femicide, in the news and shared in kitchens, include that the woman had recently left and/or filed for divorce.On a bench park near Park Avenue during one of our interviews, Mita shared details of what happened to her sister. From Mita's understanding, the issues between her sister and her sister's husband boiled down to "not connecting to one another, not understanding each other's aspirations." Mita explained, "that's why it was better to get out of that relationship ... then it turns out to be worse":

> Mita: Because I live with my husband, if my husband doesn't understand me and if he's too self centred and too selfish about himself, it's impossible to breathe. In our

community, we are asked to live with the husband no matter what the situation demands. It's ok and we try to do our best effort to stay with them. It's very hard or very few times you see that women just get out of the relationship on minor issues. It has to be extremely major to get out of the relationship.For us, our case. We just can't think of 'oh you did that and I'm out of this relationship'. No. So the same thing happened with my sister which turned out to be very drastic because the guy was too selfish and self centred and it led to a dramatic ending of ... my sister dying.

Mita explained that her sister had not stayed with her husband for very long.

Mita: but in today's generation, girls are asked not to stay relationship if you not feel comfortable at all. You are have the right, because the girls are more getting educated. So we have the right to choose whether it's good decision or a bad decision we are not forced it's not our mother's generation that we will stay no matter what happens... how much it is taking my breath out. So my sister tried to protest, very soon.

Despite many families not supporting their daughters leaving their marriages, Mita's family supported her decision. The taboo on leaving, she explained to me, is starting to change from what it used to be. Unfortunately, in Mita's sister's case, leaving was not enough to protect her and her husband killed her and then himself. Mita shared that although she wished this had never happened, she was glad he had committed suicide: "It's better that he is dead. Who gots the guarantee if he's alive he will not do, he will not create a problem for another girl?"

Everything relayed so far has been to provide an understanding of the roots of intimate gendered violence, as identified by interviewees and the literature, as well as the context of and significant pressures on South Asian women stemming from gender ideologies and social norms and values. In *The Social Construction of Wife Abuse: Experiences of Asian Indian Women in the United States,* Mehorta seeks to counter the "myth of the passive victim" and underscore that despite the significant power imbalance involved, South Asian women do find ways to cope, survive emotionally and psychologically, and resist, "preserve a sense of self-worth and agency" (1999, 631). According to Pinnewalla:

Resilience to reduce or end violence is a difficult and arduous journey many South Asian women undertake in phases, with varying degrees of success. Each woman may take a different path to deal with and work toward ending violence. Some do so while still in the relationship; some seek shelter or other state services, with difficult and sometimes noneffective outcomes; some rally the resources of informal and formal support systems; and others leave, either permanently or to return many times over. Most women use problem-solving or emotional strategies to overcome the con- sequences of PV and to assert, protect, and maintain the self, children, and in some cases extended family. (2009, 82)

In *Speaking the Unspeakable*, Abraham devotes a chapter to strategies of resistance and underscores that "women's strategies of resistance cannot be reduced to specific incidents but must understood in the context of multiple strategies" (2000, 132). "Class," Abraham adds, "ethnicity, legal status, socioeconomic viability, and the accessibility of alternate support systems also play a major role in determining a woman's use of strategies of resistance and their efficacy" (133). Mehorta categorized the strategies of her interviewees as: "in the domestic sphere", "in the interpersonal sphere", in the personal sphere", and "going outside the relationship" (1999). Mehorta found that resistance strategies included direct and cover and indirect methods, which she argues are further indicators of the large the power imbalance but were no less significant (1999, 632). Strategies used before and in conjunction with "going outside the relationship" included refusal to cook, refusal to cook only for the husband, spitting in the husband's food, refusal to clean, destruction of husband's clothing, refusing to adhere to mobility restrictions, keeping important documents in inaccessible places for the husband, contacting family outside of the home despite restrictions imposed, refusal to have sex, refusing to speak or acknowledge the husband. As for Abraham, she categorizes the resistance strategies of the women she interviewed into three categories: personal strategies, using informal sources of help, and using formal sources of help (1999, 133-134). Abraham reports that "women's strategies of resistance included silence, avoidance, confrontation, hiding, talking back, hitting back, challenging the abuser's fiscal control, contemplating and resisting suicide, and seeking informal and institutional help" (133). Resistance, given the vulnerable position of South Asian women, comes at great risk with the possibility of dire consequences. Of note is that husbands will sometimes use women's strategies of resistance to justify abuse and/or use institutions against them like the

police, courts, psychiatry and for immigrant and refugee women, immigration departments. In *South Asian battered women's use of force against intimate male partners: a practice note,* Debjani Roy speaks to a rise in women's use of nonfatal force against their husbands as observed by workers at Manavi, a New-Jersey based SAWO (2012). This use of force often "goaded by the husband", is then used to label women as the "primary aggressor" (1116). Advocates and practitioners, she argues, need to understand the barriers that South Asian women face and need to stay on the lookout for ways in which husbands use their positions to further enact violence and control by using the system against them including their survival strategies. Of note, despite the pressures, costs, and risks associated, Abraham's interview participants had nearly all taken the step to "take control and getting out", which as mentioned above is often one of the last strategies used to end violence (2000, 133). Not only have women left violent situations, but survivors of abuse and South Asian women who have witnessed intimate gendered violence in their homes and communities have created informal and formal networks of support, gotten involved with and founded women's movements and centres and, in the diaspora, created SAWOs. These SAWOs, like SAWCC in Montreal, have been pillars of women's rights and anti-violence work since the 80s (Abraham 2000, Dasgupta 2007, Chew 2011, Kang 2006). South Asian women have consistently led and been involved in activism and advocacy for themselves, women internationally, and others facing oppression and violence.

Pulling Up the Roots

When Pramiti named patriarchal values as the root causes of intimate gendered violence, she also spoke on how they should be "knocked down" and that this should start in the homes. Pramiti explained that what would be needed for many women and their communities is a "conscientization process": "How to make them conscientized. I mean aware. Hmm. About the values, about the perpetuation process. How actually socialisation is being perpetuated by the man, by the women also."

Popular or community education programming is key to "pull up" or "cut" the roots of women's subordination and intimate gendered violence,. Anita Raj and Jay Silverman state in their seminal Violence Against Immigrant Women: *The Roles of Culture, Context, and Legal Immigrant Status on Intimate Partner Violence*, cited countless times throughout the literature:

> Such educational outreach efforts should include objectives of increasing community awareness of IPV (e.g., forms of abuse, prevalence in the community, and consequences for victims), legal protections for victims, legal consequences for perpetrators, and support available for victims and their children. Community-based organizations and community leaders in particular should be encouraged to participate in such training as they are commonly approached by those in need (2002, 392).

Similarly, one of Go et al.'s main suggestions for violence prevention and the changing of social norms in *Crossing the Threshold: Engendered Definitions of Socially Acceptable Domestic Violence in Chennai, India* is that: "[c]ommunity-wide messages that emphasize the destructive attributes of violence against women may be an important first step of effective interventions to reduce women's vulnerability to violence and its health consequences" (2003, 405).

Programming to raise awareness not only helps with violence prevention and intervention but also has a significant role in the healing process of women who have left. Wilson writes, "[i]n rebuilding their lives, one of the hardest things for many South Asian women is to free themselves of the guilt and shame caused by haram [having transgressed against what is considered sacred]. This is one of the reasons why many South Asian women's refuges regard discussions and 'educational' work as crucially important" (2006, 35). Furthermore, according to my conversation with Mita about how the taboo around divorce was slowly changing, such programming and involvement with the organizations running them are also key in breaking taboos that contribute to sustaining power imbalances:

> Pamela: Do you think that it's because people are starting to insert the idea that it's important for a woman to be well?
>
> Mita: Yes! Her health is important. Her life is important basically.

Pamela: How do you think that change is happening?

Mita: Education. Then these networks, organization, people becoming, people are realizing they are communicating with others and getting involved in these things as a volunteer. Also will help you to broaden your, you know, your knowledge, your range. And you will start thinking oh these happen, oh these can be done, oh these are the ways to which I can go around this thing or solve this problem.

During my fieldwork, a large focus was on learning about the multiple services and programs that SAWCC runs of which many have core educational and conscientization goals achieved in a myriad of ways. The main goal across these services and programs is to empower women in all facets of their lives. In my first interview with Harusha and Mehry, coincidentally my first interview, I asked them about SAWCC's role in addressing violence:

Harusha: What is violence actually? Let's say myself, I see a lady in front of me if her needs desires and her well being is not well respected at home and she is depressed and there is some incident happen. Then I feel like no, she is having violence. Gendered violence. So, it depends. There is categories in it. First I can say, she is physically abused, if she is controlled by her husband, if she is not allowed to go out, financial control, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse, all those elements combined in family violence. So what is Centre's role and ethics? We empower ladies, we give them information and information of other resources we teach them how to establish their rights how to get her respect. f it doesn't happen at her home, then we give them the options and resources where she can go how to grow her self esteem how she can go for self defense course, where she can get training for leadership, how she can develop her career. Those are our resources options we give them and beside that it depends on their personal situation if she feels insecure go back to home then we take proper action in that area. So this is the way we define the violence and this is the way we help them."

