

VIOLENCE, COLONIALISM & THE THIRD WORLD WOMAN

VIOLENCE, COLONIALISM, & THE THIRD WORLD WOMAN:

A Postcolonial Discourse Analysis on Violence Against South Asian Women

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ABSTRACT:

Intimate partner violence impacts women around the world and therefore does not present itself congruently across cultures or regions (Devries et al., 2013; Sarkar, 2010; World Health Organization, 2012). Many contemporary researchers strive to name, classify and understand experiences of intimate partner violence that are distinct to the South Asian subcontinent and members of the South Asian diaspora (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Bloch & Rao, 2002; Chatterji & Chaudhry, 2014; Jeyaseelan et al., 2007; Mani, 1987; Panchanadeswaran, & Koverola, 2005). Their works contribute to a dominant discourse about violence against South Asian women that often frames cultural understandings and practices to be the cause of harm within this community. A dominant discourse which predominantly utilizes Western feminist understandings of “patriarchy” and oppression primarily serves to further homogenize, Other, and essentialize the experiences of South Asian women which cannot and should not be discussed in contrast to violence in a Western context. The impact of applying a Western lens to violence against South Asian women is that Western scholars take on the responsibility of identifying and prioritizing the needs of South Asian peoples and offer solutions to these issues without considering the systems of support that already exist or asking those impacted how they imagine change. This project engages a postcolonial discourse analysis to examine dominant discourses on violence against South Asian women as they are deployed within the context, literature, and research on intimate partner violence. Through analyzing 75 highly cited articles using a postcolonial lens, this project unearths commonalities across the dominant discourse such as the use of positivistic colonial research methods, the construction of a monolithic South Asia, the technologies of neoliberalism and colonial capitalism, and the archetype of the Third World Woman via white feminism. These reoccurring themes throughout the dominant discourse

indicate the existence of an inferiorizing and oversimplified understanding of South Asian people and their experiences which is frequently framed using colonial technologies and the white gaze. Deconstructing these mechanisms can create an intentional space for anti-colonial ways of being and knowing as a South Asian person and discussions of violence in the South Asian subcontinent and diaspora without essentializing, homogenizing, or erasing aspects of these experiences.

Key words: *South Asia, violence against women, postcolonialism, discourse*

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INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence is understood as an issue that impacts women around the world regardless of their demographics, identity, social positioning, culture or religion and has been identified by the World Health Organization as a global health problem of epidemic proportions (Devries et al., 2013; Sarkar, 2010; World Health Organization, 2012; World Health Organization, 2013). When conceptualizing intimate partner violence on a global scale, it is important to recognize that this type of violence often does not present itself or manifest congruently across cultures. Scholars such as Ahmed, Reavey, and Majumdar (2009) and Razack (2003) have attempted to identify the variety of ways that intimate partner violence can manifest uniquely based on cultural and historical considerations. More specifically, there is a growing body of work that conceptualizes and tries to name experiences of intimate partner violence that are distinct to the South Asian subcontinent and members of the South Asian diaspora (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Bloch & Rao, 2002; Chatterji & Chaudhry, 2014; Jeyaseelan et al., 2007; Mani, 1987). Researchers have also begun to investigate the unique barriers to accessing supports and fleeing abusive relationships for South Asian women in North America such as language barriers, immigration status, and intracultural norms and pressures (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2005). Together, these works contribute to a dominant discourse about violence against South Asian women that often frames cultural understandings and practices to be the cause of harm within this community.

A dominant discourse which predominantly utilizes Western feminist understandings of “patriarchy” and oppression primarily serves to further homogenize, Other, and essentialize the experiences of South Asian women which cannot and should not be discussed in contrast to violence in a Western context. The impact of applying a Western lens to violence against South

Asian women is that Western scholars take on the responsibility of identifying and prioritizing the needs of South Asian peoples and offer solutions to these issues without considering the systems of support that already exist or asking those impacted how they imagine change. With this white, Western gaze frequently being applied to the experiences of South Asian women, it is imperative to disrupt this discourse by applying a postcolonial lens and creating opportunities to understand these experiences of violence through a lens which considers the social, political, and historical complexities of the South Asian subcontinent from the perspective of South Asian people. This shift will allow for South Asian peoples to regain control of the way their experiences are portrayed and discussed and allow for meaningful reflection on their needs without the assertion of colonial, capitalist agendas. In the context of social work, it is important to understand how such discourses are constructed and the ways in which they inform social work practice. Dominant discourses often shape trainings and methods of practice which are implemented in the field and therefore directly impact service users who hold these identities.

Additionally, within the emerging literature about the cultural practices and barriers these women experience, much of the discourse is focused on understanding this issue from a Western perspective and presenting it in a digestible way for white audiences; a phenomena often referred to as the “white gaze” (Barry, 1995; Chatterji & Chaudhry, 2014; Ganguly, 2006). The desire to “understand” a culture or community in a measurable way comes from a positivist lens that places hegemonic value on empirical data and generalizable conclusions. Many academics are taught to view research as a tool to understand hidden truths because of the notion that there is always an explicit answer to a question if you know what to ask and where to look (Chatterji & Chaudhry, 2014; Ganguly, 2006). These practices are so pervasive that it is often members of the South Asian diaspora that are researching and repackaging nuanced, heterogenous experiences in

a way that is palatable to those outside of the community. In order to do this, authors have to select the narrative that they want to construct and synthesize vastly different communities, cultures, religious groups, castes, etc. into a cohesive conclusion (Razack, 2003). This process upholds colonial infrastructure and often erases and silences the centuries of history, culture and tradition that is inherent to the South Asian subcontinent. Without regard for the nuances and complexities, the experiences of South Asian peoples are reduced to essentialisms and inferiorizing oversimplifications which imply Western dominance as the authorities of knowledge about violence against women.

The purpose of this research project is to challenge the dominant discourse and determine how literature about violence against South Asian women could benefit from a postcolonial analysis. A postcolonial analysis will invite questions such as “how does this text explicitly or implicitly discuss aspects or implications of colonial oppression?”, “what does this text reveal about the complex relationship between personal and cultural identity such as hybridity and mimicry?”, “who does this text identify as the ‘Other’ and how are they described?”, “is this text making generalizations or assumptions about South Asian women?” and “who is benefitting from the output of this text and its conclusions?” Through reading and asking these questions of highly cited texts within the dominant discourse, I aim to identify the ways that the experiences of South Asian women are misunderstood and often generalized to be palatable within the “white gaze”.

Postcolonial theory provides an invaluable lens for topics such as this because it allows for the deconstruction of methodologies that were created as colonial tools to study the people of colonized lands (Said, 1978). It questions the ways that researchers often frame their research question to elicit desired responses, validate their preconceived conclusions and collect

generalizable data (Chatterji & Chaudhry, 2014; Ganguly, 2006). Postcolonial theory inquires about ways of being and knowing that existed before colonization and is concerned with unearthing the ways that colonial research methods perpetuate the ideology that people of colonial lands are backward, lesser, and deserving of colonization (Said, 1978).

The field of postcolonial studies works to highlight the historical, social, and political contexts of South Asian experiences in a way that emphasizes and deconstructs contemporary issues in a meaningful way for members of the South Asian subcontinent and diaspora (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2002; Gandhi, 1998; Loomba, 1998; Young, 2001). Postcolonial studies has worked to dispel the notion that research must produce generalizable findings in order to be valid and actively challenges colonial products in favour of methods that centre the voices and experiences of marginalized people (Spivak, 1999). By recognizing the limitations of the “white gaze” that is prevalent in many aspects of Western scholarship, I aim to go beyond the dominant discourse and deconstruct tropes and stereotypes that are often propagated in order to frame narratives about South Asian women. Through a postcolonial lens, my research strives to acknowledge that there can be a coexistence of multiple truths and that existence is multifaceted and layered (Loomba, 1998). I hope to shed light on a means of analysis that does not fit the mould of one Western methodology but rather draws from worldviews and understandings that cannot be quantified or synthesized in a single way. A postcolonial framework allows for the platform to deconstruct, critique, and contextualize the dominant discourse about violence against South Asian women from the perspective of the subjugated Other. Although this invites viewpoints that often are not seen in Western academic literature, the main limitation is that it may not be seen as “credible” or “scholarly”. This limitation is something that is fundamental to postcolonial studies as a rejection of colonial research methods is deeply entrenched in the field.

