In Hajar’s Footsteps: A De-Colonial and Islamic Ethic of Care

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Abstract

This dissertation radically reimagines the boundaries of political theory as a practice and as a tradition in three ways. First, I surface the ableist and colonial paradigm of recognition that shapes the study of Islam and the “Muslim Other” in comparative political theory and care ethics. The colonial legacy of political theory lives on within the textual sensibilities of political theorists, inherited from white-orientated reading practices, epistemic white privilege, and matricide as an epistemological orientation. Refusing to (un)learn how colonial histories of sense-contact have shaped our practices of reading and writing compromises the witnessing capacities of political theorists. In turn, we become complicit in authoring and authorizing colonial world-building practices. Second, I trace how white-orientated and heteropatriarchal conceptions of citizenship travel through the inheritance of the nation-state. Imperial readings of disability, (inter)dependency and care, both within and outside the Islamic tradition, render Muslim women and disabled Muslims as misfits in our knowledge relations. Through autoethnography I argue care-based modes of knowing Islam are needed to theorize accessibility because 1) disabled Muslims and care-givers remain visible only through frames of charity or tragedy; 2) situations of dependency care render one ontologically and epistemically incapable of sensing and knowing the Islamic; 3) interpretive authority is sanctioned by legal scholars, Muslim men, or white and secular scholars; and 4) narratives of informal care-giving, care-based epistemologies of Islam and the epistemic authority of disabled Muslims and Muslim women are denigrated within the ecology of Islamic knowledges. I design various care-based and intersectional Islamic technologies by which (non)Muslims can harness care as a critical sensibility that orients how we read, write and think about what is “Islamic”, whose bodies we
identify as interpretive authorities, and which types of knowledge we authorize as “Islam.”

Third, I turn away from imagining moral epistemologies of care to focus on the praxis behind care-based epistemologies of Islam and its vast potential for coalitional politics and de-colonial movement building. By de-centering whiteness, I re-conceive what it means to be a Muslim on Turtle Island and practice Islam in a settler-colonial society.
Lay Summary

In the traditions of political theory and Islam, disability, care and dependency are perceived as tragedies, punishments and tests that seriously limit one’s ability to be an independent, free and rational person. Just as racist political theorists have written off Muslims as passive, uncivilised, dependent and obedient followers of Islam, the contributions of disabled Muslims and Muslim women are cast to the margins of Islamic knowledge systems. By reflecting on my family’s situation in a relationship of dependency care, I offer a care-based way of knowing Islam and doing political theory that radically re-imagines how we understand tradition, knowledge production and personhood. A method that centres care-work and interdependency helps us not only account for the colonial legacy of the Islamic tradition and political theory as a practice, but it also opens up space to re-imagine relations of interdependency (and responsibility) between Muslims and Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island.
Preface

I identified and designed this research program in consultation with my supervisory committee.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................................... iii

Lay Summary ........................................................................................................................................... v

Preface ...................................................................................................................................................... vi

Table of Contents .................................................................................................................................. vii

List of Tables ............................................................................................................................................ xi

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................. xii

Dedication ................................................................................................................................................ xvi

Chapter 1: In the Horizons and In the Selves ....................................................................................... 1

1.1 Breaking the Bell Jar of Political Theory ......................................................................................... 5

1.2 Inhabiting A Fractured Loci: Positionality and Complicit Scholarship ...................................... 13

1.3 Political Theory as a Care-Based Epistemology ......................................................................... 19

1.4 In the Horizons: Sense, Sensibility and Sense as an Ability .......................................................... 25

1.5 Travel and Empathy: White-Orientated Modes of Knowing .......................................................... 30

1.6 Hearing Different Voices .................................................................................................................. 36

1.7 Connection-Based Modes of Knowing ............................................................................................ 47

1.8 With Loving Eyes: The Political Theorist as a Witness ................................................................. 52

1.9 Research Questions ......................................................................................................................... 62

Chapter 2: In the Waiting Room of History ......................................................................................... 68

2.1 The Plight of Zaynab and Bishan Singh ......................................................................................... 68

2.2 Through Whiteness or By Death: The Colonial Politics of Recognition ...................................... 76

2.3 Forced Intimacy and the Master’s Refusal to Respond ................................................................. 87
2.4  Darkness → Light / Dependency → Freedom ..........................................................96
2.5  The White Body as a Body that Reads, Feels .........................................................103
2.6  The Relational Phenomenology of Sense as an Ability: Translation as Sanitization and
     Domestication ...........................................................................................................109
2.7  Resistant Texts and Mis-Fits ...................................................................................115
2.8  Hermeneutical Injustice and Epistemic Privilege ....................................................124
2.9  The Poetics of Mourning: Maternity and the Mother(land) as Sites of Violence ......130
     2.9.1  Mourning the Motherland .............................................................................133
     2.9.2  The Dead Body in the Master’s Chambers .....................................................136
     2.9.3  A Childless Mother and the Spectre of the Colonial Metropole ......................140

Chapter 3: In the Belly of the Whale ..............................................................................147
     3.1  Body-Sense, Radical Relationality and the Witness .............................................149
     3.2  Mapping Points of Arrival ..................................................................................152
     3.3  Islam as a De-Colonial Theology of Liberation ..................................................155
     3.4  To be a Maker of Islam ........................................................................................159
     3.5  The Narrative Textures of a Living Tradition .......................................................165
     3.6  Islamic-Medical Model of Reading Disability and Dependency .........................166
     3.7  Re-Reading Code Blue .......................................................................................169
     3.8  Reading in the Dark with Yunus .........................................................................175
     3.9  Zulumāt as Radical Subjectivity: The Land and Body as Witness .......................181

Chapter 4: In Hajar’s Footsteps ....................................................................................188
     4.1  Tradition as Birth-Work not Birthright .............................................................201
     4.1.1  Matricide as an Epistemological Orientation ................................................206
4.1.2 The Spectral Histories of Dependency Care ..............................................211
4.1.3 Maternity as an Aporia ..................................................................................215
4.2 The Womb and the World: An Islamic-Feminist Ontology of the Maternal Body.....218
4.3 The Hajar Paradigm: Historicizing Maternity as a Category of Analysis ..............222
4.4 In the Master’s Care: (De)Veiling the (M)Other .............................................226
4.5 Staring, the White Gaze and the Intimacy of Wake-Work ..................................230
4.6 Translating Anger as a Shared Labour of Care ...............................................234
4.7 The Abuse of Witness: Unveiling as Violation ...............................................239
4.8 To be Estranged from our Mother(land)s .........................................................244
4.9 Learning to Love our Mothers .........................................................................253

Chapter 5: In the Courtyard ....................................................................................260

5.1 Dihlîz: An Islamic Paradigm of Access............................................................260
5.2 Unlearning Care as Guardianship and Gatekeeping ...........................................266
5.3 Practicing Intersectional Islam on Turtle Island ..............................................269
5.4 The De-Colonial Potential of Care-Based Epistemologies of Islam ....................280
5.5 The Stench of Oppression: Smell as an Islamic Sensibility .................................281
5.6 The Mujadila Praxis: A Care-Based and Islamic Mode of Knowing .......................284
5.7 Grounded Relationalities and the Land .............................................................290
5.8 Conclusion: Re-Visiting Intentionality ...............................................................295
5.9 Do the colonial intentions of dead white guys matter? ......................................297
5.10 Niyyah: Allah as an Ever-Present Spectator in our Knowledge Relations ..........302
5.11 In Between Deen and Dunya: Weaving De-Colonial Futures ..............................309
5.12 Ameen ..................................................................................................................313
List of Tables

Table 1.1 Methods and Sensibilities of Political Theory as a Care-Based Epistemology

..........................................................21
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Writing this dissertation has felt like a great unravelling. I have collected every sentence, every piece of wisdom, from the great depths of joy, grief and miracle. It is a story of losing myself and my sense of place in the world only to be returned from the belly of the whale in the most gentle and compassionate way by the most wonderful community of care. I am incredibly grateful for my family, near and far, for their patience and trust in my dream to pursue higher education. How worrying it must have been when I announced my decision to enroll in this program and move across the country just as Abu was coming home from the hospital. Back then, I only hoped to be a stronger pillar of support and advocate for you. Years later, in writing this dissertation, I have followed through on this promise. Every chapter is my way of speaking truth to the great injustice and violence we, along with every Muslim family situated in a relation of dependency care, have endured in medical spaces and within our relations. I have written this
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Dedication

For my Ami Jaan and Abu Jaan
Chapter 1: In the Horizons and In the Selves

We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth.

But is it not sufficient concerning your Sustainer that He is, over all things, a Witness?

Surah Fussilat (Explained in Detail) 14:53

Be ever steadfast in your devotion to Allah, bearing witness to the truth in all equity; and never let hatred of anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Be just: this is closest to being Allah-conscious. And remain conscious of Allah: verily, Allah is aware of all that you do.

Surah Al-Ma'idah (The Table Spread with Food) 5:8

O my Sustainer! Open for me my chest (grant me self-confidence, contentment, and boldness); Ease my task for me; And untie the knot from my tongue; that they may understand my speech”

Surah Ta-Ha 20:25-28

What haunts me is that the white supremacist responsible for the Quebec Mosque shooting in January 2017 was a political science student at a Canadian university. When teaching in a classroom, or gathering in a Masjid, like many other Muslims, I have developed a neurotic habit of always searching for the points of exit in the room and mapping out escape plans. Each time I am reminded that there is no place to hide; the innate openness of such spaces makes them defenseless against such hate. I also think a lot about the political science professors and teaching assistants in my (under)graduate studies who held space in their classrooms for students to experiment and air out their racist conceptions of personhood, democratization and civilizational progress. Their contributions were celebrated as natural intelligence or nuanced and critical thinking. Some of these individuals are now thought-leaders of the alt-right movement in Canada, work for major policy think-tanks or provincial and federal ministries, and others have mobilized serious threats against Muslim and migrant communities and organize hate-filled rallies to yell at racialized children to “go back to your country” as they leave school.