Deeba, Mehry, Mita, and Kushula all underscored the fundamental and critical importance of making sure that women know their rights. When I asked Deeba how she knew an intervention was successful, she answered: "To measure success is difficult but in my opinion when I see, if a woman get to know and have the information, and she knows what she can do and what her

rights are, that's the best thing." Merali's research findings in *Experiences of South Asian Brides Entering Canada After Recent Changes to Family Sponsorship Policies* support Deeba's assessment of the crucial element of knowing one's rights for women's empowerment (2009, 335-336). Thus, as a general practice, any woman who approaches SAWCC staff about an issue and/or violent situation is given information about her rights and resources available to her. Regular drop-in information sessions are regularly held at SAWCC on a wide range of topics. As well, pamphlets and booklets are also created and distributed in key places where South Asian women and families frequent that contain this information. SAWCC's *How to Help A Women In Difficulty* pamphlet was created a part of a project called 'Creating Safer Spaces with south Asian Women A Popular Education Violence Program using the Applied Arts'. Pamphlets and informational material are produced not only regarding intimate gendered violence but on migrant justice, refugee claims, labour rights, and even health and safety. Furthermore, this information is circulated through publications, like Shakti in previous years, and now the monthly newsletter in various formats such as essays on and/or news pieces on new policies and regulations.

In terms of educational programming specifically on intimate gendered violence and gender equality, Nabila shared with me that "[t]hese are always difficult. They're both difficult subjects." Over the years, SAWCC has tried various types of programs and campaigns and accumulated several decades of experience on running such projects. Deeba recounted:

> Deeba: You know, in the past, the Center tried to bring sensitization and education within the community about family violence. They started having some workshop, some conversation and to involve the mens. The men should be involved. But, what they found that it's not getting the way it's supposed to be. Because when men are there, they all take the floor. They don't let the women talk. They will bring up so many things that sometimes it's difficult to handle or tackle in a group setting where you have to keep that respect everyone, you understand me?

SAWCC then tried running violence awareness workshops with only women:

Deeba: Even if she going through that, let's say in a group of a ten women, I am also sitting there, if I have something like that I don't want to talk about it, I don't want others to know about it because for me that is private life, why should I share my private life? right? So we felt that this is not a good way of getting them involved so we started a project and it was through the form of theatre. And that theatre was in the beginning, it was I think in 2002, 2003. So we all start all sort of training in that. We started creating small small skits with different themes we selected. When we started doing that we used to have animator. She was a very good animator. Oh my god, she was too good. So we create that theatres with this staff.

First we got the training in different skills. Different matters of doing theatre without saying anything. When we did that, in a group of women and within that group we know which women is going through violent situation. We don't want to say anything so when this was presented and the way women started expressing. That was amazing. That was amazing. During the play they were saying 'do you see any violence? you have to say stop.'And the women who were shy to talk about their own problems were intervening in that play. That was really interesting and this was a very good way of educating these community.

So at that time, this play was taken many places. We showed it many places - senior homes. In the temples even because they have some special community programs the temples. The way it was taken by and how the people got involved in it. Even there is a point when the animator asks 'let's say you are finding problem here in the scene. Is there a possibility somebody from you can come and say that this should be changed this way and then act on it?' So they were doing it. That was really interesting and that is a way of popular education. Yeah, that way was really good. We wanted to revive that program but it's just that need a person who can run it, who can animate it. I can play, I can do but animation is not my forté.

Pamela: Yeah, it takes a kind of skill.

Deeba: Exactly, because the animator needs to keep the audience engaged and then they can get peace when people don't agree but how to keep that balance.

Popular (nonprofessional actors) non-verbal theatre, according to SAWCC's report "Migrant Feminisms in the New Millennium: 30 years of Sisterhood, Strength, Struggle and Success" is "a very useful tool for expression of feelings, and also for communication between clients and staff, particularly if there are language barriers or if clients are faced with particularly sensitive issues they are not comfortable expression verbally" (2011, 4). Such educational programs help women identify the many forms that violence can take. In our conversations, Deeba identified being able to name violence for what it is as one of the key factors to promote well-being along with a woman's desire to address this violence for themselves:

> Deeba: In terms of people I help, for women specifically the factors that they are empowered enough to make their own decisions. You know violence, can be present in many forms, and they are able to identify it. They should not be justifying that but they should be identifying it and doing proactively something about it. Because if a woman doesn't want to come and do something, nobody can help her. This is something I feel that for their well being is very necessary they should know that there are different forms of violence because in our country and women coming from our countries you see they give lots of leverage and benefits of doubt to men.

Denial, she names, is a strong factor, even when women are telling her their experiences. This denial, she explains, is due in part to them "not seeing that as a violence." Nabila and Vihbuti shared similar experiences from giving workshops on intimate gendered violence to women in Park Extension and in Cote Des Neiges.

It is important to note that the demographic for these workshops, part of SAWCC's Autonomous and Independent Program, tends to be quite different than that of SAWCC staff and my interview participants in terms of class and educational background. Whereas most of my interview participants and much of the SAWCC staff came from higher class backgrounds having obtained university degrees, a significant portion of South Asian women do not have access to higher education or in many cases education period. Nabila noted this to me as we walked towards the workshops one day, explaining how Pakistan has a very low literacy rate, due to devastation of colonialism and poverty and that women were disproportionately affected. For example, one of the more elderly participants whom I got to know over several months

shared with me one afternoon how proud she was to be understanding, speaking and even more so, writing a new language given that she had never learned to write in her mother tongue.

The aim of the Autonomous and Independent Program, launched in 2006, is to help break barriers for South Asian women in terms of their participation in Montreal life and to promote their well-being. The project meets women in their homes to assess their needs and which relevant services might be most helpful for each individual. The project is held in satellite spaces, to meet women in their neighbourhoods weekly so women "have a safe, secure space near their homes where they could come together to talk, share and learn" (SAWCC 2011). Programming is holistic in terms of providing opportunities to help women work towards their "cognitive, economic, social, and personal betterment" (SAWCC 2006). This includes language classes (French and English) and discussion groups. Combined with language practicing opportunities, the project provides activities to develop skills, like learning about public transit systems and job searching, and group outings both for skill development and to grow group bonding. Another component are workshops on pertinent topics, like discussions on violence against women. In our joint interview, Nabila and Vihbuti shared their observations:

> Nabila: In some house, I don't see that they accept that it is a violence in their homes. They really believe that it's not violence.
>
> Pamela: They are not recognizing it.
>
> Nabila: According to their traditional standards it is not violence when a husband says 'okay, you can't spend 20 dollars on facial or 30 dollars on facial'. That's not violence. He is just telling you fact. 'I don't have the money, money is mine, you can't do it.'
>
> Vihbuti: I just want to add something also, we asked also when we talk about violence what do you mean by violence? They just explain it that when somebody hits someone, that's the violence.
>
> Nabila: Yeah, or maybe scream, or maybe scream.

Vihbuti: Scream will not matter. Not many people, some people agreed but only the hitting.

Nabila: In one workshop we started with violence. What do you understand by violence? What is violence? We put a lot of things on the board.

Pamela: You did the cycle of violence, right?

Vihbuti: That was much later, only the definitions.

Nabila: That was later. This is the first or second workshop where we were introducing. We said, 'what do you think is violence?' So, all of them, we put a lot, a big list. Whoever raises the hand and tells what violence is, we will cross it off. So from the list hitting, beating -

Vihbuti: - physical violence -

Nabila: - physical pushing, dragging, pulling hair. All this went into violence category. Screaming and yelling, after two three times of prompting, they agreed. But after that there was nothing that they thought was violence like controlling, like not talking. They didn't think controlling money or controlling that you are going out or not. Even if you have to take permission, so that's a norm. They take permission for anybody who is older than you at home before leaving, coming from SA cultures, if my mother-in-law is at home and husband isn't I have to take permission traditionally. And ask, 'I am going out, I will be gone for two hours, is it ok with you?' So with husband of course there was a big group that said, 'that's not violence that I have to take permission'. But does the husband take permission to go? And they were laughing. 'No, sometimes we don't even know that he is gone'.

Then we talked about difference between permission and informing. I said, I always inform my husband where I'm going and estimate time of my coming back just in case he needs me or there's an emergency, hard to reach me, so that he knows and he doesn't worry about me but I don't ask can I please go, and he doesn't have the authority to say 'no you cannot go'. So for them, going for grocery shopping is informing. They are at that level. Picking up kids is informing. They inform the husband but if they have to make a plan to go out with a friend for shopping many of them, not all of them, let's not

put them in one category, that could be permission. That they need permission. And if the husband says no, they don't see that as control.

Nabila explained that in those first violence workshops, women didn't speak very much. Her impression was that women accepted norms like a husband's right to control where they went and who they associated with because this was how things had been for a very long time: "Their grandmothers did it this way, their mothers did it this way, so it doesn't become like or dislike. It becomes a fact." Even to come to the workshops, Nabila and Vihbuti were recounting, women had to ask for permission. Nabila and Vihbuti also found that when women were not denying the violence, they were justifying it, much like discussed earlier as 'natural' male aggression:

> Nabila: For us, what we realized was women were giving a lot of leeway to the men. 'Men get angry, so that in their anger they become violent, it's okay.' But then I asked them a question. Okay, your husband loses temper and it's ok he loses temper. I agree okay because it's his nature, it's his habit, he is a man, fine. But, the same man who gets angry at home and throws a table or bangs the wall or even, I didn't say hit the woman, but okay he is being violent and being aggressive banging at the walls and breaking stuff. If he gets angry at his boss and his job, does he do the same thing?'
>
> Pamela: Hmm, that's a good point.
>
> Vihbuti: Yeah, it is.
>
> Nabila: 'No, never.' Because he would be quitting every two months because he cannot control his anger. the boss -
>
> Vihbuti: - fire, fire -
>
> Nabila: - fire him.
>
> Pamela: Yeah!
>
> Nabila: So does he get fired often? 'No, never.' Does the boss complain that he is violent? 'No, never.' So how come he is able to control that same anger at the workplace and

cannot control it with you? What's the problem? He doesn't love his boss. He loves you, right? He is your husband. So why cannot? So these questions really, I could see their facial expressions changing. They couldn't answer.