This research study is grounded in my ontological positioning as a South Asian woman who is part of the diaspora in Canada. It is important to note that “South Asian” as an identify marker is a colonial construct and a tool used to homogenize the experiences of diverse individuals from the South Asian subcontinent. I use this term because it is a commonly known and understood way of identifying individuals, like myself, who themselves or whose ancestors are from a region within this subcontinent. However, my use of the term “South Asian” is critical because I believe it insinuates the existence of a homogenous ethnic group which simply does not exist. My social location provides me with insight about the nuances of South Asian culture and the complex history of South Asian peoples which has been severely impacted by colonialism. Because of this lens, my research stems from a refusal of the idea of a homogenous South Asia, namely in cultural practices, traditions, and beliefs. When acknowledging that the subcontinent is comprised of thousands of years of culture and knowledge as well as hundreds of languages, numerous religions, and countless ways of being, it is disconcerting to see literature that essentializes these experiences.

A postcolonial discourse analysis, unlike other methods of discourse analysis, is formed against the grain of colonial research practices and seeks to pinpoint technologies of ongoing colonialism, oppression, and subjugation through discourse while also highlighting the ways that discourse is constructed, who it is constructed by, and the purposes that it serves (Gandhi, 1998; Loomba, 1998; Young, 2001). This type of analysis will allow me to frame an important issue, such as violence against South Asian women, in a way that validates and recognizes the complexities and nuances of these women's identities, social positioning, and historical and cultural contexts (Bhabha, 1994; Ganguly, 2006; Mani, 1987; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1999).

Through seminal works, such as those by Said (1978), Spivak (1999) and Bhabha (1994), it is possible to understand the depth and complexity of a postcolonial analysis.

This theoretical lens assumes that most research practices are entrenched in colonial practices and serve, often unintentionally, to perpetuate harmful systems of knowledge, power, and dominance over the colonized Other (Mani, 1987; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1999). These tenets of postcolonial theory lend themselves nicely to my interest about the generalizations and stereotypes that are created and perpetuated through the dominant discourse about violence against South Asian women. This process of homogenization and essentialization may not occur intentionally but is closely tied to the theoretical and methodological frameworks that researchers apply when approaching work that involves marginalized groups with deeply rooted colonial, historical and cultural contexts. This project engages a postcolonial discourse analysis to examine the ways dominant discourse on violence against South Asian women operate, (re)produce social relations, hierarchies of knowledge, and reinforce colonial oppressions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To analyze the dominant discourse about violence against South Asian women through a postcolonial lens, it is imperative to consult the existing works of scholars from various disciplines within the social sciences. It is important to understand the ways that violence against South Asian women is conceptualized within the dominant discourse. The following review of the literature will highlight some of the most cited works about violence against South Asian women as gathered through a scoping review of prominent social sciences databases (ProQuest, JSTOR, Web of Science, and Google Scholar). It will also contextualize feminism and gendered violence through postcolonial literature to provide insight about how a postcolonial analysis can

provide depth to the existing discourse. Understanding the dominant discourse about violence against South Asian women as well as postcolonial framings of culture, feminism, and violence will allow for a deeper understanding of my analysis to follow.

Violence Against South Asian Women

When beginning to read and analyze existing literature about violence against South Asian women, numerous articles with a focus on physical violence against women in India emerged (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Eswaran, & Malhotra, 2011; Jeyaseelan et al., 2007; Kalokhe et al., 2017; Rocca et al., 2008). All these articles employ quantitative research methods to measure the prevalence of physical violence and generate statistical data about the experiences of women who have experienced such violence. They use surveys to investigate potential precursors and protectors of domestic violence in India and other South Asian countries. These articles also focus their exploration of violence against women on married, heterosexual couples. Many of these articles discuss concepts such as shame and honour as well as cultural demands of women to be subservient and silent in their marriage (Jeyaseelan et al., 2007; Kalokhe et al., 2017; Rocca et al., 2008). Similarly, scholars such as Ahmed-Ghosh (2004), discuss the ways that domestic violence in India is perpetuated by patriarchy, family values, and tradition. Other scholars investigate the limitations of social and economic resources for women who face domestic violence in India (Rocca et al., 2008).

All of the aforementioned studies contend with the notion of violence against South Asian women stemming from an overly patriarchal culture. They investigate experiences of violence and try to understand the underlying causes by posing questions about family values and dynamics, knowledge of structural rules and legislation, and economic participation and

access to financial resources. Some scholars also investigate the variance in experiences of women in urban, rural, and slum areas or those who entered into a “love marriage” rather than an arranged marriage (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Eswaran, & Malhotra, 2011; Rocca et al., 2008). They also often explore the role of dowry payments in instances of marital violence (Eswaran, & Malhotra, 2011; Rocca et al., 2008).

Many researchers also suggest that the way to protect from experiences of violence are vocational programs and social groups for women in order to create employment and opportunities for financial independence as well as social groups to increase solidarity and sharing of experiences and support (Ali, Naylor, Croot & O’Cathain, 2015; Dalal & Lindqvist, 2012; Rani & Bonu, 2009; Sarkar, 2010). However, Rocca et al., (2008) concludes that women who are involved in vocational programs and social groups were found to be more likely to experience violence in their relationship. This contrast indicates that although many of the scholars who study violence against South Asian women discuss similar themes and elements, there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to mitigating and reducing violence because of its nuanced, complex nature. As much as a proposed solution like vocational programs and social groups may protect some women, it can simultaneously increase risk for others within the same demographic.

Other researchers (Alcoff, 2009; Nayak et al., 2003; Rani & Bonu, 2009) believe that the best way to understand an issue, such as violence against women, and formulate prevention strategies is to understand the attitudes towards the issue. Nayak et al. (2003) found that sociocultural factors such as politics, historical contexts, religion, economics, and attitudes towards gender roles played a significant role in both men’s and women’s perspective of violence against women among undergraduate students in India, Japan, Kuwait, and the United

States of America. They also commented on the ways that collectivist cultures (such as cultures found in India, Japan, and Kuwait) can inhibit access to care after experiencing violence because survivors are more likely to be worried about what their community members will think and say about them (Nayak et al., 2003).

Similarly, Rani and Bonu (2009) investigated health surveys from Armenia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Kazakhstan, Nepal, and Turkey to understand physical violence among married couples. They determined that in some cases younger respondents justified physical violence more often, and working women were equally or more likely to justify physical violence compared to nonworking women (Rani & Bonu, 2009). In both studies, and many others that investigate the issue of violence against women in a global context the findings are not very specific and represent a variety of viewpoints and experiences (Abrahams et al., 2014; Alcoff, 2009; Guruge, 2012; Palermo, Bleck & Peterman, 2014; Tran, Nguyen & Fisher, 2016). This is likely because they collected data from numerous vastly different countries, which is problematic and troublesome given the heterogeneity that exists across cultures, religions, and geographic locations.

The existing literature in the dominant discourse about violence against South Asian women calls upon ideas and notions of culture, community, and tradition to describe the factors that contribute to experiences of violence. It names South Asian *culture* as patriarchal and dominant over women. These are examples of the ways in which patriarchy in the context of racialized nations in the global South is weaponized by Western scholars. Similar notions of patriarchy are at play in Western nations, yet through the “white gaze” of Western research and knowledge production, patriarchy is deemed more violent, oppressive, and dominant in South Asia than in the West. It also pinpoints traditional practices and cultural norms such as *arranged*

marriages and dowry exchanges as causes of violence and names communal or societal expectations as factors that keeps women in unsafe marriages.