It is no secret that political science as a field and as a tradition has been oriented by, and deeply embedded within, white supremacist projects of nation-building and sustaining racial hierarchies (Blatt 2018). Just as hate groups thrive in the anonymity of cyberspace (Awan and
Barlow 2016), Islamophobia in political theory is camouflaged by practices of pedagogy and scholarship that dismiss the significance of historicity, positionality and intentionality in knowledge production and consumption. Whether a professor or student harbors feelings of hostility towards Muslims or judgments about the “inferiority of Islam” is rendered irrelevant to their ability to conduct research, teach or analyze Islam as a theoretical category of analysis (Grosfoguel 2010). There is also little accountability for Islamophobic violence and discrimination against students by faculty and staff (Mir 2014). We continue to design syllabi and lesson plans that legitimize and naturalize orientalist conceptions of Islam and Muslims as terrorists, Muslims as invaders, Muslimahs as sexually repressed victims of Muslim men or Muslims as the enemy (Ahmad 2018). Institutionally, Islamophobic knowledge and pedagogical practices “place Muslims in a position to act contrary to their faith” such as placing exams on religious holidays and refusing students accommodation (Ahmadi et al. 2018). Or, Islamophobia in political science looks like educators demanding Muslim students to solely use white supremacist or western research paradigms and methods that may compromise Islamic ethics of knowledge production and consumption. In addition, there is no ethical demand for (non-)Muslim scholars, teachers or students to translate their study of Islam, or of Muslim communities, into political advocacy for anti-Islamophobic and anti-racist policies (Kendi 2019).

If I have learned anything in my time studying political science it is that the face of hate is not rooted in a lack of education, resources or ignorance. Hate is well-organized, hides behind dog-whistles, feeds on the insecurities of its hosts, and is steeped in a culture of entitlement and complacency. The stench of hate goes beyond what one person’s body can hold; if it is fed, harnessed and given a supporting environment, it becomes the air we breathe. Hate is the refusal to change, to open up how our boundaries of the self-same are predicated upon the exclusion and
erasure of others. It is the demand of others to meet our moral values, our anthropological minimum for personhood, while our sense of self remains off limits for critique. Hate is an inherited and enacted textual sensibility by which we read, write and teach in political science. It is underpinned by white supremacist and colonial conceptions of masculinity and racial superiority (Brindle 2016; K. M. Campbell 2014). Whether it is the indifference with which we consume images of police brutality against Black communities; the joy with which we celebrate violence against civilians as a win for our nation; the righteousness with which we author laws that endanger women by denying them access to safe and legal abortion services; the comfort with which we hold our loved ones closer as we support regimes and policies that tear apart families; hate is the force with which we settle and measure ourselves against the earth to develop a sense of place, of rootedness, through an Other’s displacement (Ahmed 2001).

The work of hate is inherited and learned as an orientation by which we sustain a social contract to not only refuse others access to the worlds and sense of self we inhabit but to build our sense of place and personhood on their backs. When hate becomes the air we breathe, we all become complicit in different ways. Unlearning such white supremacist and colonial textual sensibilities requires us to not only weed out Islamophobic knowledge practices but also anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism in our knowledge relations. Here, I am addressing multiple readerships, and engaging various interpretive communities, from Muslims living on Turtle Island, to Black, Indigenous and racialized political theorists, to white and non-Muslim political theorists to Muslims situated in relations of dependency care and Muslim women.

Unlearning hate we have inherited through colonial modes of knowing, and the hate we harbor for one another, is a multi-dimensional process that re-orient our sensibilities and bodyminds, transforms how we inhabit a place together, and restores our faculties of moral
witnessing in our knowledge relations. Writing this dissertation has felt like a circuitous
homecoming—of unlearning ten years’ worth of instruction in secular modes of critical inquiry
and finally re-translating and re-coding my political imaginary through the Islamic modes of
knowing I have always known, embodied and inhabited. I invite you to move with me through
this journey of return and bear witness to my struggle to think Islamically as I begin with relying
mostly on secular paradigms of thought and move homewards to inhabit my own breath in
critique.

What induced this great unravelling was becoming a primary care-giver for my father.
Political theory, as I knew it, came undone in tandem with my father’s stroke. The daily
pilgrimage of care-work has transformed my political imaginary and textual sensibilities. In
order to understand the poetic structure of my inquiry it is crucial to understand the
epistemological and moral dimensions of care-based knowing. I argue that knowledge
production and consumption in political theory is not a thought-based and logo-centric activity
performed by disembodied minds. Rather, such interpretive work is multi-sensorial and multi-
genерational, engages all dimensions of our bodyminds and is sustained by the care webs we are
rooted in and sustained by. In turn, it is only through my positionality as a Muslim care-giver, I
can re-imagine what it means to do political theory, and to be a political theorist.

My journey to develop a de-colonial and Islamic ethic of care originally began as a
criticism of Eva Kittay’s notion of “some mother’s child” and the colonial politics of recognition
within ethics of care literature. However, as I searched between the lines to find traces of the
Great White Mother, I found myself falling in love again, unable to let go of the “loving eyes”
with which I first read Kittay (Oliver 2001). Love’s Labour helped me find words to write about
my father as a disabled Muslim, to demand worlds in which my mother as a primary care-giver
living with chronic illness, too, is cared for, and to build relations in which my sisters as young carers are not left behind (Munawar 2014). Through colonial mapping of my social location as a dependency worker and racialized Muslim-Settler, I delineate not only the ethical obligations that arise from my situatedness in the netherworld of dependency care within the Muslim Ummah and the Canadian state, but also the orders of my complicity in authorizing and authoring coloniality (Segovia 2005). Such reflexive work can only be done through power-sensitive, connection-based, Islamic and care-based epistemologies that seek to uproot hate as an orientation and textual sensibility.

1.1 Breaking the Bell Jar of Political Theory

De-colonial scholarship, from a “non-Western” perspective, is boundary-transgressing, interdisciplinary and a practice of epistemic disobedience; this fragments my work into multiple “emerging” sub-fields within political theory such as ethics of care, Islamic de-colonial thought, and comparative political theory (Mignolo 2015). Contemporary scholarship on the “Islamic” within comparative political theory by scholars such as Andrew March, Fred Dallmayr and Roxanne Euben, aims to “journey to other shores” in search of non-Western traditions of political thought. Yet, my arrival to these the shores of Turtle Island as a Pakistani immigrant-settler and my re-embodiment of Islamic thinking tells a much different story of travel and requires different orders of responsibility and redress. Similarly, comparative ethics of care scholars seek to articulate anti-oppressive and care-based epistemologies rooted in Black, Indigenous and non-Western traditions of thought (Boulton and Brannelly 2015; Dalmiya 2016; R. angel K. Williams, Owens, and Syedullah 2016). Whether it’s fusing horizons, creating a dialogue across horizons, or working within a horizon, modes of inquiry within comparative political theory and comparative ethics range from translating fragments of non-western texts
through European categories of analysis, to a hermeneutics of interpreting the Other (Godrej 2009), to imagining models of cross-cultural inquiry rooted in non-western traditions. Although such emerging literature shows some commitment to the global struggles for liberation, there remains an ambivalence on how to reconcile its ambitions with, and where to place it within, the colonial legacy of political theory as a tradition. Beyond placing such intersectional and comparative inquiry within the field of political theory, there is the dilemma of placing myself among others as a political theorist.

Within this community of practice, I inhabit a fractured locus (Lugones 2010). For my work to be sensible to fellow political theorists, as indeed political theory, and to Muslims as Islamic, I have to do a lot of mapping, self-qualifying and connecting the dots to frame care-based epistemologies as legitimate modes of knowing the “Islamic” and the “Political”. Preserving for the reader a semblance of comfort and continuity for the sake of being intelligible to western, white and secular readers would follow the colonial logic of categorization (Quijano 2007), or “abyssal thinking” (Santos 2015); such logic is counter-intuitive to the de-colonial, care-based and Islamic ethos of this project. Instead of travelling to foreign lands, or containing Indigenous knowledges within European frames of reference through knowledge translation, de-colonial political theorists find hope not in perspectival reasoning, but in pluriversal and multi-sensorial reasoning that asks of the theorist to interpret through her situatedness in the world, without venturing to appropriate the land, epistemologies, and stories of the Other. Neither of these two sub-fields and their methodologies suffice, together or alone, to articulate the intersectional registers of analysis needed to articulate an Islamic ethic of care. In addition, existing paradigms of cross-cultural inquiry within these fields centre whiteness as a primary lens of relating to the Muslim Other and translating Islam to white readerships.
On one hand, despite its “democratic” intentions, CPT has yet to purge itself of its colonialist impulses by continuing to: 1) centre European categories of analysis as points of origin and entry into the “canon”, 2) assume that there exists a pure text, tradition, place or whole which is essentially Other (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 73), from where we can be one with the Other 3) take-for-granted the analytical leverage of organizing histories, modes of inquiry, texts and epistemologies into binaries (western/non-western, European/Other, East/West) and finally, 4) erase the labours of subaltern communities and scholars who have sustained and maintained their knowledge systems and relations through material and embedded histories of knowledge translation and transmission. As CPT scholars struggle with the colonialist discomfort of not-knowing, the work of comparative care ethics remains on the peripheries of ethics of care as the field has yet to be exorcised of the ghosts of colonial maternalism and the white maternal benefactress (Garland-Thomson 1997; Jacobs 2009). For racialized, Black and Indigenous CPT scholars, such not-knowing what lays beyond the western canon translates as a differential burden to know, “they must know about the oppressor’s culture, but the oppressor need know nothing about them” (wadud 2006, 64). Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz defines this as an “invisible invisibility” when “people do not even know that they do not know you” and in addition to this, your non-Christian and non-Western epistemologies are also not valued or legitimized (qtd. in wadud 2006, 64).

On the other hand, for a field that celebrates interdependence, reciprocity and difference, ethics of care has yet to deeply engage the thought, (con)texts, and the care-work of other-mothers or the ways in which labours of care have been appropriated by the apparatuses of coloniality and the nation-state (Collins 1995; Nakano-Glenn 2010; Narayan 1995). Why do we struggle to move beyond non-western and non-secular strains of political thought and continue to
de-center the writings of Black, Indigenous, faith-based and de-colonial feminist thinkers as our contemporaries, as grandmothers of ethics of care and political theory? De-centering whiteness in care ethics requires not only opening up its borders, but also, dissolving the boundaries between marginalized feminisms “from unthought locations” and “building feminist solidarities across the divisions of place identity, class, work, belief…” (Mohanty qtd. in Cannella and Manuelito 2014, 45). It is not that I aspire to bridge the divide between white and non-white feminist care ethics, but rather, dispossess whiteness as an orientation when building lines of connection between Indigenous, Black and Islamic feminisms. Both Muslim and non-Muslim political theorists have so much to learn and unlearn through such de-colonial traditions from: Indigenous feminist writings on the differential distribution of domestic care-work (Maracle 1988), kinship care and land-based practices (Simpson 2017; YoungWolfe 2017) and the land as mother with witnessing capacities in our relations (Byrd 2014); to Alice Walker’s (1983) and Audre Lorde’s work on care as an alienable labour; to Amrita Pritam’s and Fahmida Riaz’ work on mourning (Ahmad 1991); to amina wadud’s Hajar paradigm which centres the plight of the single, racialized mother in an Islamic ethic of care (Abugideiri 2001). It seems that Sara Ruddick’s refusal to “speak for any other mother” (1995, 54) has folded into the care ethics as a deeper refusal to address how the legacies of European colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade and settler-colonialism, supported by the structures of white supremacy, continue to orient our ways of relating to, thinking about, and caring-for other mothers.