Vihbuti: They couldn't answer, I remember that when you asked them, they couldn't answer.

In *Patriarchal Beliefs and Perceptions of Abuse Among South Asian Immigrant Women*, Ahmad et al. concluded that "women who agreed with patriarchal social norms were less likely to see spousal abuse as abuse" (2004, 275). Of note is that the research uses the term agree and accept interchangeably. However, as Nabila pointed out, women may "accept" patriarchal values as something akin to "fact" which is not the same as agreeing with them. Nonetheless, Ahmad et al. also found that "[w]omen with strong patriarchal beliefs may not even perceive a situation as wife abuse when they witness it" and that "[i]f the abuse occurs to another woman, they may negate the other woman's experience by telling her that it was something other than abuse" (275). In their review of the literature, Ahmad et al. also discussed predictors for strength of patriarchal beliefs. These were: age (older= stronger), education (higher = weaker), and employment (weaker). Their research findings, Ahmad et al. argue are key to understanding help-seeking (or non-help-seeking) behaviour and echo Deeba's insistence on the importance of being able to identify abuse, without justifications for it.

Given women's responses to the identifying violence exercise in their workshops, according to Nabila, SAWCC staff had to take a step back and reorient their intervention: "We realized that there's a BIG difference in women's heads about their own status within the family. They don't consider themselves equal to their husbands. And so, that made us realize that we need workshops where we talk about gender equality." Recognizing, as Pramiti noted, that the childhood indoctrination into patriarchal values was so strong that any discussion of violence needed to disrupt the "taken as fact"-ness, as Nabila explained, of patriarchal values and norms. Charu also noted the need for this when I asked her what changes were necessary to eliminate intimate gendered violence in South Asian communities:

Charu: Educating. Educate a woman. I mean like, women should get, go to university and get an education and stuff, and get a job. But also educating them in terms of the idea that they are also human and they also deserve respect and be as well treated as men are. I personally have not been like experienced [intimate gendered violence] but I'm assuming maybe some women think that 'I'm a woman and I guess it's something that's going to happen to me because it was going to happen anyway.' So just letting them know, that you know, it's wrong and that you shouldn't have to go through that and educating the men also. I'm not sure how we can do that but like, you know, just giving them a sense of awareness and like coping strategies and that stuff.

One of the first events I attended and volunteered for at SAWCC was an exhibit, held in the Park Extension neighbourhood at a local community center, to celebrate the success of SAWCC's recent gender equality workshop series. From Montreal's downtown core, I took the green metro line to Berri station, then the orange line to Jean Talon, and the blue line to Park. I would soon be making this same fifty-minute public transit trip weekly for many months. When I arrived, my main role was to help SAWCC staff set up the event: help to tape the posters and artwork to the main lobby walls and carefully put on display the quilt which usually hangs in SAWCC's main room (see Appendix B). Although it seemed for a moment that the event would be a quiet one, the room quickly filled with people. Around fifty women gathered in clusters taking turns looking at the different posters and pieces of art, chatting, while locally prepared *desi* food, or food "from the country," was served. Community workers from local organizations in partnership and/or connected to SAWCC dropped by in support. According to one of the staff, an event goal was achieved when two local politicians attended to recognize the program and discuss more resources for SAWCC and the Autonomous and Independent Program. With the event taking place in the lobby, neighbourhood children of diverse backgrounds coming for the library, gymnasium, and/or other activities would periodically join and stop to read a poster or two from the exhibit.

The gender equality workshop series, part of SAWCC's Autonomous and Independent Program, included twelve workshops with 144 participants over a one-year period between 2012-2013. The sessions covered a wide and comprehensive range of topics related to gender equality which were reflected in the posters and art on display. These ranged from basic

definitions and information on human rights to gender roles and stereotypes, learning how to identify violence in many forms, discussion of recent femicides, theatre exercises to discussions of South Asian women leaders, protecting children from violence and raising independent daughters. From what Nabila and Vihbuti reported along with analyzing the texts and artwork produced, SAWCC's workshops clearly aligned with and achieved one of Go et al.'s other main suggestions for lowering the threshold of acceptable violence which was to empower "women to spear-head interventions that reconsider traditional gender-based roles at the level of the relationship" (Go et al. 2003, 405). The workshop series itself was a "spear-headed intervention" that also empowered participants to do so in their own lives and for their children.

On the topic of the success of the workshop, Nabila explained, "in the beginning, it wasn't. But slowly, what we realized is any process has to be slow. And when I say slow, it means *very* slow." The workshops were framed not as gender equality workshops but centered on "talking about relationships between women and women and women and men and what we think we are in our family, what our roles are in the society, and we will see how important women are in general." When developing the modules, Nabila found that resources that met women where their participants were at were overall lacking. Most existing modules started from a place where there was already a general acceptance (if sometimes only theoretical) that men and women were equal. Their workshops, Nabila explained, needed to begin by establishing that women's contributions are significant and that they have worth:

> Nabila: Our first two or three workshops or sessions were only this. What do I do at home? And when I ask this question, they said "I do nothing." So what does that mean, you do nothing?' "Yeah I do nothing." Because in their minds. if I don't earn money, I do nothing. My value is nothing, basically. So what we did, we played a game. we had all the chores and we had some other things that traditional men do. Then we gave them those papers, those small like puzzle kind of papers and we said "ok, make three piles." 'I Do', 'My Husband Does', 'We Do'. 'I Do' pile was *so* big. And 'My Husband Does' - signing the check, brings money, and maybe lift heavy things. Three things. And 'We Do As A Family' - shopping, or I don't know going out on a picnic or something like that. But 'I Do', women's pile, was *really* huge. Then I said, "Who is doing all these?" "We do." "And

do you realize how much you do?" I'm still having goosebumps because that was an eye opener. I could see that they were moved, completely moved.

In a conversation with Deeba, who explained how difficult it could be to get South Asian women in workshops to name not only their desires but even more so their discontents, she suggested that there was often better success when asking women these questions indirectly, through their role as a mother: "If you ask them, would you like your daughters to have the same life like you have had? Then there is a big question, there is a big hesitant on their side to say yes." The same was true for this workshop series, Nabila recounted struggling to get women to speak about issues or even admit to them and trying to "pull it out" of them with little success. That is until moment she asked, "Okay would you want the same exact life for your daughter also?" Nabila recounted, "All said no." The exhibit materials were rich with women voicing their desires and discontents through what they would want to see for their daughters. One of these was the poster titled "My wishes for my daughter's future":

To be able to speak without being scared.

To be able to say NO to violence.

To be able to express her real thoughts.

To be able to go everywhere freely.

To not have to carry all the burden on her shoulders.

To be able to choose her partner.

To be strong enough to confront the world.

To be able to become a leader in my community.

To be able to financially support her family.

To be able to decide her future.

To be independent and free to take all her decisions.

To be supported in all her life, to be a strong woman and a feminist.

To not have to worry about what others say or think.

To be able to obtain an education according to her wishes.

To be able to be strong, even if the whole world is against her.

To be able to share all her responsibilities with her partner.

To be able to become what she wants to become, a doctor, a lawyer, an accountant, etc.
.
To be able to win arguments with her strong logic.

What they would like to see change for their daughters was also part of the responses on the posters titled 'What Does Gender Equality Mean' featuring colourful handwritten cards in Urdu, Tamil, Bangla, and Hindi and then twice translated in English and French (see Appendix C):

> *I want my daughter to be a free bird.*

> *I wish that my daughter won't have to face the uncertainty of not knowing… I want her to have a chance to understand and to plan her life and to reach her goals.*

When SAWCC community workers asked in the workshop what women would do to improve their daughters' lives, women responded:

> Nabila: 'I would want my daughter to have her own money.' Why? Why? Why is it important that she has her own money? 'So that her husband cannot control her so much.' So they didn't want to tell me directly that or they didn't want to share it within the group

that there is a problem at house. That there are control issues about money and finances. 'Because I don't earn the money, I don't make the decisions.' But they don't want it for their daughters.

Indeed, decision making was a major theme expressed for the 'What Does Gender Equality Mean' activity in relation to the marriage and the family along with respect and equal treatment:

When my husband respects my point of view in decision making.

There is no difference between my brother and me, we have equal rights in decision making.

My husband and I, we take all decisions together and that's equality.

Is mutual understanding and adjusting between men and women.

When the husband and wife have mutual respect.

Not only between the husband and the wife, equality between the sexes is to accord equal treatment to children.

My husband and I sharing household chore. We discuss our opinions before taking decisions.

On the meaning of gender equality, another major theme in the posters was in terms of care labour and household tasks. Nabila also explained this in our interview:

[Women] realize that money makes the difference. Whoever earns the money has the power. When I asked them what do you see different in your family life and the family life of your neighbour who is a non SA? So for them that's the difference, woman earns, man earns, therefore when they come back home they are both tired, equally. So sometimes man cooks, sometimes woman cooks. So for, for them in the basic terms this is equality. When they share tasks.