Culture as Complicit of Violence

When trying to understand the ways that violence against South Asian women is constructed in the dominant discourse, understanding the role and the construction of culture is vital. Many of the authors mentioned above (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Jeyaseelan et al., 2007; Nayak et al., 2003; Rani & Bonu, 2009; Rocca et al., 2008) posit culture as a mechanism that contributes to violence against South Asian women through structures such as patriarchy, gender roles, traditional matrimonial practices, or inequitable economic opportunities. The notion of culture is frequently referenced in the literature and therefore it is important to contrast the way it is conceptualized in the dominant discourse with postcolonial understandings of culture and its production.

Authors such as Rastogi and Therly (2006) and Hackett (2011) discuss the transferring of assets to a groom's family in exchange for marrying a bride, commonly referred to as dowry exchanges, and the phenomena of "dowry deaths" as a culturally informed practice of violence against women. Rastogi and Therly (2006) conducted their analysis and discussed their findings using a psychological lens to determine the effectiveness of interventions for dowry-based violence in North America and the United Kingdom. The authors recognize sociocultural, religious, and economic factors to be important when considering a woman's ability to seek out support for dowry related violence (Hackett, 2011; Rastogi & Therly, 2006). However, they also describe these women as illiterate, devoted to religious ideals such as purity and chastity, and overall helplessness in decisions that pertain to their own lives (Rastogi & Therly, 2006). Hackett

(2011) examined Indian crime data related to domestic violence to determine that dowry deaths occur at higher rates in “underdeveloped” areas of the country.

Similarly, Ahmed, Reavey, and Majumdar (2009) investigate the ways that British South Asian women who are also survivors of sexual violence understand their culture's impact on their experiences of violence. The authors conducted qualitative interviews with eight women and concluded that the idea that culture is “problematic and unchangeable” was both accepted and challenged by participants. While some women resist cultural constructions that perpetuate experiences of violence, they also acknowledge that such cultural constructions exist to subjugate women (Ahmed, Reavey & Majumdar, 2009). In this study, the researchers also found that “culture” can act as a barrier to South Asian women seeking support for their experiences of sexual violence out of fear of discrimination or breaches of confidentiality within their shared cultural community (Ahmed, Reavey & Majumdar, 2009). Similar to other research (Fontes & McCloskey, 2011; Papp, 2009; Rani & Bonu, 2009) that presents South Asian women's experiences of violence, framing “culture” as a “barrier” as if it is one universal, static entity further homogenizes these women's experiences.

Many other studies that claim to represent national or regional perspectives of intimate partner violence in the South Asian subcontinent similarly contribute to such broad overgeneralized conclusions about South Asian culture (Ali, Naylor, Croot & O'Cathain, 2015; Dalal & Lindqvist, 2012; Fontes & McCloskey, 2011; Papp, 2009; Rani & Bonu, 2009). Dalal and Lindqvist (2012) explicitly suggest that a means of preventing domestic violence in India would be to eliminate the “structural inequalities inherent in the indigenous oppressive institutions of religion, caste and the traditional male hierarchy in society” (p. 265). Similarly, Rani and Bonu (2009) conclude that to reduce the prevalence of physical violence in South Asia,

both men and women need “liberation from the binding stereotypic norms” (p.1394). Ali, Naylor, Croot and O’Cathain (2015) also indicate that a “cultural tendency to view women as objects” and “a cultural acceptance of violence and silence” are contributing factors to intimate partner violence in Pakistan (p. 306). All of these scholars contribute to a discourse about South Asian people that tie them to an *oppressive, unchanging* culture which normalizes gendered violence. This type of discourse does not account for historical considerations which indicate that cis-heteropatriarchal hegemony was brought to the South Asian subcontinent by British colonizers and enforced through acts of violence to further colonial interests (Chitnis & Wright, 2007).

Key Concepts from Postcolonial Literature

To contrast and critique the literature that describes South Asian culture in these problematic ways, it is beneficial to draw upon the works of postcolonial scholars such as Bhabha (1994) and Razack (2003) to reconceptualize culture and the ways we discuss culture in literature. In his work *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1994) identifies the concepts of cultural hybridity and mimicry where he suggests that culture is not static or fixed to a single time or place but rather it is fluid and regularly transforms through interactions. Applying this perspective, culture can be viewed as something that cannot be grasped or studied as a static, unchanging entity. Bhabha (1994) explains that it is important to recognize that humans have created a system of cultural hierarchy. In this hierarchy, more value is assigned to cultures that wield greater power, which results in white, colonial nations imposing their cultural ideals onto their colonial subjects (Bhabha, 1994).

Bhabha's (1994) dismantling of culture through a postcolonial analysis is important to consider when conceptualizing the role of South Asian "culture" in violence against women. If the contemporary culture within South Asia cannot be grasped or studied, and the majority of our understanding of that culture has been shaped by the hegemony of white, colonial ideals; what exactly is being measured and studied? Is it possible to unearth a pre-colonial South Asian culture and study it using colonial research tools? Bhabha's (1994) discussion of culture disrupts the dominant discourse, which suggests that there exists a measurable South Asian culture which can be studied and understood in order to prevent practices, traditions and ideologies that contribute to violence against South Asian women.

Razack (2003) asks who or what gives Western narratives about South Asian women authenticity, credibility, and power? In her article titled "A Violent Culture or Culturalized Violence?", Razack (2003) argues that researchers construct "orientalist fantasies" about the helplessness and dependence of South Asian women. Razack (2003) highlights the fact that it is important to discuss the violence that occurs in the South Asian community without placing the blame and responsibility on the "overly patriarchal culture". She posits that considering violence against South Asian women as emerging from culture is to reproduce racism (Razack, 2003). Her commentary on the construction of culture within the dominant discourse begins to draw attention to the relationship between culture, colonization, and violence against South Asian women through a postcolonial lens, which plays an important role in framing the following critical discourse analysis.

Additionally, as Loomba (1998) writes, a critical part of the mission of colonization was to gather and catalogue information about the peoples of the lands being colonized. This process of colonial knowledge production constructed the binary divide between colonial powers as "us"

and colonial subjects as “them”. Colonial knowledge generation and research methods evolved to produce information which was used to justify the means of colonization and further subjugate people across South Asia (Loomba, 1998). Western knowledge production often prides itself on discovering objective truths and implementing methods which are free from ideology or bias, however many of these means of knowledge production are rooted in colonial, racist structures and ideologies which inherently posit whiteness as superior and Black and brownness as “barbaric”, “wild”, “backward”, “savage” and overall worthy of colonial domination (Gould, 1996; Loomba, 1998; Stepan, 1982).

With much of the dominant discourse describing South Asian women in terms of lack, there is merit to considering the ways that feminism is understood in a South Asian, postcolonial context. In the ways that the dominant discourse highlights these women’s lack of power and autonomy, South Asian feminism creates a space to highlight those exact things. South Asian feminism allows for the centring of women’s voices, perspectives, and experiences alongside a dominant discourse about them that often excludes them.

Conceptualizing South Asian Feminism

Azim, Menon, and Siddiqui (2009) write about the importance of historical considerations when implementing or constructing a South Asian Feminist lens. They highlight important reflections about the positionality of women from the South Asian subcontinent and diaspora such as the colonial imposition of religious as well as linguistic divides that have created barriers to collective action (Azim, Menon & Siddiqui, 2009). This article serves as a toolkit to guide meaningful ways of connecting history, culture, and tradition from the South Asian subcontinent to the systems of power and oppression, which are inextricably connected to

colonialism. The authors also discuss the colonial construction of South Asia as a subcontinent and the arbitrary creation of borders to separate people (Azim, Menon & Siddiqui, 2009).

Postcolonial scholars such as Azim, Menon, and Siddiqui (2009) disrupt the dominant discourse by revealing the deeply rooted colonial past that has forever changed the way that South Asian people exist and see themselves in the world. The colonial construction of the South Asian subcontinent and the nations within the subcontinent have direct implications on the way this region and people are understood in Eurocentric, Western academic spheres.