Within this bell jar, the mother, or the scobe, of these two sub-fields is political theory and through it these two fields have inherited colonial modes of knowing. I open up the horizons of political theory and the selves of political theorists by framing political theory as a relational practice of speculative care. If we understand political theory as a care-based epistemology that
carries within it multiple cosmological orientations, histories of sense-contact and ethical sensibilities, we can not only make space to include Islamic methods and sensibilities as modes of doing political theory but we can also account for the role care has played in orienting our sense-abilities of reading the “Islamic.” Grounding political theory in care-based modes of knowing requires a hermeneutic and Islamic ethos of openness, uprooting the notion that political theory is a birthright, as well as, identifying and disinheriting colonial and white-orientated textual sensibilities and interpretive sense-abilities. With this criterion as my point of departure, I outline the colonial impulses of CPT, and the colonial politics of recognition within ethics of care literature to illustrate how political theory, as a relational and interdependent practice of speculative care, is deeply complicit in the work of coloniality. However, my re-imagining of political theory as speculative care is generative, not an act of epistemic de-linking (Mignolo 2011), and serves as a footing for expanding what we conceive to be the origins, boundaries and aims of political theory as a tradition. My primary research contributions to political theory, Islamic feminism and de-colonial thought and praxis include: 1) an intersectional and de-colonial Islamic ethic of care, 2) a care-based epistemology of Islam that empowers the interpretive authority of disabled Muslims and Muslim women as knowers and makers of Islam and, 3) a method and as praxis for dismantling coloniality, in all of its forms, as well as de-colonizing our practice of Islam on Turtle Island, that is rooted in an Islamic ethic of care. A de-colonial and Islamic ethic of care is multi-dimensional and engages different registers of analysis. Each chapter engages a different domain of care-based modes of knowing from the epistemic (Chapter 1), to the ontological (Chapter 2), to the phenomenological (Chapter 3), to the affective (Chapter 4) and to the spatial (Chapter 5) domains of care-based modes of knowing.
My concern is not to make Islam sensible to political theorists, but rather, to offer intersectional Islam as a moral framework of evaluation that is rooted in care-based modes of knowing. As opposed to studying Islam as a theoretical object of analysis, I engage with it as a category of practice that obliges me to be answerable for my complicities in the oppression of others—especially in my knowledge relations as a political theorist. For example, Islamic approaches to reconciliation on Turtle Island by Muslim communities have been either charity-based or knowledge-sharing through which grounds of overlapping consensus and possibilities for political coalition are charted. Whether mediated through the not-for-profit industry or neoliberal academic institutions, both of these activities remain deeply embedded within the settler-colonial state and the paradigm of multiculturalism. The work that remains on the horizon for the Muslim community is that of de-centering the Canadian state as the third-party in the relation and establishing a relation of responsibility with the Indigenous nations. Islamic law obliges us to observe the governance structures and legal codes of the rightful owners of the lands we migrate to. We have yet to “hack Sharia law” in Rumee Ahmed’s sense (2018), to articulate in Islamic terms the zulm (injustice) of our complicity in settler-colonialism and possibilities to acknowledge treaty rights and responsibilities within an Islamic framework. Designing a comparative mode of inquiry requires us to ask:

what would judgment look like that took place not “within” one framework or another, but which emerged at the very site of conflict, clash, divergence, overlapping? It would seem a practice of cultural translation would be a condition of such judgment, and that what is being judged is not only the question of whether a given action is injurious but also whether, if it is, legal remedies are the best way to approach the issue, and what other ways of acknowledging and repairing injury are available (Butler 2009, 104).

I argue that we need an Islam-based framework of moral evaluation by which we can observe and respect Indigenous sovereignties. Only through such epistemological and moral
transformation of Islam in response to colonial violence and oppression can we become allies to Indigenous peoples. The site of conflict I identify is that existing pedagogies and methodologies of political theory not only stifle the possibility for nurturing Islamic sense-abilities but also position Muslim theorists to compromise their critical sensibilities and responsibilities as witnesses. As I will illustrate below, this is because existing paradigms of CPT or comparative care ethics, within which such inquiry is contained and fragmented, inhibit intersectional analysis. By enforcing secularism in knowledge production, such practices require the practitioner to embody whiteness as an orientation and as a textual sensibility.

Instead, I offer an Islamic ethics of care not as a model of cross-cultural inquiry but as a de-colonial and intersectional theology of liberation (McLaren 2015). To Muslim readers, I offer this as a method by which we can: 1) chart new epistemological and moral terrains of intersectional and anti-oppressive Islamic thought and praxis, 2) build relations of responsibility and care that run deeper than political coalitions with Indigenous peoples and 3) imagine a theology of liberation by which we can build more accessible, inclusive and caring worlds for all. To white, and non-Muslim, political scientists, through an Islam-based model of knowledge production and consumption I make an ethical demand of you to purge coloniality from political theory, as a field and as a practice, and to unlearn colonial and white supremacist textual sensibilities. For racialized, Indigenous, Black and faith-based political theorists, I offer this as a model of doing political theory, on our own terms, in our own words and respective imaginaries, and as a way to disembody relational modes of othering in de-colonial movement building and theorizing (Dhamoon 2019).

An Islamic ethic of care is inherently de-colonial and intersectional and calls for liberation from coloniality, in all of its forms for all. The same breath with which we advocate
for liberation for Muslims as Muslims we must also acknowledge the different, yet connected ways, in which our plight is tied to the fate of Indigenous people living in settler-colonial societies, or the LGBTQ2 community’s efforts to dismantle heteropatriarchy, or Latinx folk struggle against US imperialism etc. A de-colonial and intersectional pedagogy deepens our understanding of Muslim subjectivities by acknowledging our complexities and nuanced modes of self-expression—that we come in all shapes, sizes and colours—and are not solely or primarily Muslims. There are Indigenous Muslims, white Muslims, Queer Muslims, Black Muslims, Disabled Muslims, Muslims in the Global North and South etc. There are also Muslims who drink, Muslims who only identify culturally, Muslims who have sex before marriage, Muslims who make up the 1%, Muslims who pray five times a day, Muslims who have not prayed in years, Muslims who do yoga etc. And so, we must acknowledge the interlocking, and connected, ways in which we are affected by and complicit in interlocking structures of oppression and how these complex intersections colour the Islamophobia we experience in classrooms, community spaces and beyond. De-colonial feminist Maria Lugones best articulates the aim of such interpretive inquiry:

How do we learn about each other? How do we do it without harming each other but with the courage to take up a weaving of the everyday that may reveal deep betrayals? How do we cross without taking over? With whom do we do this work?…How do we practice with each other engaging in dialogue at the colonial difference? (Lugones 2010, 755)

Writing about the “Islamic” as a theoretical category of analysis, while engaging Islam as category of practice as a Muslim scholar, charges me with the very difficult task of writing many dissertations in the size of one, with multiple readerships and horizons in mind. De-colonial hermeneutics is pluritopic in that it engages multiple traditions, is multiply placed (Donaldson 2001), and “calls into question the positionality and the homogeneity of the understanding
subject” (Mignolo 2003, 12). Such “interactive” scholarship is a form of cultural intervention by which the scholar focuses on the “social and human interests in the act of telling a story as political intervention” as opposed to pulling stories from various locations for the sake of representing diversity or building a theory” (Mignolo 2003, 15).

Through this method, I seek to explore how textual interpretation of the “Islamic” within political theory can be “rethought within a pluritopically oriented hermeneutics and the sphere of colonial semiosis” (Mignolo 2003, 16). Instead of using ethics of care, de-colonial Islamic thought, post-structural semiotics, critical disability studies or comparative political theory as filters, frames or containers for my argument, in my scholarship the problems to be addressed arise from within my situatedness as a Muslim political theorist in a relation of dependency care and not an observer of Islam as a theoretical category of analysis. It is through care-based modes of knowing, as well as my membership in a community of care, not filling in gaps in literature, that such issues arise for me as ethical problems to be addressed. And so, the weight and value of my work is in the deeper, more difficult, inquiry into how such gaps, or “blindspots” (Alcoff 2006, 43; Nanda 2003), in the horizons of political theory and in the selves of political theorists are informed by colonial and white supremacist textual methods and sensibilities of caring for the Muslim “Other”.

1.2 Inhabiting A Fractured Loci: Positionality and Complicit Scholarship

Situated in the netherworld of dependency care (Kittay 1998), as a political theorist, primary care-giver and Muslim immigrant-settler, I inhabit a fractured locus (Lugones 2010). Theorizing intersectional positionality as a fractured loci helps me consider: who am I facing from the multiple locations I inhabit as a writer? Who have I turned my back on? Whose faces have been displaced in my citationality? Whose faces watch over my writing? Who is my writing
accountable to? The fractured loci as a heuristic device illustrates how material economies of attention pull at my knowledge production. The fields of de-colonial Islamic thought, critical disability studies and feminist ethics of care remain on the periphery in both political theory and Islamic thought. In addition, the voices and experiences of disabled Muslims, as well as primary care-givers, as interpretive authorities remain spectral (yet to be inscribed into the written or spoken word) within Islamic (con)texts and western academia, or perceived as epistemologically and ontologically inferior and unreliable (Richardson 2012, 113).