The workshops then proceeded into looking at women leaders across South Asia such as prime ministers, ministers, and activists such as Benazir Bhutto(Pakistan), Pratibha Devisingh Patil (India), Jeyalalithaa Jayaram (India), Khaleda Zia (Bangladesh) and Malala Yousafzai (Pakistan). The conversation underscored how Sri Lanka elected the fist woman prime minister, Srimavo Bandaranayake (1960), and India the second with Indira Ghandi (1966). Nabila mentioned to me that they asked the question: "In a society where men just push the women down all the time and women accept it, how come these leaders came out?" Women dismissed the leaders as being special or "prophet-like" exceptions but workshop facilitators insisted: "No, if they could do it, any woman could do it. And these women somehow learned to make these men see that women are equal and even better than men in certain ways." Nabila explained that they went back and forth in both directions of focusing on the level of women's roles as wives and mothers and back to some of the work of the leaders. Throughout this, workshop facilitators wove in conversations around current world events and women's rights in Canada. The difficulty lay in people knowing rights versus embodied affect of believing in those rights:

> Nabila: When I asked them women have rights in Canada? Everybody admits, everybody agrees. But that's theoretical rights. They haven't, they say being equals but then they don't feel it in their hearts.

That being said, responses for this activity also included participants voicing their understanding of gender equality in terms of the basics in terms of rights and access:

> *Education facilitate life and the concept of equality for women.*

> *Here in Canada, professions offer equal chances for men and women.*

> *When women obtain the right to their due and to take their own decisions.*

> *Recognize the contribution of women in society and in their family and give them their due.*

That we don't have to speak about this subject and women and men are free in their thoughts and in their actions.

At the end of the workshop series, Nabila observed that one of the biggest takeaways for participants was that "some realize[d] that doing some special things with their daughters empowering their daughters was important. An eye opener for them was improving their lives for their daughters." This kernel of gender equality, she relayed, is a spark for continued awareness building as well as taking action in their lives.

> Nabila: Eleven sessions cannot erase what you've learned over generations, Thousand of years of the same mould of women coming out. It cannot erase your mentality, but, what I felt was towards the end when I talked to them, I said look, if you want to change the lives of your daughters you need to work now.
>
> So I asked them what what are you doing different so that your daughter has a better life Are you teaching her to more empowered? Are you doing anything different? 'No'. So who does the chores at home and and which order? Most of them said their sons don't do anything, the husbands don't do anything but the daughters help or they make sure that the daughter's learn how to cook, how to clean, how to do many tasks. So you are creating your daughter exactly in your mould. So the mould you are creating is going to give you the exact same thing. So, 'yes, you are right, what do we do, what do we do?'
>
> You need to change your boys as well as girls. You have to teach your boys that they have to respect women first of all. They don't have to think that women are something beneath them. And that you can only show if you put equal weight or pressure at home on your children. You need help, of course involve your children. Ask them to do chores, but don't make a division at home. Which I felt they were doing when I asked. 'My daughter washes the clothes, does the laundry, dishes, helps cooking, cleaning.' What does the son do? 'Not much. When he learns to drive, he does the driving.' But that's fun! driving is fun.

Charu similarly noted how important breaking the socialization cycle was and that it starts with how sons and daughters are treated in the home:

Charu: Yeah, I don't feel that guys and girls should be so different. In the South Asian community will learn that you know girls should be quieter. I don't believe in that. I feel that boys and girls should have equal expectations, just like, or else just like, sexism. Like it's not fair that girls are not allowed to go out or even go out as much or go out as late as guys. Or like, you know, have as many freedoms as guys do. I know when I'm going to be raising my kids, I won't have such a gap in the way I treat my kids depending on their gender.

Along with changing how one treated their children, being a role model to one's kids was also discussed. Ultimately however, changes also required fathers to model new behaviours as well since fathers and other men in the family not sharing in household tasks sent a strong message to their sons:

Nabila: When I talked about changing they said 'that's why our boys don't work'. I understanding completely because when i ask my son to go wash his cup, he said 'why is dad sitting on a sofa and just watching tv and not washing his own cup, make him do it then I'll do it.' So, his role model is his dad.

What then, is the role of men in pulling the roots of intimate gendered violence? Go et al.'s recommendation was actually to empower "men and women to spear-head interventions that reconsider traditional gender-based roles at the level of the relationship" (2003, 405). Go et al. suggest working with men and women through "[r]oleplays involving couples could elucidate workable modes of community specific conflict resolution appropriate for men and women" (405) . For Juhi, educating men was the second most important change needed to address and eliminate intimate gendered violence but it was a very challenging task:

More awareness for men, I really don't know how you can do that because men are very ... What do you call? They have some ego. If you ask them to go for anger management or therapy, maybe he is a depressed person, but they don't want to accept it. If you ask him to go for a therapy he say, 'Do you think I am crazy? I am not crazy'. If you ask him to go for a anger management, they don't want to go. They don't even want

to accept that they abused the woman. They think, 'Oh no I didn't do anything ok.' You know. Those things, I really don't know how to educate the mean, they get angry so they don't acknowledge their weakness or mistakes, so, how do you educate them.

This echoes, Deeba's earlier statement about how men had talked over women and taken up too much space during group interventions in the past. Deeba shared an incident in which she went to visit a Pakistani friend who lived in her building. When her friend's husband came home, he quickly acknowledged Deeba but headed straight for the pots and pans to see what his wife had cooked:

> Deeba: Then he realized that she has not cooked as yet whatever is there is from the previous day. Then he came to the sitting room and said 'Look!' In our greetings when you have a friend either they call us her sister or Babi. Babi mean brother's wife. So he usually used to call me Babi, because he call my husband is like my brother. So he said 'Babi, look! She has not done anything and she was at home.' Then I was little upset, I said 'listen to me you came inside you never ask her how are you, how was your day, maybe she was not feeling well, why didn't you ask her. Right away you say what has been cooked, nothing.' So this is how the mentality is. if she has not done this one washing of clothes it means she all day she was having fun. She was not doing anything. So you cannot change the mentality of the community like this. It's, it's a slow process and you have to make them realize that this is not right.

Women daring to "break the mould" in raising one's children and making interventions at the interpersonal level, speaks to what Kallivayalil reminds us that "individuals shape and reproduce culture; it is not simply transmitted from one generation to the next" (Geertz in 2010, 791). In *Reinventing Honorable Masculinity: Discourses from a Working-Class Indian Community*, George, argues that as women become more autonomous, "traditional male authority" is eroding (49). As new forms of femininity are emerging (autonomous wives), so too are masculinities (men who 'allow' their wives to be autonomous). In comparison to notions of men's honour residing primarily in women's bodies and actions, George observed in her participant's discourses that "women hold men's actions responsible for male honor and that men's honor is also shaped by women' discourses on men's actions" (49). George found that "[b]y reversing this

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pattern and constructing honor also through women's ideas of men's actions, urban working-class women are recasting and stretching the contours of honorable masculinities and femininities and gender relations" (49). This article underscores that as more and more women dare to become more autonomous, despite the social and material costs, change in attitudes must and will happen. The ability to become autonomous through sufficient resources then, is a key element in social change.

Creating new moulds for gender norms is also a key role for men, who can choose to use their positions of power to clear roadblocks new paths for women. Men can refuse to partake in reproducing violence against women including any behaviours that reinforce women's subordination. Indeed, an early observation I made was that in the majority of my interviews, with primarily frontline workers and women involved in women's empowerment, a commonality emerged about key men in their lives. All the women had men in their lives who all allowed and/ or encouraged deviation from gender norms and roles. When I asked Juhi if she had any role models growing up, she replied:

> Juhi: No. No. In the place I was born and brought up in the north part of Sri Lanka where women are really restricted. Restricted in the sense, they are not abused, but there are so much of like young girls don't visit relatives. Once you come to age, they aren't allowed to visit neighbours or like family events, weddings, funerals, you don't go. Only the parents and the younger ones go, you know. The parents do shopping for you, clothes and everything. Actually it's part of it came from my father also, he was very lenient. He doesn't make it a big issue if we talk to boys or if we, he would let us go to the town do our own clothing shopping. But he gets trouble from his mother, his brother's wives. 'Why are you letting them go like this?' And my father put us in good schools, private schools. For that also he gets scolded like you know, 'why are you spending money on girls they are going to get married and go?' And my father always says 'I am giving them education which is the asset that I am giving'. He never saved anything for us not a single penny for us.

Vihbuti also named her father as her role model when asked. Vihbuti had previously shared that growing up with her two brothers, "I never felt that I am girl, they are boy. We had, I always felt that we had equal rights, equal things." She added that she was given a lot of independence and

that her education was prioritized in large part due to her mother's insistence as to break their she had sworn her daughter would have the same opportunities as boys. Mita spoke to me of her father as a 'progressive' and/or 'modern' man. She mentioned that despite his concerns over her and her mother being involved in women's organizations, he never stopped either of them from being involved. In Nabila's case, she shared that her parents raised her with the same opportunities as her brothers and even gave her power over them:

> Nabila: I was the eldest of four siblings I had, we were two sisters and two brothers. My brothers were born much later, my older brother is eleven twelve years younger than me. But coming from a patriarchal society, I think I was given a lot of power as you say in my house because I was the oldest. My parents kind of gave me that control to control my younger brothers. I was allowed to scold them, to to, because I kind of was in the mother role in the sense when I taught them or helped them in homework, I was allowed to do it. Seeing around me it wasn't the case, in many cases, in families boys were preferred over girls. Growing up, I didn't see that, so I can't speak from personal experience that there was a difference, educationally all boys and girls, all of us were given the same opportunities. Growing up we were given the same liberties.

As for Pramiti, as mentioned earlier, her bother had intervened with their father to ensure she could continue her education. She also shared that her natal family had been overall less patriarchal than her in-laws. "Fortunately," she shared, "my husband is a feminist." She noted how supportive her husband was of her and her being independent.