Mohanty (1984) also disrupts the dominant discourse about South Asian women as she deconstructs the production of the “Third World Woman” trope that has been imagined and asserted by Western feminist scholars. She articulates the ways that Western scholars often create distance between themselves and non-Western women by positing that *all* Third World Women are oppressed by patriarchal systems and male dominance while Western women are liberated and able to express themselves freely (Mohanty, 1984). The construction of the Third World Woman in combination with ideas of an oppressive South Asian culture in the dominant discourse contribute to perceptions of South Asian people as backward, uneducated, and barbaric (Mohanty, 1984).

In this essay, Mohanty (1984) provides an analysis of transnational feminist discourse, Western feminist scholarship, and demonstrates the Othering, essentializing and homogenizing that often takes place in literature about South Asian women. She discusses the problematic nature of universalism and the construction of shared struggle through shared womanhood (Mohanty, 1984). This analysis unravels the way that women are constructed as victims of male violence and the colonial process, dependents, subjugates of patriarchal family systems, and excluded from economic participation within the dominant Western discourse (Mohanty, 1984).

Her work highlights some of the ways that language is wielded against South Asian women in order to create a divide between Western women and Third World women. She also demonstrates the ways that Third World women are often only included when broad generalizations are made in transnational feminist discourses about shared struggles and universal experiences of oppression and subjugation.

The works of Azim, Menon, and Siddiqui (2009) and Mohanty (1984) allow us to recognize the need to carve out a space intentionally for South Asian women in the discourse that is cognizant of colonial implications and historical considerations. They utilize a postcolonial lens in their analyses to centre the experiences of women whose perspectives and experiences are rarely showcased in the discourse using such considerations. The following section will highlight the discussion of gendered, colonial violence by postcolonial scholars in order to frame my following analysis of the contemporary, dominant discourse on violence against South Asian women.

Violence Through a Postcolonial Lens

Postcolonial scholars, such as Ganguly (2006), describes the ways that colonialism forever changed the ways that members of the South Asian subcontinent exist, operate, and understand themselves. She illustrates this in her work by highlighting that contemporary understandings of the Indian caste system are built based on exploitative, colonial research in which the British colonizers attempted to classify traditional Indian ways of being into categories based on white social orders (Ganguly, 2006). Since the British understood governance through systems of hierarchy, they imposed these ideas onto their colonial subjects and assumed that all

groups of people who they colonized across the globe existed in a similar way (Chitnis & Wright, 2007; Ganguly, 2006; Lau & Mendes, 2012).

As a result of colonial ethnographic research practices, the British deemed the Indian caste system to be a rigid classification system that determined a family's position in society and the social and economic outcomes they would experience as a result of their occupation and social standing (Ganguly, 2006). In actuality, caste in precolonial India was a fluid identity marker that served only as a tool which allowed individuals coexist in communities cohesively. The British used their problematic understanding of caste to tighten their control of land and justify their occupation of India. They determined that only higher castes could own land and deemed Indian society and their ways of being to be backwards and uncivilized (Chitnis & Wright, 2007; Ganguly, 2006; Lau & Mendes, 2012).

Additionally, Spivak (1988) incorporate notions of South Asian feminism into her work about gendered violence. Spivak (1988) writes about West vs. East and colonizer vs. colonized relations by elaborating on the power struggle between the elite and the subaltern in her influential essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?". As described throughout the field of subaltern studies, the term subaltern refers to an oppressed Other who is often spoken for and stripped of autonomy within the colonial project (Lau & Mendes, 2012; Spivak, 1988). Spivak (1988) deconstructs Western knowledge production and unearths countless considerations to be made when thinking about the experiences of South Asian women through a postcolonial lens. Because subalterns operate and exist in ways that are often immeasurable through Western methodologies and incomprehensible through the white gaze, Western scholars fail in their mission to essentialize the subaltern experience (Spivak, 1988). This is significant because it indicates the divide between the issues that are highlighted in Western scholarship compared to the realities of

South Asian people and the things they identify as issues in their own lives. She questions how the third world subject can be studied without cooperation in and reinforcement of the colonial project by commenting on the imposed divisions by colonial powers on South Asian people such as gender, caste, class, region, religion, language etc. that play a vital role in isolating them from one another (Spivak, 1988).

Spivak (1988) describes the ways that the subaltern, those who are disenfranchised, marginalized, and neglected from society, are viewed as voiceless despite their continual acts of resistance and resilience. Those in power, often as a result of the colonial project, speak on behalf of the subaltern in order to further their own agenda (Spivak, 1988). To illustrate this, Spivak (1988), Loomba (1993) and Mani (1987) highlight the example of Sati, the ceremonial custom where a Hindu woman would burn herself to death on her husband's funeral pyre, in colonial India and the ways it has been discussed in the years following. British colonizers abolished the practice of Sati because they deemed it to be a "brutal" and "barbaric" custom created to enforce the Hindu patriarchy (Loomba, 1993; Mani, 1987; Spivak, 1988). Spivak identifies the British colonizers' ulterior motives for banning Sati as justifying the colonization of India because of such barbaric practices (Mani, 1987; Spivak, 1988). Sati allowed the British to claim that there was a need for a civilizing mission or as Spivak eloquently describes, "white men are saving brown women from brown men" (Spivak, 1988, p. 92). She identifies that rather than speak on behalf of the subaltern, we must "learn to learn" from the subaltern and create enabling conditions for the subaltern to speak for herself (Spivak, 1988).

In their article, Chatterji and Chaudhry (2014) explore the role of gendered violence in the nation forming of various countries in South Asia. They draw parallels between women's boundaries and borders by metaphorizing women as the bearers of national identity and

highlighting the ways that the process of state formation contributed to violence against women and systemic disenfranchisement (Chatterji & Chaudhry, 2014). This is furthered by understandings of property and ownership that emerged at the time of nation building – illustrated by the Urdu proverb used to describe a man's most prized possessions “zan, zar, and zameen”, meaning woman, gold, and land (Chatterji & Chaudhry, 2014). The authors also described the ways that national honour and shame were attributed to women's bodies and women were often exchanged as goods after the partition of India and Pakistan (Chatterji & Chaudhry, 2014). These practices play an integral role in the ways that women are seen and treated in contemporary times. In their work, Chatterji and Chaudhry (2014) contextualize the history of violence against South Asian women and demonstrate that many of the “cultural” and “traditional” practices associated with contemporary South Asia became prevalent after colonial involvement and influence. Patriarchal values, understandings of hierarchy, power, and control, as well as ideas of nationalism, ownership, and commodity were instilled by British colonizers and have been embedded into modern ways of life (Chatterji & Chaudhry, 2014).

The following critical discourse analysis will implement tenets of postcolonial theory to complement the work of postcolonial scholars who have discussed violence against South Asian women. This discourse analysis aims to demonstrate the ways that Western ideologies, constructions, and research methods continue to uphold and reinforce the colonial project. Much of the literature showcased in this review indicates that feelings of shame and honour, family values, and tradition demand women to be subservient, silent, and economically dependent in their marriage (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Eswaran, & Malhotra, 2011; Jeyaseelan et al., 2007; Kalokhe et al., 2017; Rocca et al., 2008). The dominant discourse does not account for the

historical legacy of colonialism and could benefit from the application of a postcolonial lens to unearth the colonial technologies at work to uphold systems of oppression and subjugation in the lives of South Asian women. As a result, this discourse analysis aims to provide crucial insight into the experiences and perspectives which are not represented through the Western academic dominant discourse about violence against South Asian women.

METHODOLOGY

Postcolonial theory conceptualizes discourse as “ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them” (Weedon, 1997, p. 105). This encompasses and refers to “knowledge” as both scholarly and non-scholarly knowledge, including intellectual, cultural, economic, political, etc. (Prasad, 2003). Therefore, the term “discourse” in postcolonial theory points to the ways that intellectual, social, cultural, political, and economic structures seeks to (re)produce and perpetuate relations of colonialism and neocolonialism (Loomba, 1998; Prasad, 2003). While considering this understanding of discourse, I chose specifically to focus on the intellectual production of knowledge by analyzing the production of discourse via academic journal articles. My analysis, however, will address the social, cultural, political, and economic implications of this discourse.