In addition to the interdisciplinary and intersectional substance of this project, my responsibilities as a Muslim scholar not only co-exist but are deeply shaped and textured by my responsibilities and situatedness as a care-giver. I inhabit multiple perspectives and have inherited the very difficult task of weaving together multiple worlds to articulate a case of my father as capable of “intelligent embodiment”, of “having a world” of his own (Solomon and Lawlor 2018, 212). What Lugones refers to as the fractured locus, South-African scholar of Islamic thought, Ebrahim Moosa (2005), refers to as dihlīz, “an interspace”, or an in-between space from where he must negotiate and struggle with “the hegemonic and colonial knowledge traditions as well as subalternized Islamicate knowledge systems” (34). He likens Islamic knowledge production to the image of the honeybee in the Quran as a bricoleur draws from “a diverse variety of sources—pollens and nectars—in order to produce a synthetic product that reflects all the colours and fruits of its immediate habitat”; in doing so, the honeybee not only “furthers re-production through cross-pollination that in turn generates new flowers” but also “restarts the cycle for future production of honey” (34-40). In this dissertation, I move with the honeybee. Instead of placing myself between different fields of literature, or within the gaps of
political theory as a field, I place myself and my scholarship within the negative space between multiple fields.

From this borderland (Anzaldúa 2007), I attempt to “read and write disability [and dependency] differently” (Titchkosky 2007) through a de-colonial and Islamic ethic of care because the epistemologies that arise from my family’s narrative of disability and dependency care cannot be bifurcated or provincialized to fit into the imagined boundaries of an academic discipline (Said 1993). Intersectional scholarship in the field of religious feminism engages not only categories of analysis, by which we speak of others, but also, categories of practice by which we speak for others, “to subsume others, along with oneself, into a collective ‘we’” (Brettschneider 2016; Brubaker 2012, 2; M. W. Dube 1997; wadud 2006; Yildiz 2009). Through intersectional analysis, I am not unpacking how Muslim women and disabled Muslims resist interlocking structures of oppression, but rather, how my situatedness within a relation of dependency care shapes how I read from within “an ethical-political tradition, and against a background horizon of meanings, goods and purposes” (Singh 2015, 670). Here, intersectionality as a research paradigm illuminates how our “ethical-political difference actually modulates the nature and character of oppression, and the appropriate responses/resistances to it; it shapes what will be regarded as oppressive in the first place, in what specific ways it is experienced as oppressive, and how oppressive social structures or relations should be resisted (Ibid.).

Identifying positionality is a way of qualifying the scope of one’s interpretive authority as a speaker and knower (of and about) “Other” (con)texts. To locate oneself within the horizon of an interpretive community is not only an issue of positionality, but also, of the viewpoints I assume in writing about disability and Islam and my complicity in (re)producing the colonial difference in my knowledge relations. Echoing Brettschneider’s (2016) wordplay on Jewish
intersectionality, just as disability is a raced/sexed/classed/cultured/gendered category, the “personal and social constructions” of my life as an Islamic feminist and caregiver are “historically situated” in various categories of practice as a neuro-divergent Muslim, as a Muslim woman, as an immigrant-settler in Canada, as a Muslim scholar living in care time and in crip time.

In a non-fiction essay “Care Time”, Sarah E. Stevens shares her experience as a member of the disability community as a care-giver for her partner living with Parkinson’s disease. In response to Ellen Samuel’s notion of “crip time” as grief-time, time-travelling and “broken-time” that disrupts “normative time” (Samuels 2017); the temporally able-bodied care-giver lives in the liminality of “care time” and must constantly “code-switch…between crip time and abled time” (Stevens 2018). Whereas for Samuels the queer notion of “feeling backward” means a “refusal to stop mourning her mother” and the deep melancholy and brokenness that comes with “the pain of crip time”, for Stevens the texture of backwardness for the care-giver feels like Fanonian ressentiment:

Sometimes I am incredibly jealous of those who seem to move through life with the fluid grace of the fortunate. Walking through a bookstore the other day, I felt a sudden flash of hatred for everyone I saw, everyone who seemed untouched by grief or exhaustion (Stevens 2018).

Just as crip time casts the disabled body into “a wormhole of backward and forward acceleration, jerky stops and starts, tedious intervals and abrupt endings” (Samuels 2017), the care-giver’s time and body must remain responsive to her charge’s needs; and so, “every plan” that we make “has an unspoken asterisk after it, because every plan is subject to cancellation” (Stevens 2018). In ethics of care literature on the maternal and nurturant joys of care-work, what is seldom discussed is the bitterness, the exhaustion and the depression that comes with being a transparent
self in an environment in which there is little to no channels of respite, community or structural care available for informal care-givers. And so, in addition to the categories of practice, how my situatedness as a care-giver in my father’s community of care pulls at my capacity to attend to this dissertation is not only raced/sexed/classed/cultured/gendered/Islamic but also very different than my sisters’ and mother’s share in the distribution of (non)nurturant care-work in our care web (Nedelsky 2014, 2018; Dhamoon 2011, 234). What also remains unaccounted for is how such inequities in the distribution of care-work shape who within our care web is able to face the writing table, face the Quran to recite, or go the Masjid and inhabit their bodies as “knowers” and “makers” of Islam.

Therefore, I argue that the paradigm of *positionality* in intersectional analysis and *viewpoint* in hermeneutic analysis must go deeper than figuring out where one is situated and the intentions of the author. Instead of wondering about where to locate myself, I worry about the complicity of my scholarship, as thought and as praxis, in the project of coloniality in which I am not only an author, but also a writer, a reader, and a witness, in the process of knowledge production. Theorizing knowledge production as a relational and interdependent process dissolves the self-centered “vectoring of character viewpoint” and opens up space to understand multi-temporal and multi-spatial orders of responsibility by revealing orders of complicity as co-authors and chains of narration by which we authorize ourselves as interpretive authorities, knowers of the “Islamic” and the “political” (Stockwell, 2009). The edgework of reading disability in the Islamic, the Islamic in disability, as a care-giver, as a Muslim scholar, as a political theorist etc., requires reading “what is happening at the edge” between readers, narrators, care-givers, characters, writers and authors and the edges between reader/character, reader/readers, reader/narrator/author, reader/narrator/narrators, reader/character/narrator/author,
writer/narrator, writer/character, writer/readers etc. (Stockwell 2009). The combinations are endless and can be expanded to include publishers, editors etc. The point is to read with “a sense of movement of perception” (123).

Through such tactile reading, in my scholarship I must trace my movements, or deictic shifts in viewpoint, as a political theorist, care-giver, Muslim etc. to open up conceptual space for interpreting a (con)text and for exercising interpretive authority, and the responsibilities that come with it as a reader, narrator, author and writer. You as the reader must move with me as a care-giver, as a Muslim, as a political theorist etc. This is the dance of collective accessibility. The aim of such a reading practice is to expose how a “single vector line” is composed of “braids of deictic dimensions” (128). This mode of reading begins with “moving beyond the character terminal of the vector” in which we focus on the author’s “perception of her own position” (111–28) Such a frame centres viewpoint as an “autonomous locus with connections to other characters, the narrator and the author” (123). Instead, the viewpoint is not “free-floating within its text world” but can only be understood “with reference to the viewing position of the reader” (ibid). As readers we are both inheritors and enactors, of various contexts of the “Islamic”, decoloniality, disability and dependency care. And so, as a reader, I ask you to remain accountable and mindful of how you re-enact coloniality in your reception of this text. How can we read with de-colonial sensibilities? How do we inherit the work of (de)coloniality from colonial (con)texts in our knowledge relations? Instead of reading this as my personal viewpoint, my story, in opening up myself and sharing my story with you I urge to also open up yourself through your reception of this text.

What connects me with you beyond the material by which these words appear to you? The de-colonial reader must locate “a coalitional starting point”, address her “epistemological...
habit” of erasing the colonial difference and “dwell” in “histories of resistance” in order to (re)imagine “creative ways of thinking, behaving, and relating that are antithetical” to the logic of coloniality (Lugones 2010, 754). Practicing Walter Mignolo’s (2011) textual strategy of subverting the colonial difference to the advantage of the colonized, Lugones argues that de-colonial readers must first learn to see the “active subjectivity” of resisters at the colonial difference by reading against “social-scientific objectifying” readings of the colonized (2010, 753). At the fractured locus, one is not only intricately implicated in the enactment of coloniality but also in resisting it; and so, as readers we must learn how to read with de-colonial sensibilities. To resist from the fractured locus is to always remain accountable for the possibility of resistant thinking and praxis as complicit in the colonial matrix of power and to attend to the material histories that enable, or inhibit, our ability to attend to liberation in our knowledge (re)production.

1.3 Political Theory as a Care-Based Epistemology

Building upon Wendy Hollway’s notion of care as a critical capacity (Held 2006a; Hollway 2007), I explore how the situation of coloniality stifles and distorts the sensibilities with which we identify the unmet caring needs of Muslims, practice responsibility in our knowledge relations with Muslim communities, do the actual work of caring for Muslims, and receive feedback from communities we have cared-for through our thought and praxis on Islam. Whereas care ethicists focus on surfacing alternative “epistemologies of moral decision-making” through the imaginative dimensions of care-work, comparative care ethicist Vrinda Dalmiya (2016) seeks to define knowing in general, not just as decision-making and the identification of needs and moral injury, but also as “contextual, narrative, communicative and immersed in particularities” (11). Care-knowing is a process/virtue of mechanism by which we arrive at the
“truth about selves” and a character trait/a virtue of character by which we organize “enquiry to make it more inclusive of opposing points of view” (Dalmiya 2016, 23). Doing political theory is practicing what Maria Puig de la Bellacasa and Sheldon Wolin (2004) define as “speculative care” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 75–77). Here, I outline two senses of the term speculative. For Wolin (2004), “speculative exclusiveness” means that a political theorist’s capacity to attend to certain issues and not others is not a matter of choice, but rather, is orientated “by the problems agitating his society” and pre-formed by his horizons (21–23). Conversely, for Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) knowledge production is a mode of caring-for and caring-about others. It is speculative in that it reveals possibilities for connection and “creates a collective and populates a world” (77). It is “a way of relating” that does not create unions or juxtapositions but rather follows a relation “as something that passes between the two as a letter” from a mother to her daughter (ibid). Whereas the former focuses on where we are looking, the latter sense of emphasizes that sight serves a relational, connective function to others and carries different orientations, and textures (Garland-Thomson 2009).

Care is more than an activity, it is a relational practice because it incorporates normative guiding values and temporally extends beyond a decision or a single act (Held 2006a, 37). In Caring Democracy, Tronto defines care as a "species activity" through which we "maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible" which includes acts and relations of care which are nestled in a “life-sustaining web interwoven by bodies, selves and the environment (Tronto 2013, 2). Caring labour does not only include direct caring and emotional care but also “maintaining the immediate physical surroundings in which people live…” as well as “fostering people’s relationships and social connections” (Nakano-Glenn 2010, 5). In my knowledge relations, my responsibility as a political theorist is an inherited,
collective practice (MacIntyre 2007), of truth-seeking, of holding power accountable, of caring for our relations and the (con)texts in which our thought is embedded, of building, and imagining, worlds in which no one is left behind. The issue of “who cares”, which concerns the differential distribution of care-work in society, should be addressed by political theory because failure to do so offers an inaccurate picture of theorists, “overvaluing their lives as workers” and “devaluing their lives as people engaged in relationships of care” (Tronto 2013, 26).