Women's Stories #7: From the Start to the Breaking Point

When Lakmini first spoke with Juhi she was twenty-six years old. Lakmini's husband had started abusing her from the second day of her arrival. Her husband had already been in Quebec for some time. He went back home for their arranged marriage and then sponsored her. The husband had clear anger issues and was having an affair. When she came to know about the affair and would question him about it, he beat her. Then one day, he wanted her to go to the other woman's house and when she refused, he hit her and beat her until she relented. At the time, she didn't speak English and told herself "he might kill me if I don't go." At the other woman's house, Lakmini refused to engage and speak with her. On the way home, her husband began to hit her in the car and dropped her on the highway. She was new to the country and it was cold. Even though she was very upset, it took her almost six months to make the decision: "I am not taking it anymore, I am leaving." She didn't have anyone here. Back home, she had her parents and a brother but didn't tell them anything because she didn't want to worry her mother who has heart issues. She has a cousin in Switzerland, a kind of brother figure, who called regularly and knew what was going on. She was not really allowed to speak to many people and only allowed to call her parents and this cousin. However, their conversations could not be private as she would have to keep the speaker on. After hearing about SAWCC from a friend, she spoke with Juhi a couple of times when the husband was not home. She was worried and extremely nervous. She told Juhi that she was nervous she might get sent back but doesn't want to go because then her mother will come to know and "will have heart problems." Also, Lakmini's sister was going to get married soon and Lakmini worried that if she left her husband this might affect her sister's reputation. Even worse, the husband had threatened her that if she left, he would stop the marriage back in their home country. When she brought up his affair and asked why he didn't leave her, he threatened to have her whole family killed. One day, when she asked her husband if she could go with him out of the house, he kicked her into a room, locked the door and took the keys. She called Juhi who advised her to call the police. The woman worried that since she didn't speak English, the husband would be called and that he would turn the story around with the help of her mother-in-law. The in-laws were very aware of the violence but ignored it. They didn't actively support the son in his abuse but were not proactively stopping it. The mother in law used to tell Lakmini: "ok, next time when he hits you, call the police." But, then, the mother-in-law would still side with her son in the end. Lakmini came to the breaking point where it no longer mattered what might happen. Even if the marriage ends, or her mother is ill, she was leaving. Lakmini made the decision with the support of Juhi, the assurance given to her by SAWCC about not being sent back to her home country, the support of her cousin and his financial help, as well as being given a safe place in a shelter.

Women's Stories #8: 'Abused for doing good in her life'

Juhi shared the case of a woman who had been abused verbally and physically by her husband "just because she'd doing good in her life." Nanthini, Juhi explained was very courageous and had taken a lot of steps by taking her french courses (completing high levels), volunteering at a day case, and working as a cashier. The husband, on the other hand, Juhi explained, does not go to work and is on welfare. Because of this, the whole family -which includes the husband, Nanthini, and an only son around four years old - is on welfare. The husband's self esteem is low, Juhi explained, and "so he drinks, drinks, drinks from morning to night." One day, Nanthini came to the center without an appointment and stated that she needed to talk to someone: "as soon as she came in front of me she started crying." Distraught, Nanthini did not seem to care if others overheard her and told Juhi, "I can't take it anymore, he is spitting on my face." Nanthini also shared that he would not allow her to see her sister. Juhi offered to talk to the husband and called him. Juhi had been worried that he would "scold" or yell at her but he spoke to her calmly. He told Juhi "I educated her, I sent her for French classes and now that she is done, she thinks that she can stand on her own. She wants to take the child and leave me." Nathani told Juhi that her husband kept failing to pay the rent which would cause them to have to move a couple of times. Juhi advised Nanthini that due to their child, it would be best for her to be with her husband. Juhi offered couples therapy and counselling to Nanthini who said she would come but that Juhi would have to ask the husband. The husband told Juhi that he didn't need therapy, that he "don't want to life a life when someone else have to tell him what to do, how to live." The husband seemed to feel like he had done nothing wrong. The husband felt that his wife needed therapy because Nanthini is the on who needed to change. Juhi mentioned the drinking to him but he minimized it as a problem. Juhi told both of them that "whatever they are doing in front of the child is not good for them." Juhi mentioned calling youth protection if there was no change. Nanthini asked Juhi if she could call and ask to speak to her son for her as it had been over forty-eight hours since she had seen him. Juhi called back and the husband put the child on the phone. When she asked the child how he was doing and where his mother was, he responded that he was fine and that he mother have gone to Sri Lanka. His father had told him that his mother had left without him because she did not like him. Juhi reassured the child that his mother loved him and passed her the phone. Nanthini asked the child why he had not run to her when she'd come to the door and began asking him to prepare to come running to her the next day. Juhi grabbed the phone from her and told her not to teach this to her child. "Most of our people don't realize what they talk what they do affects the children. They think, oh he is a small baby he won't understand, you know?", Juhi explained to me. Both parents were telling the child that the other was bad and the father. "I explained everything," Juhi recounted, "and then the girl agreed to go back and stay. She said whatever he does I'm not going to care, I'm just going to live here for my child." Nanthini said the only thing she wanted was to find a job so that rent would be paid. Juhi mentioned asking welfare to pay rent directly. Juhi explained to Nanthini that the next time the husband hit her or placed his hands on her, or abused her verbally, she should call the police. Juhi explained that unless Nanthini went to the courts, she should not take the child this way. Juhi also mentioned that perhaps living with the father drinking all the time was not good for the child. I asked Juhi about her phoning the husband, one of the things the SAWCC "How to Help A Women in Difficulty" pamphlet explicitly said not to do when helping a woman. The pamphlet also stated not to tell women to stay for the sake of the children. She replied that she used her judgement in the situation but had overall felt really undertrained and unprepared for taking on this role in the beginning. She wished there had been more capacity for an official training. The husband called back the next day to tell Juhi that Nanthini had come home. He told Juhi that if they had another fight, they would get a legal separation. Juhi counselled Nanthini to ignore her husband when she was angry or annoyed so that he might "turn the other way.". Nanthini called back to tell Juhi that she was ok and was "being quiet and calm and let him do what he wants to do." Juhi felt that Nanthini "understood the necessity for the child to be with both parents *without* fighting. " Juhi felt that now that Nanthini knew her rights and the possibilities for leaving that even if she had gone back, this was a good outcome overall.

Women's Stories #9: 'Taking some time for herself'

During our interview, I asked Deeba if she had seen cases where women who faced this violence and had then found a sense of well-being. Deeba responded that she had: "There may not be many cases like that but I have seen." Deeba recounted one case in particular of a Pakistani woman who married in her home country and was then sponsored by her husband to come to Canada. There was a large age different between them and they had one daughter. Deeba recalls that the violence had been so bad that when the woman was brought by the shelter social worker to SAWCC, "she was like a scared cat." The woman really didn't know anyone else than her husband here. So, she had wanted to go back with the condition that he would not do these things again. The Centre had advised her against this but it was her decision to make. She went back, the same thing happened and she ended up in the shelter again. This time, the woman knew about SAWCC and came to them. Through listening, counselling, and talking to her, they tried to convince her not to make any decisions about her marriage for the time being, to take her time, try to live separately for some time and work on herself. "Somehow, this thing she understood," Deeba explained. This woman had completed a bachelors in the past and the suggestion to go back to her studies and do a French language course resonated. She moved out and lived separately while doing the government French language course and reached a fairly high level. The woman was a quick learner and daughter was also in French school, as per provincial policy, and so learning French alongside her daughter seemed to help. Then, the woman decided to undergo a diploma course in the field of computer sciences. "Slowly, slowly, she decided that she doesn't want to go back to the husband because she felt she has the taste of life where she can independent, she can make her own decisions which really her mad her feel good and she was in charge of her life," Deeba described. During this year and a half, the woman realized that returning to her husband would have negative impacts on her daughter as well. Deeba explained that "sometimes when women make stop to make this decision, usually it's because of the children." The woman finished her diploma, got a job and began work. Deeba shared, "that was really, for us, we felt that something has been achieved somewhere. It was not only us, it was *her*. Because she was the one who made this effort." The woman was able to get a divorce and, according to Deeba, her husband seemed to respect the restraining order.

CHAPTER FIVE: Where Do We Go From Here?

"Given these transnational flows of bodies and cultures, how can we understand and articulate cases of transnational violence and exploitation against South Asian women, and perhaps even more importantly, how can we imagine and enact new forms of transnational justice? In this new era of globalization and transnationalism, we can no longer rely on our old imaginations of violence and justice, but instead must develop new perspectives that will help guide us in this shifting, complex, and interconnected world of thoughts and actions" - Jesudason, 245

"Race is real to me. It marks me just as my gender does, but the confluence of race and gender interlocks in ways that shape every facet of my life, determining the choices I make, the paths I travel, and the roads I am prohibited from travelling"

"[R]acism and sexism constitute forms of violence. Their separation in daily though and talk serve strategic purposes - namely, in obfuscating links that could facilitate analysis, and more importantly coalition building. Sexist violence and racist violence share the common denominator of being structured in a larger culture of power - a culture mediated by institutions structured in dominance" - Yasmin Jiwani, Discourses of Denial

This thesis provides significant groundwork for further research.Two additionally map layers, which I explain below, remain inextricable with the 'base map' presented in these pages. All of these 'topographies' interact and mutually shape and transform one another and must all be considered for supporting the well-being of South Asian women facing intimate gendered violence as well as for interventions that can help eliminate such violence.