Using postcolonial theory to frame my research has important implications for both data collection and data analysis. When seeking out data, I will be looking for literature that utilizes positivistic, colonial research methodologies, such as standardized surveys or ethnographic interviews, and is published within academic journals. By narrowing my data collection to gather articles that implement Western modalities and prioritize Western methods of knowledge

dissemination, I will be able to analyse and discuss the ways that a postcolonial lens would strengthen and deepen the output of these studies. I will be reading for the ways that this literature recreates power imbalances, reinforces stereotypes and contributes to the homogenization and essentialism of South Asian women. My analysis will be guided by the works of scholars such as Said (1978), Spivak (1999), and Bhabha (1994) who use the principles of postcolonial theory to comment on and critique contemporary issues. These scholars have named phenomena such as Orientalism, hybridity, mimicry, and subaltern subordination that capture the essence of a postcolonial analysis and serve as useful tools for my research. I will be searching for aspects of South Asian women's experiences that are left out of the literature or that might not consider historical and cultural complexities. My analysis will also question who the intended audience of this literature is because reproducing data for white, Western audiences often fails to accurately represent the nuanced realities and only furthers harm.

By using the works of Said (1978), Bhabha (1994), and Spivak (1999) as well as the tenets of postcolonial theory as the foundation of my ontological and epistemological positioning, I am able to draw on the notions of Orientalism, hybridity, mimicry, and subaltern subordination in my analysis of violence against South Asian women. Much of the dominant discourse on this topic places blame and responsibility of violence on cultural practices, societal pressures and ultimately on women. This occurs most often because a great deal of South Asian history has been erased or suppressed through colonization, making it nearly impossible to understand such issues by only discussing the ways these cultural practices exist and operate in a contemporary context. The danger of focusing solely on contemporary contexts is the inevitability of further erasing the history and nuance that is associated with those cultural practices as well as the purposes that they serve. Contributing to discourse in such a way only

serves to further subjugate the experiences of the subaltern, in this case the South Asian woman. We should rather be thinking about the ways that South Asian women exist in the world and the legacies of tradition, culture, history, and trauma they carry. Centering their stories and creating methods of sharing and understanding that do not constantly compare their experiences to white, cis-hetero, patriarchal norms.

METHODS

To conduct a postcolonial critical discourse analysis which discusses and analyses a broad range of relevant, contemporary literature about violence against South Asian women, I began by using the protocols of a scoping review as outlined by Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) (Tricco et al., 2018). It is important to recognize that postcolonial discourse analyses do not have one prescribed method for data collection or determining the dominant discourse. I have chosen to implement the positivist scoping review method in an attempt to capture the literature which is more often deemed “factual”, and “accurate” on account of its existence within academic, peer reviewed journals. Conducting a scoping review allowed me to capture the discourse which is most referenced in academia in order to trouble the notion of meritocracy within knowledge production.

Following PRISMA protocols, I conducted detailed searches of four prominent social science databases (ProQuest, JSTOR, Web of Science, and Google Scholar) using the search terms (“South Asia*” OR India* OR Pakistan* OR Bangladesh* OR Sri Lanka*) AND (Women OR woman OR female OR gender) AND (“Violence Against Women” OR “Intimate Partner Violence” OR “Domestic Violence” OR “Sexual Violence” OR “Gender Based Violence” OR abuse). I limited the search results to peer reviewed articles published in academic journals

between the years 2009 – 2019 and only included the results that had been cited by other scholars more than 20 times. This inclusion criteria allowed me to gather the most current and most referenced data which should be indicative of the contemporary dominant discourse. These searches across the four databases yielded 170 articles which was reduced to 150 when duplicates were removed and reduced again to 90 articles when abstracts were read for relevance. Of these 90 articles, 15 articles that discussed violence against women in a global context or focused on various regions or countries in South Asia were used in the literature review section as those were the often the most cited works about violence against South Asian women.

The remaining 75 articles (listed in Appendix A) were read and analysed using a postcolonial lens by asking questions such as “how does this text explicitly or implicitly discuss aspects or implications of colonial oppression?”, “what does this text reveal about the complex relationship between personal and cultural identity such as hybridity and mimicry?”, “who does this text identify as the ‘Other’ and how are they described?”, “is this text making generalizations or assumptions about South Asian women?” and “who is benefitting from the output of this text and its conclusions?” My analysis of these articles was mainly focused on the discussion and conclusion sections of these articles because they contained the authors’ findings, analyses, and reflections in their own words. This was an important step in assessing the state of contemporary literature. By asking these questions of the texts and reading these articles intentionally, several themes emerged which will be discussed and deconstructed in the following sections of this project.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Throughout the process of reading, asking the aforementioned questions, and applying a postcolonial analytical lens to the texts from the dominant discourse, it became evident to me that authors who discuss violence against South Asian women describe a wide variety of experiences such as dowry, sati, physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, violence from members of the extended family, societal gender roles and community expectations. They identify numerous behaviours, situations, and experiences, such as those mentioned above, as violent, and oppressive towards South Asian women. As a reader, it is easy to infer that the dominant discourse indicates the existence depth and diversity of these women's experiences of violence given the variety of experiences discussed. However, upon reading these works, there are many ways in which their experiences are siloed by seemingly arbitrary parameters.

This can be seen in the way that the dominant discourse almost exclusively discusses the experiences of South Asian women who are married. The dominant discourse frames violence as an experience which only occurs after a woman is married to a man who is either violent himself or who comes from a violent family (Babu & Kar, 2009; Babu & Kar, 2010; Kimuna, Djamba, Ciciurkaite & Cherukuri, 2013; Krishnan et al., 2012; Rahman, Nakamura, Seino & Kizuki, 2013; Sarkar, 2010; Sayem, Begum & Moneesha, 2012). This narrow viewpoint also frames literature within the discourse which discusses dowry exchanges, the practice of sati, honour killings, violence from extended family members, and gender roles as if these practices do not impact women outside of marriages. Some scholars justify this narrow focus by saying:

... men culturally possess women; that manhood is associated with violence and that violence is widely accepted as a form of behavior. Husbands justify this act that they

have all rights to beat his wife. And, it is told to the girl before marriage that she should adjust to whatever happens after marriage (Sarkar, 2010 p. 315).

Similarly, other scholars attribute their specific focus on married women to the notion that South Asian women get married young. Rahman, Nakamura, Seinoc and Kizuki (2013 p. 10) describe this assumption by saying, “early marriage may perpetuate an unequal society, increasing female vulnerability, powerlessness, and assetlessness, as well as restricting personal, educational, and psychological development and having hazardous health effects.”

Additionally, the findings and conclusions of much of the dominant discourse are oversimplified and inferiorizing because they almost exclusively rely on positivistic, colonial research methods such as statistical surveys or exploratory, ethnographic interviews. Such practices and methods of knowledge production are built on models which were created and implemented to subjugate and oppress colonial subjects and racialized peoples in the Global South and are therefore acting as evolved mechanisms of the same colonial technologies (Gould, 1996; Loomba, 1998; Stepan, 1982). Because these methods are implemented in the dominant discourse about violence against South Asian women, it serves to uphold the colonial project and frame the experiences and understandings of these women in opposition to the Western woman.

The dominant discourse also frequently discusses the notion of *empowerment* as a solution or response for South Asian women who have experienced violence. Oftentimes this type of empowerment is suggested through the creation and implementation of programs which promote increased educational attainment and/or economic participation from South Asian women (Boyle, Georgiades, Cullen & Racine, 2009; Krishnan et al., 2012; Rahman, Hoque & Makinoda, 2011; Simister & Mehta, 2010). Much of the dominant discourse proposes that “empowering” South Asian women through education or economics either intentionally or

inadvertently place the blame of violence on these women for not being educated enough, independent enough or contributing to their household enough. Pandey, Dutt, and Banerjee (2009 p. 1183) suggest that, “providing some kind of vocational training to both men and women will not only augment the family income, but it also will have a salutary effect on domestic violence by its economic empowerment of women.” Other scholars such as Sabri, Renner, Stockman, Mittal, and Decker (2014 p. 296) determine that, “it is necessary to empower victims to reduce their dependence on dangerous abusive partners through education and employment opportunities.” This is another example of the ways in which South Asian women are constantly measured against Western women in a binary comparison. The dominant discourse sends the message that if a woman is not formally educated or financially independent in the ways that are the norms for a Western woman, her experiences of violence can be justified and explained as a consequence of her inadequacy. The notion of empowerment also suggests that South Asian women require Western intervention in order to be *enlightened* and taught how to *better themselves* through channels such as education and workforce participation.