Whereas Alasdair Macintyre (1981) argues that individuals who lack participatory experience in the community of practice are “incompetent…as judges of internal goods” (188), the issue of how we care, who cares, why we care and what do we care about in political theory should be “a large-scale democratic project” (Tronto 2013, 18) that includes and empowers those we write and think about in our knowledge relations. Also, the greater sharing of responsibilities for care (Nedelsky 2014), the less people have to fear and the “more easily they can trust others” (Tronto 2013, 146); by grounding political theory in an ethics of care, through fostering positions of trust, the world in which our knowledge relations are situated will become “more open, more free, more equal and more just” (ibid). And so, as a practice, care teaches us "how to respond to needs and why we should", bolsters "mutual trust and connectedness between persons" and makes humans "morally admirable" (Held 2006b, 42). Political theory as a care-based epistemology engages both methods and sensibilities as defined by Tronto, Fisher and Sevenhuijsen:

Table 1: Methods and Sensibilities of Political Theory as a Care-Based Epistemology

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices/Methods</th>
<th>Textual Sensibilities</th>
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| Caring about (identification of unmet needs) | Attentiveness, aligned with caring about, flows from recognizing the needs that arise from dependency through “a suspension of one’s self-interest and a capacity to genuinely
Caring is not only a dyadic interaction between the dependent and the dependency worker, caregiver and care-receiver or the human body and the act of care, but it is also an on-going relational process embedded in the worlds we live, informed by the relations that hold us in place and shaped by the traditions we inherit. With this said, care is not necessarily non-violent. Nakano identifies two forms of coerced care: 1) status obligations rooted in conceptions of kinship, gender and race/class that force some to differentially carry the burden of care work in society and 2) racialized gendered servitude such as the institution of slavery within which “one
party has the power to command the services of another” (Nakano-Glenn 2010, 7). Building upon Eva Kittay’s work on dependency care as a relation of domination (1999), Nirmala Erevelles (2011) defines care relations as dialectical as opposed to reciprocal to pave space to consider the “power differentials between caregiver and care recipient” and the possibilities for abuse (175). Whether it is delivered through settler-colonial state institutions such as forced child removal (YoungWolfe 2017) or abusive care-givers in intimate settings of the “home”, care that is “not responsive” to how the care-receiver understands “their needs, rights and desires” is a form of violence (Tronto 2016, 251).

Political theorists have also practiced care in violent ways as their desire for humanitarian interventions for the sake of progress or democracy continue to fuel imperial and white supremacist desires to civilize the barbaric (Razack 2007). There is a political economy of attention that shapes whose lives matter in our theoretical frameworks, our refusal to cultivate response-ability for our complicity in authorizing and authoring colonial world-building practices, and our attempts speak in place of marginalized communities in our scholarship. As political theorists we can cause a lot of harm in our thought and praxis of critical inquiry. Theorizing political theory as a practice of care invites investigation into a non-ethics of care under which consent cannot be possible in carceral conditions of dependency such as residential schools or “hospitals, ‘homes’, ‘sanitoriums’ and charitable institutions.” In contexts of coloniality such institutions sought/seek to domesticate and contain the epistemologies of “disabled, sick, mad and Deaf people…from able-bodied “normal society” (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018, 71). Unlike abusive care, condescending charity-based and unsolicited care, consensual care empowers disabled or dependent persons as “bosses” of their bodyminds (297). Instead of writing off sick and disabled persons as submissive and passive receivers of care or as
patients, consent in kinship care, communities of care, or care webs, requires care-givers to always be receptive to the care and access needs of sick and disabled persons as identified by them on their own terms (ibid).

Such a disability justice framework surfaces the able-bodied textures of white supremacist knowledge practices. Just as Muslim subjectivities and epistemologies are cast as the shadow self of European modes of knowing, “white supremacy leverages ableism to create a subjugated ‘other’ that is deemed less worthy/abled/smart/capable…”; and so, “we cannot comprehend ableism without grasping its interrelations with heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism and capitalism.” (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018, 36). Within such systems of carceral dependency, “care meant being locked up, losing your human and civil rights, and being subject to abuse” and this “spectre of ‘the home’ and lockup” continues to shape the “fear of accessing”, “asking for or needing care” (71). In what ways can the visibility that comes with being written, spoken and thought about in academia expose and endanger a community when the political theorist refuses to practice consensual care?

Whereas care ethicists articulate how power differentials texture practices of care, I explore how the care-work of uprooting colonial textual sensibilities in our knowledge relations is thrown onto racialized, Black and Indigenous scholars and how such caring labours are alienable and appropriated by CPT and ethics of care theorists in their desires to “not-know.” Such violence is not merely epistemic or ontological in that it shapes only conceptions of care and its delivery, but it also captures the cosmological dimensions of care by orienting our conceptions and practices of care to sustain ableist, secular and white supremacist worlds that enslave, contain, colonize and displace. We can only collapse the “border politics” of political theory (Brown 2002a) by “phrasing worlds together” and to “think with thick populated worlds”
(Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). Speculative care holds within it the possibility to both disrupt the “boundaries and cuts given in existing worlds” and also, re-enforce the disconnected ways of relating and knowing to displace populations (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 70–71). Thinking with care entwines us in a relation of responsibility and asks of us to explore not only our dispositions and intentions to be caring, but how we care. The aim of such a labour of love is to weave worlds in which no one is left alone, in which our ideas have multiple heritages, and in which there are multiple others with whom we are connected. This requires developing a curiosity about the “connected heterogeneities composing an entity, a body, a world” and to trouble the boundaries that divide us (206). Such openness is practiced not just in our sensorial reception of strange multiplicities, but also, in our knowledge relations with those, in the past, present and future, with whom we share and dwell with on earth.

1.4 In the Horizons: Sense, Sensibility and Sense as an Ability

The sun is the centre of our universe and God is dead. These two statements, by which western political theorists measure themselves against the earth, set in motion the great humbling of humankind by placing sensorial limits on the knowable and (dis)orienting our sense of place in the cosmos. They act as signifiers of the transformative power of our capacity to (re)imagine the horizons of political reflection through the practice of secular judgement and criticism. In this paradigm, it is only through “humanly attained knowledge” that we can “promote human freedom” (Viswanathan 2012). From Sheldon Wolin, to Hans Georg Gadamer, to Charles Taylor, political theorists rely on the horizon as a heuristic to articulate the “bounds of our imaginative abilities” (Alcoff 2006, 56) and how tradition shapes our critical sensibilities. The horizon tunes and orients our attention span to boundary our sense of the “political.” Interpretive approaches to political theory play with this metaphor to articulate the relation between the
phenomenology of the political subject, the spatio-temporal field of tradition and the ontological, epistemic boundaries of the “political”:

My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand (Taylor 1989, 27).

Linda Alcoff (2006) defines interpretive horizons as intersubjective, interdependent and relational limits determined through self/Other encounters, “my self emerges in interaction with the Other because the Other’s perspective gives substance and content and constitutes the horizon from which I perceive and act” (82). And so, what we know is shaped by where we are standing in the world and with whom. What we see from this view is primed, pre-conditioned and curated by our inherited traditions.

Through perspectival reasoning, in which horizons have a Nietzschean contouring effect that enables us to act, we work within the curve of our traditions to respond and attend to the present. And so, our ability to sense, what we can see or hear in this case, is pre-conditioned by tradition and our relationships. The image of the horizon serves a disenchanting function and works as a sense-orientation towards the secular. What we know can be perceived, observed and articulated through our senses. Here, the self of the political theorist can only inhabit and embody secular sensibilities of knowing the political to be a credible interlocutor. Any sense of the divine, the spiritual, cannot lay claim to truth but is considered a social imaginary or a point of view that is not demonstrable. Through this metaphor, Sheldon Wolin (2004) defines the tradition of political theory as an “inherited body of knowledge” which is accumulated through continuous discourse between interlocutors defining the “political” spread out across historical situations (21–23). Similar to Wolin, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975) also defines tradition as a language which acts...
both as a carrier through which we inherit, and a frame that enables us to see, certain interests, prejudices, questions and identify problems for inquiry (76). Our social location, or interpretive horizons, define “what the self can know” and what is “visible from this location” (Alcoff 2006, 88); through discourse our sense of place becomes sedimented into the tradition. In addition, such horizons are relationally revealed in and through histories of sense contact with the Other. Readers of Merleau-Ponty such as Sara Ahmed push political theorists to acknowledge that we do not just inherit secular logo-centric discourses but that our sense organs, such as our eyes, ears, tongue, skin and nose are faculties of moral judgement that carry within them inherited moral epistemologies, aesthetic orientations and affective cartographies.

In western political theory, the sensibilities of sight and hearing, in particular, are centered in secular criticism as the central sensorial capacities through which the political subject’s moral imagination is projected (Mignolo 2011). Wolin (2004), for example, defines political philosophy as a revelatory form of inquiry with a descriptive and imaginative function that requires practitioners to practice vision, “a form of ‘seeing’ from where we are standing” (17). It is through the sense capacity of sight that political theorists as interlocutors are able to not only perform their diagnostic and prescriptive work within the horizon of the present, but also to identify where their interpretations of the world fit in the overarching tradition of political theory. Wolin’s notion of re-picturization, for example, equips political theorists with a phoropter, the technology with which one is able to see the whole differently, play with different frames, and constantly re-assemble the factual world to re-present it anew (Marasco et al. 2017). He likens imaginative vision to that of religious or aesthetic vision through which one attempts to “mould the totality of political phenomena to accord with some vision of the Good that lies outside the political order” (Wolin 2004, 44).
Here is how Wolin’s and Gadamer’s notion of interpretive horizons help us understand the limits of sensibility in political theory: 1) there are horizons of political reflection beyond political order itself, outside the speculative horizons of the political theorist, that the political theorist cannot objectively describe or observe, 2) and that such horizons and perspectives play a vital role in mediating the interplay between situated political experiences and political concepts, and finally, that 3) exercises of political philosophy are “abbreviations of reality” (Wolin 2004, 22), limited in their representation of political phenomena. Although there will always be limits to what we can know, in this secular paradigm what shapes how we see from where we are standing is our inheritance which is a matter of birthright and not positionality. My concern is here is with not only gatekeeping what we can know but also who can know. For Wolin, birthright obliges political theorists to exercise the capacity of politicalness by caring for and improving our “common and collective life” (Wolin 1986, 181). Arguing against the social contract theory which trades in lived histories and our inheritance for an “original position” or the myth of the social contract, Wolin (1986) introduces political inquiry as the exercise of our birthright in which such perspectival reasoning is responsive to our lived history and collective memory.