The next layer would be titled "Across the Seas and On the Island" and adds the structural factors pertaining to migration and the realities of immigrant, refugee, and non-status

South Asian women and their families in Montreal. This includes the added transitional dimensions to intimate gendered violence brought on by immigration (including sponsorship process) and refugee processes and policies themselves (Merali 2009). For example, the possession of important papers, threats of deportation and/or consequences for sponsorship to control their wives (Kang 2006, Merali 2009, Raj and Silverman 2022, Abraham 2000, Bhuyan 2007). As for non-status women, 'agents,' who are paid to help bring people into the country, constitute another source of potential violence. Transnational marriages are common, with men being encouraged to marry "traditional wives" who often come from lower classes and whose families see Canada as a chance for their daughter's upward mobility (Raj and Silverman 2022, Abraham 2000). These marriages come with a host of particular considerations including abandonment in Canada or South Asia after the marriage is official and, most often, the dowry is paid. There are a considerable number of instances where South Asian men in North America have girlfriends but marry "traditional" South Asian wives to provide children and, essentially, be a housekeeper. Given the taboo of divorce, in both cases women are left in vulnerable situations. There is also the use of transnational visits used for abandonment, psychiatrist institutionalization, and in the case of rebellious daughters, confinement and punishment. Given these transnational threads, organizations and service providers need consider building and maintaining transnational networks when helping women.

Next, the factors of the "imagined West versus realities" needs to be considered. This includes adjustment to the double language barrier of Montreal (with French being most unfamiliar), loss of extended family network and day-to-day support, increased isolation and control by husbands (for fear of acculturation and/or losing control), and 'double duty', having to work for an income and still provide all the care work for the household (Abraham 2000, Spitzer et al. 2003, Graham and Thurston 2004). The winter weather in Montreal (and Canada) was also a key theme in terms of difficulties adjusting. These new realities also come with mental health and trauma considerations. Acculturation (and adjustment) to a new country has been shown to add considerable stress with potentially serious mental health outcomes (Ahmad et al. 2005, Khan and Watson 2005, Guruge et al. 2010). As well, there are added pressures for non-status women and families in terms of barriers to access to services and threat of deportation. Refugees

often have considerable trauma and compounds with the above adjustment factors but may not have access to therapy, especially since it is considered taboo. All of the above, along with contribute to barriers in accessing social services such as healthcare due to are also important considerations (Guruge et al. 2010).

Another significant new reality is that of downward social mobility and loss of status. The 'imagined West' is one of, often, false opportunity for upward mobility. Certificates and educational degrees from South Asian countries are rarely recognized in Montreal. As well, racism and xenophobia contribute to employment discrimination in addition to the language requirement which already acts as a significant barrier. Many families also have the added financial pressures of being expected to send remittances home to their families in South Asia. All of these factors and new stressors may contribute to increased vulnerability to violence as well as justifications used by abusers, whose masculinity might be threatened by some of these, for their violence towards women in their families.

On the other hand, some new realities may act as possible mitigators for intimate gendered violence and/or provide frameworks for paths to leave the violence. This includes the fact that Canada (and Quebec) is a welfare state with a wide range of social services including financial assistance and public education and services. As mentioned by Mita and Kushula, the threshold for sexual harassment in public is lower and women's rights are mostly widely accepted. Also, as Kushula mentioned, certain services like the police are, at least in theory, safer for women to access and ambulances are available rather quickly and partially covered by public insurance. This topography includes a section on what happens to patriarchal gender ideologies with migration. Dasgupta refers to a cultural fortification phenomena related to migration where women's role as keepers of tradition is heightened and so too is the pressure to "maintain family values" (1996, 254). Women become the symbol of 'cultural continuity' as Abraham states (2000, 24). In this context, divesting from patriarchal values which are the social norm can be seen as acting non-South Asian or "white" or "westernized" (Ahmad et al. 2004, 278). Here the idea of 'tradition' itself becomes a tool of control. Last but not least, is a shot section on considerations that came up in discussions for in terms tensions around 'tradition' between first- and second-generation immigrants. In Mita's words, second-generation women can be perceived

by some first-generation women as "knowing too much," being more independent, and as belonging to and 'having two cultures.'

The next topography still needs more refining but would be titled something akin to "Dangerous Games: Politics and Policies of Difference and Belonging." This mapping exercise of relevant factors began in women's homes (household and home country), the next traced factors related to travel across the seas and relocating to the island of Montreal, and the last takes a look at the forces that delineate belonging in social and public life in Quebec. This looks at structural, systemic, and ideological factors of Quebec as the dominant society within which South Asian migrant women occupy specific positions. Much of the literature found for this research focused on trying to break down barriers to resources through the proposition and explorations different models for dealing with and/or trying to integrate "culture" in service provision like healthcare, psychology, social work, frontline violence services and law (Williams 2010, Almeida 1999, McKenzie 2010, Pinnewala 2009, Grewal 2007, Navsaria and Petersen 2007). Despite the intentions behind the proposed models of 'cultural relevance' or 'cultural safety' for breaking making services work for and/or accommodate difference, there is potential for harm when the concept of culture, which retains attributes of its old meanings, is used (Rudrappa 2007, Razack 1994,) . Ultimately, in these discussions, culture stands in for difference from an unspoken norm or taken for granted "neutral" position, which is that of whiteness (Chapra et al. 2009, Chew 2009, Simpson et al. 2011, Das Gupta 1999). In Canada, this is a legacy of settler colonial policies of multiculturalism, which Sunita Puri calls a trap (139). Chapra et al. state:

> Canadian multiculturalism is no exception [to racist ideological superiority] as it aspires towards multiculturalism within a bilingual/bicultural framework and thus becomes a tool to maintain difference, distance, and dominance while maintaining its language of diversity and inclusion. By adopting a simplistic, Orientalist view of culture as its sole entry point, multiculturalism policy ignores global inequities and the perpetuation of inequity and poverty of Aboriginal peoples and racialized people living in Canada (2009).

This 'culture' discourse in service provision and legal realms can also slip into the culturalization of violence which ultimately serves both racist ideas and protects patriarchal violence (Razack 1994). In Montreal, South Asian families live within the broader context of multiculturalism that benefits white patriarchal settler colonial society and within an interculturalist one, which also serves as a political tool in terms of settler colonial tensions around Quebec's sovereignty question (Chew 2009). Shortly preceding field work, the Idle No More movement launched across Canada, or Turtle Island, with a strong presence in Quebec and immigrant and refugee women's organizations, like SAWCC, were actively engaged in solidarity networks. During field work, the political debate around reasonable accommodation of religious practices was once again predominant in media due to the newly proposed bill, Bill 60, also known as the 'Charter of Values.'

The reasonable accommodation debates in Quebec began around 2006 around a few publicized incidences of religious accommodation requests including the *Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys* case involving the wearing of a kirpan to school and a YMCA in Montreal which set up clouded windows in response to complaints by ultra-Orthodox Jewish community members. Media coverage of these cases was quite extensive but rarely mentioned, that, according to Robert Leckley, the majority of reasonable accommodation requests made concerning religion to human rights agencies are made by Christians (2012, 21). With this newest proposal, the extensive media coverage of the proposed Charter of Values and surrounding debate intensified and incensed xenophobic and racist sentiments and resulted in increased acts of hate against racialized people living in Quebec, the majority of whom live in Montreal. Harusha, upset, recounted an encounter she had in the metro during this time where people made lewd gestures at her. Politicians used the culturalization of violence to paint "cultures" or 'Other' societies as inherently more violent than others while ignoring Quebec society's own patriarchal, colonial, racist, and capitalist violence (Maynard and Ho, 2009). As Chandra T. Mohanty put it "loyalty to the nation is most easily mobilized in the face of imminent enemies, and carried forward in the sway of polarized hate" and "loyalty to a group or people can be mobilized by affiliation in the face of xenophobia, and carried forward in the sway of racism"(2005, 70). The image of Muslim women in hijabs was constantly used to by white

Quebec politicians to instil fear of Black and Brown communities, especially non-Christian ones, and to stir white saviour sentiments from white feminists. Women, once again, became the "currency of debate" as Dolores Chew puts it (2009, 86). The role of media in facilitating polarization and fueling hate in this affair and others like it cannot be understated (Jiwani 2011, Jiwani 2006, Chew and Hussain 2009, Kang 2006). Racism, xenophobia, and hate towards migrants increases women's vulnerabilities to violence in a myriad of ways and often forces them to have to choose between protecting their communities from the violence of racism, which also includes over-policing and racial profiling, and/or themselves from intimate gendered violence within their homes (Mosher and Martin 1995, Razack 1994). Meanwhile as these debates spark divisions and advance political careers, the patriarchal ideology present in dominant Quebec society, which in turn affects all Quebecers newcomer and otherwise, remains unaddressed, as did rising fundamentalism among white Christian groups along with increased radicalization towards white supremacy. These two trends represent a far more serious threat to women's rights and gender equality in Quebec than migrant families (Feedman 1997, Graff 2009). As well, such deflections ignore far more pressing social issues such as the impacts of the conservative Canadian government and Quebec austerity measures on social services and the women's sector.

SAWCC not only speaks back to the violence of these larger forces and oppressive ideologies but has successfully crafted an explicitly *South Asian* community at the forefront and frontlines of feminist and anti-violence mobilizing and services (Chew 2011, SAWCC 2011, Brommer 2011). The building of community where belonging is generated through common experiences is significant, as at the time of my research, women did not identify with being part of a larger South Asian community outside of the SAWCC. Rather, women identified being part of communities based on their regional, ethnic, and/or religious identities outside of SAWCC. In spite of limited resources and the complexity of the work, using a multitude of tools and approaches, SAWCC simultaneously considers the factors discussed, all three map layers presented in this research, to combat intimate gendered violence at the personal, community, structural and state level.