Another colonial ideology that is frequently found within this dominant discourse is the fascination with “understanding” and “defining” experiences of violence in South Asia. This is prevalent in articles that strive to highlight the ways that South Asian violence against women is different or more aggressive than other regions or cultures (Kalokhe et al., 2015). This can also be seen when authors aim to discuss the determinants of violence against women in South Asia or specific traditions and practices such as arranged marriages, dowry exchanges, sati, honour killings, or sex selective pregnancies (Babu & Kar, 2010; Das et al., 2013; Mahapatro, R. N. Gupta & V. Gupta, 2012; Mahapatro, R. N. Gupta, V. Gupta & Kundu, 2011; Rahman, Nakamura, Seino & Kizuki, 2013). Within the dominant discourse, such topics are discussed

solely from a Western, colonial perspective where South Asian people are positioned as “backward”, “barbaric”, and “violent” for partaking in such traditions or behaviours. These topics are all approached through the white gaze and employ imagery and language which suggest the need for Western, “civilized” intervention in order to “save” and “protect” these women from their “patriarchal”, “oppressive” culture.

A postcolonial discourse analysis accounts for the subjective nature of researcher positionality during the analysis of the dominant discourse. My discussion in the following section will highlight overarching themes which arose from my analysis while I was employing a postcolonial lens to these articles and are inherently informed by my lived experiences and worldview. I found that within this dominant discourse, many of the authors were citing each other and contributing to an echo chamber of sorts which allowed for distinct and reoccurring themes to become evident. Across the 75 articles that were analyzed for the purpose of this discourse analysis, I found four main themes which emerged very quickly and consistently throughout my analysis of the dominant discourse on violence against South Asian women. The first theme is the use of colonial research methods to capture the experiences of people whose ways of knowing and being are rooted in histories and realities which cannot be measured through standardized tools. The next significant theme is the construction of a monolithic South Asia through the homogenization of experiences and the framing of a very stagnant South Asian “culture”. Another notable theme is the perpetuation of colonial capitalism veiled in neoliberal ideologies of economic participation, worth and possibility. Additionally, an essential theme in understanding the relevance of this project is the production of the “Third World Woman” as inherently lesser than the Western woman through the ideals of white feminism (Mohanty,

1984). Every article which was analyzed for this project demonstrated at least one of these themes and countless articles contributed to all these themes.

DISCUSSION

Colonial Research Methods

Many of the articles analyzed for the purpose of this discourse analysis utilized a standardized survey to gather data about violence against South Asian women. Several researchers utilize surveys such as the National Family Health Survey and the Demographic and Health Survey which pose general questions with standardized answers about experiences of gender-based violence and abuse among South Asian women. Upon investigating the structure and implementation of such standardized surveys, I came to realize that they were created, distributed and carried out using the guidelines outlined by the United Nations (UN) in their report titled “Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence against Women – Statistical Surveys” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2014). This report clearly places hegemonic value on the UN’s “universal” definition of violence against women as well as their method quantifying such experiences for the purpose of comparing and contrasting global data.

The issue lies in the fact that organizations contracted by the UN around the world set out on missions to quantify and capture generalizable “facts” about violence against women. Follingstad (2017) articulates the numerous problematic assumptions that are involved in the process of collecting statistical data and using surveying tools on such a topic. There are many inherent assumptions in global or large scale surveys, a few of which she highlights are: that most people agree on what violence and abuse are, that the existence of abuse and violence can be measured and documented, that self-reporting is appropriate, adequate and accurate, and that

the same methodologies can be employed regardless of a person's race, sexuality, class, etc. (Follingstad, 2017). Research on violence against women has primarily been structured to measure the experiences of white women and the use of the same methodologies on non-white communities has countless flaws and harmful implications, as will be further discussed in the sections to follow.

I decided to take a specific look at the National Family Health Survey because it is referenced as the main data source for numerous articles that aim to discuss intimate partner violence in India and was cited frequently throughout the dominant discourse to measure “improvements” over years or compare and contrast statistics across geographic regions. It consists of four main surveys (Biomarker, Household, Men's, and Women's) which aim to measure various aspects of health and wellbeing (*National Family Health Survey*, n.d.). The women's survey is the longest of the four with almost 1000 questions in total. A few sections overlap between the men's and women's surveys, but only women are asked about their children's health, nutrition, immunization, pregnancy, postnatal care, and “household relations” (the section where they ask about domestic violence and abuse) (*National Family Health Survey*, n.d.). Rather than being asked questions from any of these categories, men are only asked about their attitudes towards gender roles. The structure of these surveys as well as the categories assigned to each gender indicates a clear disparity in data collection.

As a result of the five additional survey sections that women are asked, the ethics of this survey is worth questioning. Women are only asked about their “household relations” or any questions relating to experiences of abuse and violence after already answering over 800 questions about their children, pregnancy, menstruation, decision to implement family planning, birth control or have an abortion as well as their access to health care before, during and after

their pregnancy. With such a line of intense, invasive questioning, it is likely that the women participating in these surveys experience emotional exhaustion, fatigue, or burnout from sharing such vulnerable details of their lives with a stranger for the purpose of data collection.

Similarly, there are other methodological, recruitment, and interviewing techniques that indicate the inappropriate and potentially harmful nature of this surveying process. An example of this is the element of collectivism and communal sharing of spaces which is extremely common in South Asia in countries, such as India, with high population densities. The reality of joint families, shared housing, and smaller living spaces increases the likelihood that women were not alone or in a private setting during the time of the survey. Additionally, the survey is created in English and translated into native languages by interviewers. This allows for the possibility of misinterpretation and miscommunication as well as inconsistencies in translation depending on the capabilities of the interviewer (Khan et al., 2007). This survey also only asks married women between the ages of 15-49 about their experiences with sexual relationships, birth control or family planning, pregnancy, or experiences of violence and abuse. It completely neglects the experience of women who may have these experiences who are unmarried, separated, divorced, or widowed and who are outside of their desired age range. For a survey that claims to represent the experiences of individuals and families across India, these are only a few of the gaps and considerations which make its findings impossible to generalize.

Congruently, the ways that authors select aspects of the survey to analyze also perpetuates colonial technologies in the dominant discourse. Some of the ways they do this is by fixating their analysis on the specific regions within a given country such as urban, rural or slum areas. Similarly, some authors choose to focus their analysis on a specific caste, gender, age group, or religious group within a given geographic area. As I will deconstruct further in the

following section of my analysis, such divides do not imply homogeneity within the group and such groupings only serve to erase and disregard numerous aspects of these individuals' identities as well as historical contexts which make their experiences unique (Khan et al., 2007; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012). Many of the scholars who analyze the findings of surveys such as the National Family Health Survey contribute to the same colonial project by using these methods to paint South Asia as a homogenous group that can be studied, measured, and understood by outsiders. Practices such as searching for “statistical significance” and citing literature that supports your own conclusions are commonplace in Eurocentric, Western research methods.

Based on my analysis of the contemporary dominant discourse, there are only a handful of authors whose work is being showcased and cited in the discourse. The same scholars often cite one another in their work and often build upon each other's analysis of the same surveys. By doing this, not only are these scholars using limited, narrow, colonial research methods for their analysis, they are only amplifying the voices and works of scholars who are doing the same. These methods are used to infer conclusions about South Asian women by citing other authors that have made similar conclusions and perpetuate tropes and stereotypes which identify South Asian culture as the scapegoat for violence. Many researchers are trained to utilize such practices to validate their findings and justify the conclusions they are drawing in their work. Research methods that are not actively anti-colonial in nature inherently contribute to the colonial project in the ways that they gather data, conduct analysis, and conclude their findings. Without an integration of perspectives and methods that uplift the voices and experiences of South Asian survivors of violence, the dominant discourse creates an echo chamber for scholars to recycle the same generalized conclusions about this demographic without critical thought.