Birthright, for Wolin, entails a “a way of ‘conceiving the person’”; we are not “thrown into the world” but rather just as the person is “prefigured in the womb of their mother”, the person is also “preformed, as an incorporation of elements of family, cult and community” (Wolin 1986, 180). As an inheritance, birthrights require “interpretation” and so, are “contestable” because “we inherit from our fathers, but we are not our fathers” (182). For Wolin, we are situated within a tradition as an interlocutor who through his faculties of sight contributes to and cares for inherited meanings of the “political” co-authored by other political theorists.
Yet, he preserves an ambivalence on who and how one is born as an inheritor of such a birthright and how such gatekeeping within the field of political theory can cause practitioners to cause harm to others with our sight and sound and build worlds that create differential access to embodying such critical sensibilities of speculative care. Returning to Tronto’s concern for the differential distribution of who cares in society, what remains unquestioned is: 1) the problematic language of birthright as if some are born, or chosen, as meeting the anthropological and genealogical minimum to be political theorists and perform secular criticism and 2) whether we inherit textual sensibilities of reading, writing, thinking about the Other from the authors we read, the knowledge we consume and the (con)texts that shape our horizons. The issue here is not what is political theory, but rather, who can be a political theorist and whether we inherit only words and not the intentions, sensibilities and orientations of political theorists who have walked this earth before us.

In this image of the horizon, I tease out a significant ambivalence between sense, sensibility and sense-ability as inherited. Through a survey of various interpretive approaches to political theory, I argue that our definition of tradition should account for not just the role of the senses in sense-making but also for how we inherit histories of sense-contact, orientations and textual sensibilities of reading and writing about the “Other” by which our horizons have been countoured. Here I define sense-ability as a critical capacity of care by which we learn to attend to and respond to the needs of others. By unravelling the rigid cosmological boundaries of political theory, as we know it, I not only expand the roots of our traditions to account for multiple heritages and multiple epistemological horizons, but also open up our future (and present) to account for relations of responsibility with those whom we have absenced and continue to harm in our knowledge relations. In tandem, I also open up the inscrutability of the
political theorist, as a relational subject, as a human whose words and deeds of knowledge production are complicit in authorizing colonial world-building practices.

1.5 Travel and Empathy: White-Orientated Modes of Knowing

Horizons are not a pre-formed inheritance, but instead, are actively performed through our textual sensibilities; our sense-ability is oriented by various histories of sense-contact that governs our perceptions of others. Through Sara Ahmed’s notion of whiteness as an orientation I explore how whiteness is reproduced and inherited as a guiding ethos of CPT and ethics of care scholarship on the “Islamic” and as a racializing force that marginalizes Muslim political theorists within interpretive communities of CPT to discredit them as knowers of the “Islamic”. Whiteness as an orientation shapes our sense-ability to render others as intelligible and worthy of our care, as well as, how we care for others in our knowledge relations. In addition, colonial semiosis of Arab and European colonial histories teaches us that Muslims also inherit whiteness as an orientation through instruction in and inheritance of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous textual sensibilities and orientations. Studying the phenomenology of race, Ahmed explores how race “operates through orientation” by studying the “spatial formations of orientalism” (Ahmed 2006, 112). Spaces are racialized by how they are “directed or orientated as a direction that follows a specific line of desire” (Ahmed 2006, 120).

Travel or empathy, for example, are theorized as the movement between the familiar and the strange, from one place to another, from one body into the another. Whereas for European colonists what directed them to travel was the imperial desire to discover and expand their dominions, for the refugee, the enslaved, or the racialized immigrant, the desire to travel homewards is forced by the same destruction and displacing legacy of European colonization. Here, whereas the white body of the colonizer is read as the adventurer, the traveler, or the agent
that seeks, the racialized body of the colonized are read as dependent upon the European gaze, awaiting discovery and made to feel the destructive impact of being discovered, of publicity. There is of course an ontological privilege here, the body that discovers is the body that displaces, and lays claim to the land, and the body that is discovered is the body that is displaced and dispossessed from her homeland and her knowledge systems. The epistemic dimension of coloniality entails that the body that knows, and discovers, is that of the conquistador, or the colonizer (Grosfoguel 2012). The signature of travel does not end with movement from one shore to another but continues within the inheritance of the upkeep of the domesticated colony, or the settler-colonial state, to continue the work of displacement that sustains and makes space for one’s “arrival” (Byrd 2014). Although we have a different relationship to the desire to travel, and share some (de)colonial histories, in the context of Turtle Island, Muslims migrants are also complicit as settlers in the ongoing colonial violence against Indigenous peoples and the dispossession of and displacement from their land.

From Euben to Said to Wolin, political theorists fetishize world-travelling, but do not question the asymmetries of power within which such a desire has been cultivated and shaped. Missionaries authorized their “travel through divine claims” and represented “the targeted foreign lands as in need of or desiring the colonizing heroes and their nations”, and the “colonizing nations as superior and exceptionally favored by divine powers to invade, help or dispose their victims” (Dube 2012, 117). Similarly, political theorists seek to travel to the epistemic domains of the Two-Thirds world in search for the “democratic”, and the “cosmopolitan”, or in other words, the salvageable. Similar to the trope of travel, the notion of empathy has also been theorized extensively within the enlightenment tradition and by care ethicists as a critical ethical sensibility by which we respond to human suffering and call for a
universal framework of human rights. Like travel, our faculty of empathy is also an orientation that can be geared towards colonial ends. As Ann Stoler argues, “the politics of compassion was not an oppositional assault on empire but a fundamental element of it” and the “the “production and harnessing of sentiment…comprised a key…technology of the colonial state.” (Jacobs 2009, 26). It is no secret that white scholars of the enlightenment tradition were deeply complicit in authorizing human suffering at a mass scale in the European colonies. In addition, there is a deep colonial history of care as a civilizational mission rooted in the white cry for humanitarian intervention (Narayan 1995). Instead of framing white privilege in our knowledge relations as blindspots in our horizons, I frame it as a refusal to respond to and address the coloniality of the white cry to care-for that dwells within the self and inhabits the body of the political theorist.

Empathy, for example, as a colonial emotion was read as a unique trait of white-Europeans as care providers on a humanitarian mission. For examples, Africans were perceived by colonizers as capable of cruel violence against animals, whereas the Europeans “abhorred suffering” unless it was necessary for the sake of civilization (Shadle 2012, 1098). Even in this article by Shadle in which he critiques such imperialist empathy, his care for the plight of colonial Kenya is drenched in racist language and caricatures, some intentionally sarcastic, others perceptible as blatant white ignorance to racialized readers.

For readers with colonial textual sense-abilities, “pain can only come into existence at the expense of the slave as subject…”; building upon Saidiya Hartman’s critique of empathy, Sherene Razack (2017) argues that such a performance of “facile intimacy” in which the act of “identifying so readily with the slave’s pain that he exists in place of the other” obscures “his own complicity and privilege” (377). Such displacement of self by submerging the Other into the netherworld of the self-same is what affirms the Master’s “position as a moral subject”
(Razack 2017, 378). With these concerns in mind, Saidiya Hartman asks: “Can the white witness of the spectacle of suffering affirm the materiality of Black sentience only by feeling for himself?” (qtd. In Razack 2017, 376). From the Victorian suffragette’s metaphors of slavery in imperial-feminist descriptions of the situation of Indian women in the colony as a mark of cultural decay (Burton 1994), to the British anti-cruelty movement to criminalize torture against animals set against the backdrop of Indians and Africans who torture animals (Shadle 2012), to the French socialist appropriation of slavery in the colonies as the condition of the metropolitan worker and their defense of settler-colonialism (Andrews 2018), selective empathy and the appropriation of pain are defining features of the colonial imaginary. Here, sense-contact with the colonized, subjugated Other, is mediated through deep racial, class-based and spiritual hierarchies that are sustained and held in place through the textual sensibilities by which we read our interactions with and observations of the Other. Within the contact zone, empathy as a colonial emotion was a site through which colonizers affirmed the boundaries of the self-same against images of the barbaric other.

Conversely, Ji Young Shin (2015) explores empathy within “the interiority of the colonial subject” and how the colonized empathized with one another through the situation of sesshoku no shisō (contact) (380). Empathy between and across colonial contexts by the colonized was not based on the “sameness of assimilation” but rather, in feeling dislocated by witnessing “each region’s respective historical particularity” (391) within the shared situation of coloniality and charting lines of resistance through comparison (396). This rhetoric of dislocation has also been developed by CPT scholar, Farah Godrej, as part and parcel of the hermeneutics of knowing the Other. For ethics of care theorists, in which empathy is a mode of connection-based witnessing, such dislocation requires the annihilation of the self through a transparent self “through whom
the needs of another are discerned, a self that, when it looks to gauge its own needs, sees first the needs of another’ (Kittay 1998, 52). Is this not what the imperial feminists felt in witnessing the “slave mentality” and birthing practices of Indian women? White women saw a need for others to be civilized, or cared for, which translated into a fear of such horror happening to their bodies and rights in British society. Such empathy fueled white women’s fight for women’s rights and left the Indian woman to “hope for [a] happier birth in her next incarnation” (Mayo and Sinha 2000). Instead the origin of violence against Indian women is displaced onto and naturalized as a feature of Muslim and Hindu masculinities as a mark of cultural decay or civilizational and racial inferiority.