EPILOGUE

On Friday July 30th, 2021, I leave my home wearing a cloth mask with a fresh hand cut fabric filter to take several buses over to Park Metro station. I am too afraid of COVID-19 and its potential consequences to take the metro and figure that I can open the windows on the bus for ventilation. I have not attended nor participated in any non-essential activities or gatherings of more than ten people in over a year, with the exception of a small local tenants protest organized by a friend. This event, however, is worth the risk: a public mourn in organized by SAWCC with support by Le Comité d'Action de Parc-Éxtension (CAPE), a neighbourhood housing organization. Only a few weeks before, on July 19th, thirty-two-year old Rajinder Prabhneed Kaur was murdered in her apartment by her husband in front of their seven-year-old daughter, who subsequently ran from the home, and their five year old son also in the home. According to local new reports, Rajinder had a restraining order against her husband who was pending trial for threats he had made against her. The building concierge reported to local news to that she had even changed the locks. Her husband confessed to the murder via video call to family members in India, who then contacted Indian police. In turn, Indian police contacted Montreal police. After confessing, he fled the scene and killed himself (La Presse Canadienne 2021). Rajinder Pabhneed Kaur's murder was the fourteenth femicide in Quebec committed by a partner and/or former partner that year, despite it only being July. The sharp increase in intimate gendered violence and fatal cases in the last year and a half was being dubbed the "shadow pandemic" by feminist organizations across Canada (Favaro 2022).

When I arrive and get off at the bus stop, memories of weekly trips taken nearly 7 years earlier to the community center a few streets over for volunteering for the Autonomous and Independent program displaces my social and pandemic-induced anxiety. Walking by the main building of the metro station, I notice a group of about forty people gathered in the open space nearby. They stand in a wide circle and several large news cameras are positioned and at the ready. I make my way, join the circle, and begin to look around noticing one of SAWCC's large banners held during protests and marches we attended in 2012 and 2013. I also take note that many attendees are holding posters and signs a couple of which I recognize from the walls of the

SAWCC's dining room. I also recognize some faces but wait to approach them given the general quiet amongst the group as speakers are preparing to talk in the middle of the circle, where a small speaker and microphone are ready.

Invited speakers take turns sharing and making statements to the crowd, speaking in variety of languages, and include local organizations, advocate, and the municipal city councillor. Dolores Chew, co-founder of SAWCC and CEGEP professor, took the microphone speaking to the crowd and to State. She expertly spoke to how femicides and intimate gendered violence may primarily happen in the homes but that they are not a family problem: "These are societal problems that require society level solutions" (La Presse canadienne 2021). Femicides and intimate gendered violence affect not only South Asian women but all communities that make up Quebec and Canada. Violence against women, Chew continued is "not just a woman's problem, it's a societal problem, it's a public health issue" (CBC 2021). Chew called the public mourners the "canaries in the coal mine that are saying this needs to stop" (La Presse canadienne 2021). Svetlana Chenienko, a survivor and advocate who had organized a similar walk earlier in the spring for the femicide of Rebekah Harry, spoke critically of state responses to these issues. She recounted her own story. Despite having filed multiple restraining orders against her abusive ex-partner, he repeatedly broke them and eventually abducted her. Chenienko demanded strong legislative action, concrete change, and less responses to the violence through the proliferation of constant new services and programs which fails to change the underlying conditions: "You can't build a house on a swamp." (CBC 2021). Dolores Chew also spoke back to the state in her statement to the crowd and interviews with media that she was angry with the government who, it seemed, paid of lot of lip service of the issue and "threw millions" around without addressing the structural and systemic root causes. There is a need for more refuges for women, more transition housing in conjunction with "concrete efforts to end gender-based violence which starts with education, beginning in daycare" (La Presse canadienne 2021). Addressing intimate gendered violence and violence against women in all its forms requires resources as well as transformative actions addressing patriarchal gender ideologies and how these are being sustained by the States own "exercise of violence in different venues" such as colonialism, nationalism, and militarism (Leach 194).

Once the speakers were finished, the circle began to disband as we prepared to join in an action of public mourning for Rajinder. This public mourning, already begun in the circle, would continue in the form of a collective walk from the metro station to her home, where she was killed. Public mournings are an action of bringing into public view the "hidden sites of violence", which Leach, citing Nancy Scheper-Hughes, explains exist only due "specific configurations of policy, rhetoric, institution, and politics" (2011,193). Antiviolence organizers, through public mournings and/or 'cry-ins', vigils, marches, and memorials, subvert state sanctioned practices of who and what is considered significant for public matter, responsibility, and resources: "As in many other countries, in Canada, memorials are most commonly created to celebrate the heroic acts of men who died serving the country. Murdered women - the underside of state-sanctioned violence - are usually mourned quietly and markers noting their deaths disappear in vast cemeteries or do not exist at al" (191). These actions also "make visible the violence that underlies the social contract and can be mobilized at the will of the state," which the state also regularly "ignore [s] and implicitly condone[s]" (194-195).

As flyers with different chants are distributed, I offer to hold one of the several posters a SAWCC staff member is holding and join as the group take the form of a small continent several cars long. Dolores Chew is near the front, holding the microphone with the speaker, on small wheels, towing behind her. She leads the chants: "Break the silence! End the violence!" and then "Nari ekta! Zindabad!" We turn right onto Jean-Talon Ouest, one of the longest streets, and I am next to a woman holding a sign with the names of the thirteen women who were killed earlier this year. It reads:

Elisapee Angma (44 years old),
Marly Édouard (32 years old),
Nancy Roy (44 years old),
Myriam Daillaire (28 ans),
Sylvie Bisson (60 ans),
Carolyne Labonté (40ans),
Nadège Jolicoeur (40ans),

Rebekah Harry (29 ans),

Kataluk Paningayak-Naluiyuk (43 years old),

Dyann Serafica Donaire (38 years old),

Zoleikha Bakhtiar (36 ans),

Lisette Corbeil (56 ans),

Nathalie Piché (55ans).

We walk past a building that I will only come to realize the next summer is where La Maison Parent Roback is situated, a major feminist hub in Montreal since 1997. I have a very loud voice that I have been taught to constantly keep lowered. For once in a very long time, I let it freely project. Dolores Chew and Juvaria, a SAWCC staff member, also told reporters that one of the goals of the mourning and march was also outreach to South Asian people in the neighbourhood. The goal is to make sure people hear about SAWCC, know about the services and that they are available in their languages. "Aurat Per Tashadud, band kro, band kro, " I repeat. The chanting continues: "What do we want: justice! When do we want it: now!"

Next to me I recognize a face on a poster. It is Milia Abrar's face. Milia Abrar, a twenty one year old college student was killed in broad daylight in 1998. She had immigrated to Montreal from Bangladesh in 1990, eight years earlier. Since her murder, SAWCC has carried posters with her name and face to countless events demanding justice. SAWCC has tirelessly and unwaveringly memorialized Milia by remembering her and asking that her community and the State not forget her. We turn onto a street and continue making our way: "Contre les politiques sexistes, Je refuse et je résiste!" The chants continue and repeat. The words begin to take mass.

We arrive in front of Rajinder's apartment building and stop. People catch their breaths and form another circle, this time much closer together. Dolores Chew thanks everyone for being there and another round of short talks by speakers begin, including poetry. As we are gathered, I notice a couple across the street has stopped to listen in. Heads begin to pop out of windows from the surrounding apartments. I begin to notice that almost all of them are children, curiously inspecting the disruption. Dolores Chew asks that we chant together once more, a kind of group invocation or prayer for 'Azadi' or freedom in English and liberté in French. She explains that

this version of the chant was popularized across Indian by Kamla Basin in the 90s after she herself first heard the slogan 'azadii' used by Pakistani feminists in the 80s (The Indian Express). We begin, Chew reads the first part of the call and response and we, resoundingly exclaim "AZADI!":

      From patriarchy **-** Azadi

      From all hierarchy - Azadi

      From endless violence - Azadi

      From helpless silence - Azadi

      For walking freely- Azadi

      For praying freely - Azadi

      For protesting freely - Azadi

      From fascism - Azadi

      From colonialism - Azadi

      From imperialism - Azadi

      From sexism - Azadi

   From racism - Azai

      From climate disaster - Azadi

      For dancing madly - Azadi

      For singing loudly - Azadii

      On the streets we shout - Azadi

      In homes we shout - Azadi

      It is our right - Azadi

      We'll die to fight -Azadi

      We'll snatch and take it - Azadi

      You wait and watch it - Azadi

      For one and all - Azadi

      Our clarion call - Azadi

I have brought a small bouquet of wildflowers picked near my apartment building and ask a familiar SAWCC member if I can leave it on the steps. As I approach, one of the young boys who has been listening throughout, South Asian and no older than nine or ten years old, points to a spot by the entrance and tells me that I can leave them there. With the official action being over, people take time to greet one another and thank the speakers. The group begins to splinter off with two main subgroups headed either to Park and Acadie stations. As we head back to Park metro, this time on the sidewalks, I offer to walk next to a SAWCC staff member I had grown close with during and after my fieldwork. We catch up on the last couple of years slowly and check in with each other on everything going on with the coronavirus pandemic. I offer to carry the speaker but she says it is fine trailing behind us on its small wheels. I apologize again for the long delay in the completion of my research and she responds understandingly. When we arrive at the station, we say our goodbyes and head to opposite direction platforms. As the metro car pulls up, we wave goodbye.