Many postcolonial scholars highlight the ways that Western, Eurocentric means of knowledge production suppress and marginalize ways of knowing and being that are indigenous to the people and the lands being studied (Chilisa, 2005; Loomba, 1998; Said, 1978). Audre Lorde's (1984) famous saying, "for the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" holds true for the work of scholars who are contributing to this dominant discourse. Through utilizing colonial research methods, colonialism is being upheld through these studies and research is only benefitting oppressive institutions, such as the UN, by allowing for continued the surveillance, regulation, and classification of brown bodies in South Asia. The dominant discourse and its use of such methods as well as its reproduction and repackaging of colonial knowledge systems speaks on behalf of South Asian women about their experiences of violence.

Monolithic South Asia

Another consistent theme throughout the dominant discourse is the construction of a monolithic, homogenous South Asia. In order to begin dissecting this notion, it is crucial to investigate historiographic accounts of colonization and recognize the diversity of the people in the land that makes up the South Asian subcontinent. Western colonialism and imperialism have a long history, involving European and American exerting power and control over a variety of different peoples, cultures, and regions (Prasad, 2003). While this implies the heterogeneity of those impacted by colonialism, Young (2001) contests that, as far as the colonized peoples were concerned, the consequences of colonial practices were largely the same; the attempted domination and subjugation of the colonized. After gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1947, it was evident that India's developments was left distorted and the social, political, and economic problems, such as mass poverty and religious and caste conflict, could be blamed

on the pervasiveness of colonialism (Chakrabarty, 2000). There was a desire to produce an “Indian people” and mobilize them in their united struggle against the British (Chandra, 1979). Although this shared struggle is significant and the ideas of nationalism which emerged as a result of independence is prominent, there remained no unitary “nation” to speak for (Guha, 1982).

Precolonial India was made up of hundreds of coexisting communities, each with their own ethnicities, languages, religions, castes etc. (Kavira, 1994). This plurality that cannot be packaged into a singular, monolithic, or archetype despite British accounts of colonial history striving to do so. Much of the Eurocentric whitewashing of precolonial Indian history was led by British historians in the Cambridge School of historiography who described the land and the people as “underdeveloped”, “backward”, “barbaric” and worked to delegitimize older narratives of these communities (Mantena, 2007; Shukla, 2001). Orientalism, Eurocentrism and similar colonial technologies are upheld and reproduced throughout the dominant discourse about violence against South Asian women, predominantly in the ways that the experiences of these women are stripped of their heterogeneity and tied to notions of a violent South Asian “culture”.

Within the articles which were analyzed for the purpose of this project, a majority of scholars describe South Asian “culture” as patriarchal, stagnant, and contingent on male dominance and female submission. These descriptions paint the picture that South Asia and its people have carry these cultural ideologies and traditions which are deeply rooted in South Asian ways of being. However, the postcolonial feminist scholars describe that many of the precolonial communities in South Asia were in fact matriarchal societies and even those that were led by men placed great value on the women in their lives (McEwan, 2001; Mody, 2017;

Patil, 1973). Defining South Asian culture as violently patriarchal is harmful because it implies that South Asia has one uniform culture and that women are regarded with little to no respect or reverence in these cultures, when both are historically inaccurate when there exist communities in South India which remain matriarchal (Ehrenfels, 1953; Patil, 1973).

The danger of drawing large-scale generalizations is equally as significant as homogenizing the experiences of narrower demographics. In both circumstances, the experiences and realities of many are lost or overshadowed in an attempt to showcase only the experiences that can be viewed as shared within the demographic and can be broadly generalizable. In doing this, the experiences of some are portrayed as the experiences of many which only further perpetuates the colonial project by erasing the inherent nuances and heterogeneity. Some of the articles that were analyzed for this project used language such as, “[domestic violence] might be related to the fact that men culturally possess women; that manhood is associated with violence and that violence is widely accepted as a form of behavior” (Sarkar, 2010, p. 315). Similarly, Babu and Kar (2010, p. 136) describe that the “widespread prevalence of domestic violence is a reflection of deep-rooted gender inequalities that persist across India.”

It is important to recognize the ways that colonization has fabricated narratives about South Asian culture and people and the ways these narratives are being carried forward and reproduced in the contemporary discourse. Césaire (1972) highlights the way that colonizers consciously frame the colonized as barbaric in order to absolve themselves and legitimize their violence. He describes colonial conquests and the dehumanization of the colonial subject as a “boomerang effect” (p. 41) which actually indicate the lack on humanity among the colonizer (Césaire, 1972). In their efforts to dehumanizing the Other, colonizers are avoiding the ways they themselves lack civility, demonstrate violence, and embody the characteristics they

reserve for the colonized. Western scholars contribute to a discourse that frames South Asia as a backward, patriarchal, violent, monolithic society before they use the same frame of reference to discuss the thousands of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIW) on the land they occupy. The colonial project is upheld so long as Western knowledge producers focus on the barbaric, backwards, uncivilized ways of being in the colonized East and continue to hold themselves as the pinnacle of good, just, and fair society.

Neoliberalism & Colonial Capitalism

Postcolonial scholars identify unique characteristics modern Western colonialism, namely the ways that Western colonial nations were economically involved in the nations they colonized (Loomba, 1998; Prasad, 2003; Young, 2001). Not only did they extract wealth from the peoples and lands which they conquered, they also maintained a complex structure of unequal exchange that made the colonies economically dependent upon the Western colonial nations (Prasad, 2003). This economic imbalance created by modern Western colonialism served as a means to justify the subjugation of these lands and incentivised colonization within the realm of culture and ideology as well (Loomba, 1998; Prasad, 2003). From this intricate system of oppression, ideologies of modernity and colonial capitalism emerge.

In the dominant discourse, economic prosperity, employment, and financial independence are frequently described as a way out of violent situations for South Asian women. The literature often proposes the creation of economic opportunities, microcredit or micro loaning systems, and other means of acquiring an income as solutions to both prevent and respond to violence against women. These propositions often encourage women to gain employment so that they could “contribute to the household” and gain respect and independence from their husband (Fisher,

2010; Jayasuriya, Wijewardena & Axemo, 2011; Krishnan, et al., 2012; Rahman, Hoque & Makinoda, 2011; Sayem, Begum & Moneesha, 2012) These articles indicate that women are only worthy of safety, security, and a relationship without violence if they are financially contributing to the economy and their household.

Similarly, the dominant discourse describes the ways that South Asian “culture” commodifies women through the practice of dowry exchanges. Dowries are explained as a means for a woman’s family to lessen their “financial burden” (Fisher, 2010) and for a woman to “cover her expenses” in her new marital family (Kalokhe, et al., 2015). Women’s existence within marriages are frequently described in a transactional manner which imply that her submission, subservience, and silence is bought for the price of the dowry. In reality, dowry exchanges have historically existed as a means to provide women with their inherited share of their parental estate upon marriage and provide a financial foundation for her new life with her husband (Harrell & Dickey, 1985). Only showcasing data that compares women to property which can be bought and owned furthers the narrative that they are worthy of safety, protection, and personhood when they are participating in the economy and contributing to household finances.

The notion of economic opportunity as a way out of violence has led to many proposed and implemented microcredit and micro lending programs across South Asia. Scholars such as Sayem, Begum, and Moneesha (2012) suggest microcredit lending programs as a solution to domestic violence because it economic participation would allegedly shift women from “housewives to self-sufficient women, and from passive family members to active ones” (p. 658). A number of scholars (Elahi & Danopoulos, 2004; Levin, 2012; Wichterich, 2017) have examined and critiqued microcredit programs and their implementation in South Asia as a means

of alleviating poverty. Although many scholars within the dominant discourse posit that economic independence via microcredit programs is a way for women to prevent and escape violence, such programs have proven to fail and cause significant damage. Microcredit institutions are largely unregulated and are prone to approving exploitative loans with significantly high interest rates (Levin, 2012). Suggesting that microcredit lending programs are a solution to violence against women in South Asia both perpetuates the idea that women's worth is inherently tied to capitalism and justifies violence against women who do not contribute financially to their household.