A contemporary example is the mandating Muslim-migrants to write cultural values tests as part of the naturalization process or enforcing Muslim women to unveil for the sake of their liberation. In these French-Canadian cases, heteropatriarchal violence is rendered as a feature of a static, homogenous and orientalist image of Islamic societies and not of Western, liberal democracies. And so, domestic violence is read as an imported phenomenon that can spread and harm Canadian society through contact with the Other. Empathy and fear as imperial desires to know the other domesticate the Other into the netherworld of the self-same. In this context, the imperialist feminist does not seek to transform the imperial situation of the Indian woman to fit her own standard of human dignity but instead exploits and appropriates her plight to make a case for the white woman’s epistemic and ontological fittedness as an imperial subject. The imperial feminist builds her image and claim for her liberation through the exploitation of racialized, Indigenous and Black women’s pain and suffering without processing her complicity in authoring or authorizing such harm.
Alternatively, merging the orientations of travel and empathy, de-colonial feminist scholars such as Maria Lugones (1987), argue that identification through empathy is the root of combatting racism and white supremacy:

The identification of which I speak is constituted by what I come to characterize as playful ‘world’-traveling. To the extent that we learn to perceive others arrogantly or come to see them only as products of arrogant perception and continue to perceive them that way, we fail to identify with them—fail to love them—in this particular deep way (276).

What Lugones identifies as a failure to love as a symptom that empathy has been co-opted by colonial affective machinery, ethics of care theorists identify as a breakdown in one’s capacity to care. From Gilligan’s early pre-occupation with difference, there is a very strong, yet under-developed strain within the sub-field of connection-based modes of knowing that are rooted in body-sense and reveal new orders of ethical responsibility. Gender has been the primary category of analysis used in such inquiry into care-based moral epistemologies. Carol Gilligan (2009) argues that due to different social variables men and women come to acquire diverging evaluative horizons towards what is morally right or wrong. Men are conditioned to rely on an individualistic, rights-centric vision of justice focused on the inviolable dignity of each person, and women are socially conditioned to rely on a relational, responsibility-based vision of morality focused on the obligations we have to take care of each other. The latter as a moral compass points to different orders of moral responsibility that do not arise from the dominant vocabulary of the former. Here is where Butler’s call for cultural translation comes into play because it is only through a care-based epistemology of Islam that we can not only study how the distribution of care-work and care-knowing is gendered, racialized, class-based etc. in Muslim communities but also reveal new orders and vocabularies of moral responsibility through connection-based modes of knowing Islam.
1.6 Hearing Different Voices

However, what is concerning in political theory is when the colonial history of sense-contact, as well as white-orientated textual sensibilities, outlined above disrupt and drive this process of translation, of making the gendered, racialized or disabled Other familiar. What makes the Other familiar or sensible to political theorists is voice—the faculty of speech. Gilligan (2011) argues care is a form of resistance, and a remedy for moral injury, because of its capacity to restore voice. She argues that from a young age, girls are “forced to choose between having a voice or having relationships,” and that this is problematic because “the antithesis of voice is violence” (Ibid). Similar to Alcoff’s notion of blindspots, Gilligan’s politics of resistance advocates for “freedom from dissociation, from the splits in consciousness” that keep “parts of ourselves, and our experience outside our awareness” (Ibid). She argues that a path to resistance against patriarchy should be grounded in our humanity, not in ideology, and paved with honest voices. Though her primary category of analysis is gender, her overall project of disentangling patriarchy from democracy by (re) imagining relationships, the self and morality advocates for mutual understanding across differences through a pragmatic and care-based conception of narrative agency and voice. Fundamentally relying on the “irreplaceability of human relationships”, Gilligan grounds her politics of resistance in the human body, “its vulnerability, its power, and its promise,” and as a “practice of preservative love” (Ibid). She presents the practice of care, as an avenue through which the multi-sensorial dimensions of self-expression can be harnessed. In her most recent work on resistance, she emphasizes the importance of nurturing critical sensibilities within adolescent girls to express democratic dissent, to spot false stories and to develop their core selves by learning to hear in a new way, in their own way.
Similar to Wolin’s notion of the imaginative function of political theory, feminist ethics of care theorists frame the embodied practice of care and relational autonomy as revelatory and disclosive. Because of its closeness to the body, and embeddedness in human relationships, the spatio-praxial dimension of care opens up affective, imaginative and epistemological potentials for moral responsibility and political judgment. By focusing on the embodiedness of caring, ethics of care theorists, such as Maurice Hamington, Joan Tronto, Rita Manning, ask us to view the body as a “nexus of the is and the ought” (Hamington 2004, 31, 72) and embodied care as something that adds content to moral consideration. They argue that the practice of care entails dynamic, imaginative responses to the environment. Care-knowing is a corporeal-centric habit; when cultivated it reveals relational epistemologies, of how our bodies fit with each other. Sevenhuijsen (2003) also seeks to integrate care into political conceptions of democratic citizenship and social justice by empowering different moral epistemologies surfaced through the embodied act of care. She suggests the importance of diversifying our vocabulary through the practice of care to surface different vocabularies through which we can articulate moral problems as care is a form of human and social agency within the arena of political judgment (Tronto 1995). Interestingly, she adds the spatial dimension to the concept of relational epistemologies, by grounding relationships of care in material settings by framing the dayroom of the nursing room as a microcosm of a wider political community in which citizens express political judgment in many ways (Sevenhuijsen 2003, 3). Care is a meaning-making practice as it is exercised through the faculty of perception (positionality difference between the knower and the known), figure-ground phenomenon (concrete context) and the flesh (our entrée into the life-world, allows for continuity, inter-corporeal understanding, what it is to be other and what it is to be me) (Hamington 2004). And so, human beings are attuned to care and response to each other,
as we have eyes to see, ears to hear, nose to smell etc. all of which are gates where our body “receives the nourishment of otherness” (53). The sub-field of care ethics invites investigation into the role sensibilities beyond the faculty of speech and hearing and contact histories play in the formation of political theorists as imperial subjects.

How do we reconcile the non-violent potential of care-based modes of hearing different voices with conceptions of home-making in CPT and care ethics as an essentially conflictual process (Jurkevics 2017)? Building a home, making the strange familiar, or inhabiting a sense of rootedness in a place occurs through body-sense as we learn to manipulate, appropriate and make sense of foreign landscapes, the languages, the people and the cultures. World-building through colonial textual sensibilities, however, rely on the process of domestication by which aspects of the “Other” are “brought home” or domesticated as “something that extends the reach of the West” (Ahmed 2006, 121). Ahmed reimagines domesticity as “an effect of histories of domestication” in order to pave conceptual space to understand that home-making “depends on the appropriation of matter as a way of making what is not already here familiar or reachable” (117). In order for something to “enter” into history, it must be reachable—making history the “process of domestication” that shapes collective bodies and spaces to render ontological and epistemic (mis)fits (ibid.). Within a colonial context, the politics of domestication assumes that the “other is reachable” or “within reach” and can be “brought home” (117).

However, in the translation process this “reachability of the Other…does not mean that they become ‘like me/us’” as seen in the colonialis f 0f “perceptual distortion” or “going Native” that comes with travel (Euben 2006, 40). Rather, the white subject is the sole agent who does the work of orientating around or toward the object and “does the work” of discovering. Euben conflates the phenomenology of whiteness with the “phenomenology of I”; and in doing
so, although she critiques colonial sensibilities of travel, she assumes the same position of the white supremacist philosopher who has a chair to sit on and a writing table to face to reproduce Islamophobic textual sensibilities and representations of Muslim communities. Another example of colonial reading practices, or in this case complicit scholarship, is echoed in Sarah Bracke and Nadia Fadil’s critique (2008) of Leila Babès’ attempt to “de-orientalise” Eurocentric approaches to studying Islam by surfacing points of convergence and compatibility between Islamic and western contexts (6). Bracke and Fadil argue that this approach “occidentalizes” Islam by positioning it as “an exogenous phenomenon that can or cannot be adapted to the established frameworks and assumptions of Western scholarship” (7–9). In complicit scholarship, the “Self embodies the norm that remains unexplored and unquestioned” which leads to misanthropic skepticism of racialized and religious others (Maldonado-Torres 2007), settler moves to innocence (Tuck and Yang 2012), inscrutability of the self-same (Asad 1997; Mehta 1999) and epistemic racism (Mbembé 2001; Mignolo 2018).

However, as Ahmed suggests, if “we began instead with disorientation, with the body that loses its chair, then the descriptions we offer will be quite different” than the point of view shaped by the “ease with which the white body extends itself in the world” and “orientates toward objects and others” (Ahmed 2006, 138). Euben may briefly identify the imperialist desires of travel in the form of historical accounting; March may identify that it is not his intention to solely translate aspects of the non-West into the Western cannon; and Warren and Williams may identify their desires for democracy and cultivating relations of shared fate; but what they all sanction as morally inscrutable is their inheritance of such colonial orientations in their desires to know and domesticate the “Islamic” within preformed notions of cosmopolitanism as rooted in western political theory. Ahmed urges us to consider our
complicity in authoring and reproducing whiteness in our knowledge relations by examining how we “inherit the proximities that allow white bodies to extend their reach” and “how such inheritances shape those who do not or cannot ‘possess’ such whiteness.” (Ahmed 2006, 112).

Whether it’s a refusal to address other mothers, or a refusal to respond to one’s self as complicit within the oppression of another, CPT and care ethicists scholars “embody distance” in their scholarship and make whiteness proximate in their representations of the “other side of the world” as associated with “racial otherness” (Ahmed 2006, 121). Andrea Gibbons (2018) argues that such an “epistemology of ignorance”, or white ignorance, operates through five orders of refusal: 1) a refusal of the humanity of the other—and a willingness to allow violence and exploitation to be inflicted, 2) a refusal to listen to or acknowledge the experience of the other—resulting in marginalization and active silencing, 3) a refusal not just to confront long and violent histories of white domination, but to recognize how these continue to shape injustice into the present, 4) a refusal to share space, particularly residential space, with resulting segregated geographies that perpetuate inequality and insulate white ignorance and; 5) a refusal to face structural causes such as capitalism, settler-colonialism, heteropatriarchy etc (729). Here whiteness is a bodily and relational inheritance that serves as a “straightening device”, and not just a “characteristic of bodies”, that organizes, codes, and translates aspects of non-Western culture to fit into the civilizing mission of democratization (Ahmed 2006, 121). And, whiteness in our knowledge production is “reproduced through acts of alignment” (ibid.). What makes it into the western cannon, into the reach of white bodies, are “attributes that are seen to pass along the line” (122) or the anthropological minimum (Mehta 1999). The “point of reproduction” is “when the familial and the racial become aligned” however this alignment is not a fusion or a symbiosis but rather the “the family line coheres around a racial group, which becomes a
boundary line: to marry someone of a different race is to marry “out”” (122). Sharing, in this context, is not a matter of reciprocity, or consent, but rather a matter of ownership over the birthright of doing political theory and this is distributed based on degrees of one’s likeness or proximity to whiteness whether by inheritance, passability or by epistemic assimilation (123).