On my way home, changing metro lines from blue to orange to green, I sit absorbing the last hours. I reflect on this research and its methods and analysis. The factors and forces that need to be considered when addressing intimate gendered violence against South Asian women in Montreal are both numerous and quite varied. Even within their general groupings, these factors constitute various dimensions of this complex issue. Yet it is preciously the intersection and compounding of these factors, also not a homogenous experience, that needs to be considered to no only address this violence but to support the well-being of these women. By mapping out these factors, sites of possible and successful intervention or excavation become identifiable. The need that prompted and guided this research was originally named by Nabila: that there was a lack of people she felt she could refer her clients to that understood the South Asian migrant and second generation context enough to sympathetically advise women. This was not only a question of speaking the same language but also of understanding 'cultural' differences and the significant taboos that would shape responses to violence situations by affected women themselves, service providers, frontline workers, and by antiviolence organizers. This thesis was only the start of a larger analysis and focused on what respondents and the literature identified as

the roots. Mapping, orientation, and analysis began in women's homes and the patriarchal values and gender ideologies taught to them by their families, communities, and societies. This is also where power relations first begin to shape their lives and their understandings of themselves as well as the importance of their well-being, for themselves and others. Subsequent mappings or map layers are essential to understanding the particular vulnerabilities, barriers, and power imbalances that affect the well-being of South Asian women in Montreal. Interviews with frontline workers and women themselves, including women's stories they shared, served as the primary guide for the mapping process. I only hope this representation and my analysis honour's them.

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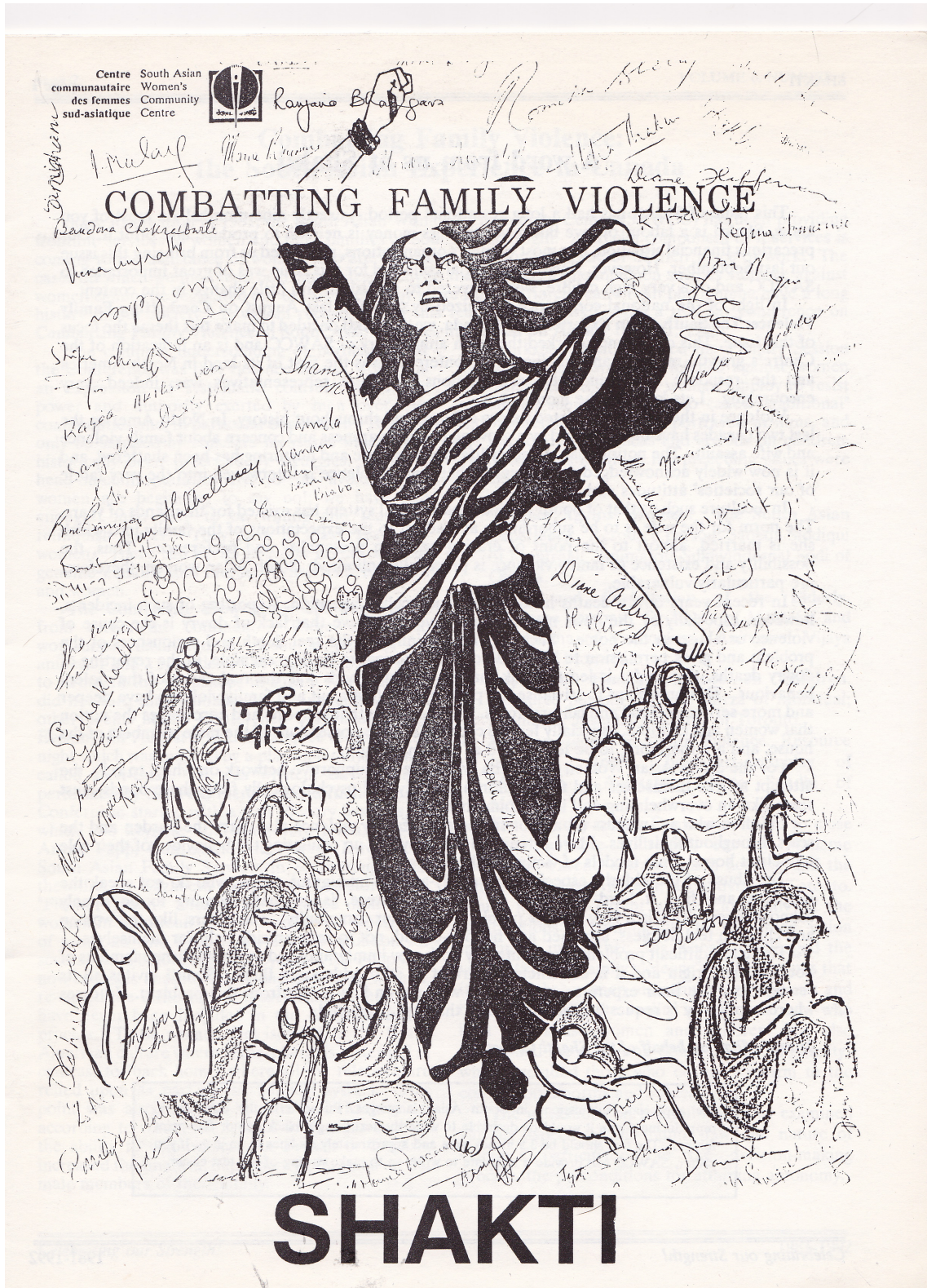
Cover of SAWCC's prior publication entitled SHAKTI envoking a woman fiercely
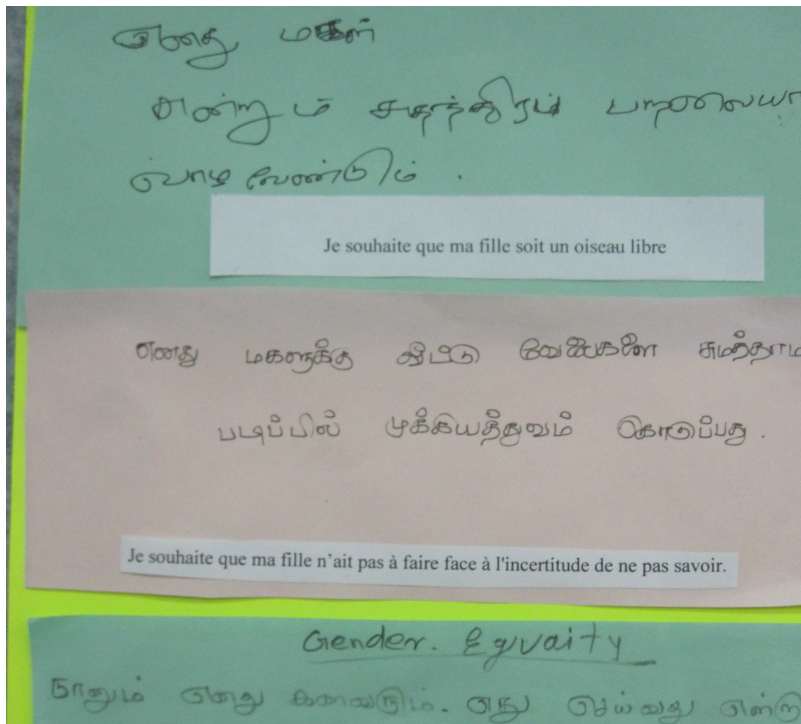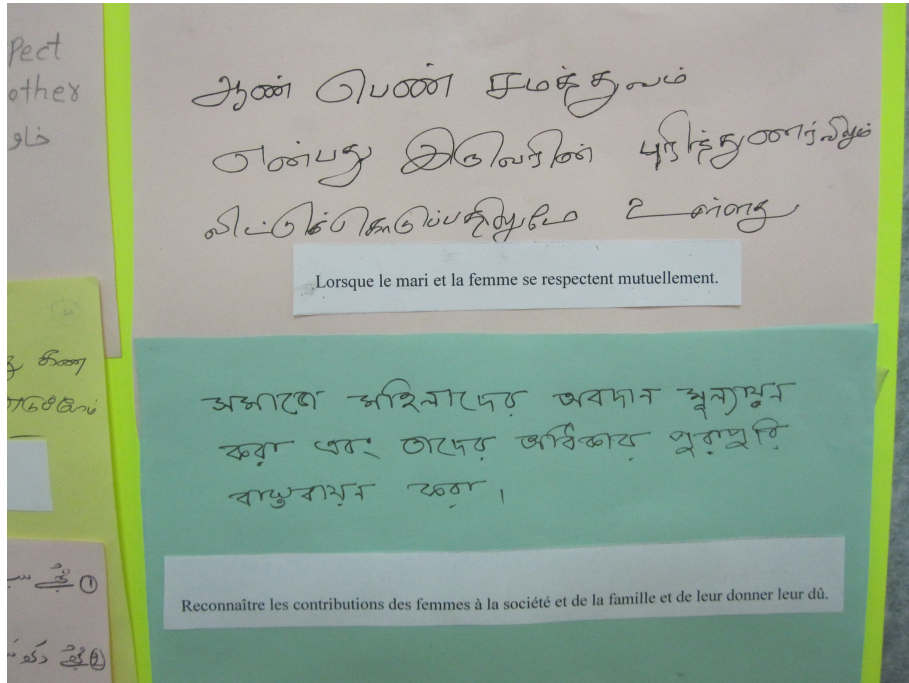combatting violence surrounded by figures of other women and signatures.

SAWCC quilt photos from the Gender Equality exhibit and of the quilt hanging on the dining room wall at the Centrre.

APPENDIX C

Lorsque le mari et la femme se respectent mutuellement.

Reconnaître les contributions des femmes à la société et de la famille et de leur donner leur dû.

Je souhaite que ma fille soit un oiseau libre

Je souhaite que ma fille n'ait pas à faire face à l'incertitude de ne pas savoir.

Gender. Equaity

Gender Equality exhibit poster entitled 'What Does Gender Equality Mean' with handwritten cards translated into French. .

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