As a result of colonial capitalist and neoliberal logics, ideologies of modernity, development and “progress” anchor the continued exploitation of women and rural workers. When worthiness is tied to workforce participation and economic involvement is prioritized above all else, the increased divide between classes contributes to what Walker (2008) refers to as internal colonization. Internal colonization is the materialization and reproduction of colonial technologies of subjugation (Walker, 2008). By placing hegemonic value on participation and “progress”, the class struggle is intensified. This contributes to the creation and implementation of colonial ideologies and policies which further oppress those precarious workers, rural farmers, women, and members of specific castes (Walker, 2008). The idea of women's independence and liberation being tied to employment and financial independence stems from white, Western feminist logics. When those same notions are applied to women in South Asia and in the Third World, they contribute to structures that uphold the colonial project.

The Third World Woman & White Feminism

As demonstrated above, off of the aforementioned themes can be tied to the ways in which the dominant discourse about violence against South Asian women construct the “Third World Woman” and perpetuate the ideals of white Western feminism. It is important to conceptualize the terminology “Third World Woman” through a critical lens and my use of it stems from Mohanty’s (1984) work where she identifies the necessity of carving out a space in the discourse for women who occupy spaces outside of the Western world. Western feminist discourses often take up womanhood by discussing women as an oppressed group (Mohanty, 1984). However, because this is primarily situated in the context of white womanhood, discussions of women’s experiences outside of the West are often rooted in colonialism. Mohanty (1984) pinpoints the ways in which white feminism constructs their ideologies on the basis of cohesion and shared struggle against patriarchal systems but simultaneously situates Third World women outside of these boundaries and therefore not progressive enough to share in the fight.

The dominant discourse is littered with this “us” versus “them” imagery where Third World women are described only in terms of lack. These descriptions imply that the standard of freedom, liberation, and independence – the hallmarks of white feminism – should be the goal for South Asian women and their current distance from these goals indicate their personal shortcomings. Almost every single article that was evaluated for this discourse analysis concluded that education, or lack thereof, was a contributing factor to women’s experiences of violence. South Asian women are also often described as “illiterate”, “passive”, “submissive”, “sexually oppressed”, and “traditional” in the discourse. Mohanty (1984) perfectly describes this process as the continued underdevelopment of the third world in which:

[...] third world women as a group or category are automatically and necessarily defined as: religious (read "not progressive"), family-oriented (read "traditional"), legal minors (read "they-are-still-not-conscious-of-their-rights"), illiterate (read "ignorant"), domestic (read "backward") and sometimes revolutionary (read "their-country-is-in-a-state-of-war-they- must-fight!"). This is how the "third world difference" is produced (p. 352).

Positioning South Asian women as illiterate and helpless, and framing an entire geographical regions as “underdeveloped” are examples of the ways that scholars often essentialize South Asian women, draw conclusions based on their ways of knowing and being, and therefore contribute to a narrative which deems South Asian norms, cultural practices, and traditions as the contributors and perpetrators of violence. These are examples of the way that research and discourse can contribute to the colonial project of “progress” and “enlightenment”. By positioning white women and the ideals of white feminism as the standard to which all women should strive, the dominant discourse homogenizes Third World women as the Other whose experiences are primitive and uncivilized.

In her book *Desire for Development: Whiteness, Gender and the Helping Imperative*, Barbra Heron (2007) writes about the way that the Third World is constructed as a place of suffering, starvation and bloodshed which requires Western involvement to be saved from itself. This takes place alongside a fascination and exoticism of the Other through their cuisine, clothing, and culture (Heron, 2007). She describes process of Western women’s empowerment through the rise of white feminism where white bourgeois women were seen as respectable, autonomous, and self-sustaining (Heron, 2007). This paved the way for these women, empowered by evangelicalism and the church, to “help” the poor, the working class, and enslaved peoples (Heron, 2007). To incentivise development work among wealthy white women,

a discourse was created where their interventions in the Third World was romanticized as missions of caring, saving, and being transformed by the Other (Heron, 2007).

In order for the industry of development work to exist, there must exist a discourse of the lesser, backward, oppressed Third World that is in need of saving by white “helpers”. This problematic development discourse overlaps and intertwines itself within the discourse of violence against South Asian women. In both discourses, the Third World Woman is described as incapable of saving herself, as a victim of the oppressive structures of the Third World, and as lacking the resources to succeed. South Asian women are describes as being confined by the violent patriarchy, forced to perform household chores and care for children, and deprived of economic independence. Cultural practices such as dowry exchanges are depicted as a mechanism to reduce women to the status of property which can be bought and sold without her consent. All of these are examples of the ways which discourse creates a narrative that encourages colonial involvement under the guise of development and saviourism.

CONCLUSION

This critical discourse analysis utilized the tenets of postcolonial theory to investigate the ways that the dominant discourse about violence against South Asian women upholds colonial technologies. Although there are numerous ways that such technologies appear and are maintained throughout the discourse, the most prevalent and reoccurring themes were the use of colonial research methods, the construction of a monolithic South Asia, the pervasiveness of neoliberalism and colonial capitalism, and the dichotomy of the Third World Woman and white feminism. These findings indicate that Western academic literature and “accredited” sources of knowledge production are heavily entrenched in colonial ideologies and can have harmful

outcomes for South Asian women if used to influence the creation and implementation of policies and practices both internationally and domestically.

The implications of these findings for the field of social work are significant at every level. On an individual level, it is important for social workers, namely those intentionally providing services for South Asian women and cultural groups, to understand their implicit biases about this demographic. How are your understandings of South Asian women crafted? Do they account for the plurality and complexity of their experiences rather than perpetuate generalizations and assumptions about their culture, religion, traditions etc.? On a broader level, we must challenge Western knowledge production and the ways in which it carries forward colonialism. This includes questioning who is conducting research about South Asian people and the methods and theories they are utilizing in their work. Are they doing research *about* South Asian women or *with* South Asian women? Research is often used to inform policies and practices within the field of social work, so we must remain critical of this production of knowledge and ensure that it accounts for the appropriate historical, social, and cultural factors.

Although this project primarily highlights the flaws and problematics of the dominant discourse about violence against South Asian women, it is equally as important to uplift the discourse of postcolonial scholars who discuss the experiences of individuals in South Asia while remaining cognizant of the implications and remnants of colonization. We must also be weary of studies which conclude by calling for more colonial research on the subject. We must seek out research that is aware of its ontological and epistemological implications, political positioning, and ethical obligations. These methods will create a bigger space for a discourse which is critical of the white gaze and works against colonial technologies and the Western cis-heteropatriarchy.

The primary limitation of this study is that significant amounts of indigenous knowledge, teachings, and ways of being have been stripped from South Asian people through the process of colonization. As a result, these Western, colonial understandings of South Asia and South Asian people have been imposed on us for centuries and in many ways have been internalized in the ways we understand ourselves and exist in the world. It is therefore challenging to conceptualize a way in which South Asian people can exist in ways that are intuitive and regain autonomy outside of colonial structures. I intentionally and purposefully choose not to offer alternative ways to respond to violence against South Asian women because I believe that the answer does not lie within academic texts nor do I believe that I hold the solution. As a collectivist society, South Asian peoples are equipped with centuries worth of knowledge and traditions that emphasize community care and support for those who have been harmed and those who cause harm.

South Asian ways of being and knowing are deeply complex, tied to culture, language, religion, and can only be conceptualized in an anti-colonial framework. It is imperative to acknowledge and account for the destruction and erasure that was colonization. As a result of this history, there is no one way to discuss violence against South Asian women or their ways of being and knowing. Colonial research methods and tools cannot describe or encapsulate the complexities of something so intuitive such as these ways of being and knowing as well as intergenerational knowledge. In the dominant discourse, women are regarded as the keepers of familial honour, purity, and pride. In reality, South Asian women are more adequately knowledge keepers, teachers, and caregivers.

APPENDIX A

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