Whereas white, non-Muslim scholars such as Andrew March, Fred Dallymyr, and Roxanne Euben, have built careers on the study of Islam as comparative political theorists, Muslim political theorists, especially racialized scholars, “are made to feel that their belief in Islam, their identity as Muslims, somehow compromises their intellectual integrity and objectivity” (Chaudhry 2018, 7). Such scholarship centers whiteness in the study of Islam, and for the most part, has been focused on translating and interpreting the “political”, “cosmopolitan”, “democratic”, dimensions of medieval and pre-colonial Islamic (con)texts by “journeying to Other shores” (Euben 2006). It prioritizes the voices of “dead Muslim scholars, rather than respond to the pressing moral needs of living Muslim communities” (Chaudhry 2018, 6). It is also written for and consumed by primarily white, secular, non-Muslim audiences. I argue that such scholarship, characterized as White Supremacist Islamic Studies (WhiSIS) by Chaudhry, lacks the barakah (blessing) (Demirel and Sahib 2015) of Allah as well as of the Muslim community. In their later scholarship, political theorists who set out to find in the “Islamic world” that which resembles the liberal, progressive ideals of the western, modern world end up running into themselves. Without realizing the imperial origins of their intentions or desires to appropriate, they acknowledge the limits of their ability to know or work within the Islamic imaginary and eventually discontinue or abandon such work. The ethical sensibilities, the desires, that drive such scholarship are self-centered and not in the service of the Muslim community or even to the cause of de-colonization but instead serve to authorize white men and
women as interpretive authorities of the Islamic. Conversely, de-colonial scholars of political
theory argue that knowledge production does not only engage the intellect, or the realm of
discourse, but is also embodied, relational, rooted in peopled histories, and cultivates within us
ethical sensibilities and orientations.

The colonialist ethos of comparative political theory is best captured by Roxanne Euben’s
metaphor of journeying to other shores. Euben naturalizes the association between travel and the
pursuit of knowledge and likens it to a “bridge that opens a realm of comparative inquiry across
culture and history” (Euben 2006, 38). The text is steeped in the logic of coloniality: from the
defining binary she relies on between Muslims/Western travelers, to her sanctioned ignorance
towards the colonial orientations of European travel, to her de-contextualized and disembodied
attempts at interpreting Quranic Revelation, to her harmful readings of colonial displacement and
dispossession as natural consequences of the ambivalence that comes with travel. Although the
text is sprinkled with bits and bobs of quotes by post-colonial and racialized scholars, and there
is one section on imperialist travel, the majority of her citationality relies heavily on the sense-
contact histories of colonialist writers to theorize travel as a concept, as a material, relational and
perceptual medium, by which one comes to know. Similar to Wolin’s notion of re-picturization,
travel, for Euben, entails the “multiplication of vision—and the recognitions and misrecognitions
it inevitably entails—made possible by a condition of simultaneous rootedness and
estrangement” (Euben 2006, 45). Euben does briefly connect imperial sensibilities with the
impulse to travel as seen in her reference to the colonialist writings of James Mill:

Whatever is worth seeing or hearing in India, can be expressed in writing. As soon as
everything of importance is expressed in writing, a man who is duly qualified may obtain
more knowledge of India in one year in his closet in England, than he could obtain during the
course of the longest life, by the use of his eyes and ears in India (Euben 2006, 123).
This acknowledgement does not translate into a re-orientation of her own sense-abilities as seen in her move to recommend that comparative political theory as a method and as a sensibility engages the faculties of sight and hearing in the work of discovering “new” cosmopolitanisms. Whereas Euben studies travel writing and Islamic historiography, Andrew March (2009) attempts to place CPT scholarship on the “Islamic” within the broader field of political theory. He argues that political theory is the exercise of: normative political philosophy, critical analysis and interpretation, the history of political thought, the study of forms of political thought and speech (534). CPT scholars claim that they do not do the work of introducing non-western texts to the western political theory; instead March (2009) argues that the contributions of CPT can be organized into five themes: “the epistemic, global-democratic, critical transformative, explanatory-interpretative and the rehabilitative (538). The epistemic argument for comparative political theory is that western political concepts cannot lay claim to universality, without engaging and including non-Western perspectives.

Referencing Dallmayr in *Beyond Monologue* (2004), March argues that the aim of comparative political theory should be global-democratic and work to imagine a “planetary political philosophy” which facilitates cross-cultural understanding and engages globalization. The third theme, critical-transformative, acknowledges that the questions and solutions posed by western political theory are not only acts of ideological hegemony and domination, but also, part of the problem. The critical-transformative dimension in particular engages (post)colonial literature. The explanatory-interpretive dimension mobilizes non-western perspectives and contexts to throw light onto how political problems are articulated to reveal new orders or answers and responsibility. Finally, the work of comparative political theory seeks to rehabilitate the gaps between western and non-western approaches to political theory, to reveal possibilities
for similarity and universality. Building the tradition of CPT, Mark Warren and Melissa Williams (2014) offer an alternative method of comparative political theory that elaborates on the ethical sensibilities of CPT not only as a method but as a democratizing force that builds relations of responsibility across various interpretive communities (43–46). Similar to March, Warren and Williams (2014) also assume that such community-building work is primarily intellectual, logo-centric, and involves:

1) Empathy: making the particular trials and tribulations experienced by communities in a global and local context intelligible as problems for political theory and political action;
2) Representation: challenge how problems are articulated through the self-understandings of the political subject, as well as the terms through which power is legitimated;
3) Translation: mapping new terrains of relational responsibility within communities of shared fate;
4) Discourse: generate new discourses “that attend to globalized relationships of fate, and contribute to emergent publics” and;
5) Action: transform discourses into orientations for political action and political actors (43–46).

The aim of such scholarship is to further “critical reflexivity across cultural and linguistic boundaries—a condition for fashioning collective futures” (Williams and Warren 2014). Nowhere within these three frameworks is there a critique of why such a glaring absence of Islamic (con)texts exists in the first place within mainstream political theory and how the situatedness of political theorist as moral persons and political subjects is predicated upon the subjugation of Muslim subjectivities, Islamic epistemologies and ontologies. What is missing in these paradigms are the issues of positionality, de-coloniality and the ethics of knowledge production that arise in such encounters. In the words of bell hooks (2014), “to make one’s self vulnerable to the seduction of difference, to seek an encounter with the Other, does not require that one relinquish forever one’s mainstream positionality” (23). Western CPT scholars continue to follow a logic of categorization, west/non-west, that signifies the movement of travelling
elsewhere to unchartered epistemic terrain in hopes of finding cosmopolitan notions of democracy, justice, freedom to add flavor to their existing canon (21). It is really a sub-field in which “rebellious” white scholars attempt to rehabilitate gaps within their own self-understandings while policing, gatekeeping and delegitimizing racialized, Black and Indigenous scholars from working within their own knowledge-systems and traditions in order to profit from appropriating non-western knowledge, racialized labours of knowledge translation and stories for the sake of feeding their desire to know.

Through such appropriation, white scholars exploit and profit through imperialist nostalgia, the desire to know what they have absenced, “where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed” or as “a process of yearning for what one has destroyed that is a form of mystification” (hooks 2014, 25). Such imperialist nostalgia can look like white political theorists attempting to become like the Other or to dig up the Other’s “abandoned world” or project onto the Other “a sense of plenty, bounty, a field of dreams” that holds epistemic potential for “social control as well as commodity innovation” (ibid). What remains unquestioned is the genocidal impulse with which such epistemologies have been systematically erased within the field of political theory to create such “blindspots” within the self-understanding of political theorists. Disagreeing with Euben, I argue such “blindspots” are not caused by a lack of, or the ambivalence that comes with, of world-travelling.

The emergence of CPT as a sub-field is not the first time in history political philosophers have journeyed to other shores. From John Locke’s defense of English colonialism (Arneil 1996), to John Stuart Mill’s plea to civilize the barbaric (Levin 2004), to Hegel’s “slaughterbench”, to Marx’ take on colonial expansion as an organic result of capitalism, the Other has been written and imagined in the history of European political thought as
unappropriated land to be conquered, as a dirty body to be purified, as an irrational worldview to be consumed by the cunning of Reason, as unmined terrain (Jenco 2007) to revive European economies or as an object incapable of having a history and a language of its own. In practice, such colonialist narratives were used to justify the deeply violent and violating practices of European-Christian missionaries in the two waves, in 1492 and 1792, of missionary movement into the Americas, Africa and India (Segovia 2005). Care, in this context, was a civilizing mission. The missionaries’ “perspectives of justice” were informed by colonial readings of the Bible. They were not “ethically opposed to the imperial project of their countries” and were deeply implicated as agents of imperialism (Dube 1997, 4). And so, “Christianizing, colonizing, civilizing, as well as enslaving” were all part and parcel of the “mission to save” (M. W. Dube 1997, 10). With a similar ethos, comparative political theorists set out to save the salvageable aspects of non-western cultures and knowledge systems. In doing so, they assume an interpretive authority as translators who have been charged with the burden of locating in the abyss of the non-West semblances of their pre-conceived notions. Upon discovering “new cosmopolitanisms” CPT theorists re-package non-western epistemologies as holistic solutions to problems within western societies caused by systems they refuse to dismantle or disinherit in their praxis.

Why is it that political theorists still cling to this story of “the West” as the birthplace of modernity? Is it that, as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) argues, “it is impossible to think of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even the theological traditions of Europe?” Just as Thomas Macaulay traced the historical origins of British civilization to Ancient Greece as a way to signify the inferiority of Sanskrit, political theorists continue to center the origins of political theory in colonial language-systems, in the writings and historical contexts of European-Christian
philosophers, and in North-American political science departments. We are trained to refer to, and defend, these (con)texts in our practices and pedagogies as the origins of freedom, of civilization and of civil society, of the “political” and of political (inter)subjectivity. This insular interpretive community of shared fate is steeped in colonial textual sensibilities; in addition, there are many gatekeepers and access barriers that enable the privileged few, be it white men or native informants, who meet the anthropological minimum for Reason, to become translators and interpreters of non-Western traditions.

1.7 Connection-Based Modes of Knowing

There is little space within the methods of CPT, and within the sensibilities of care ethics, for understanding the ethical implications for our knowledge relations when knowledge is appropriated through non-consensual and white-orientated modes of travel or empathy. In addition, there is also little accountability to consider how colonial sensescapes of care-based knowing are inherited and acted upon as orientations in contemporary political theory. The narrative of discovery or recognition that underpins the sentiment of journeying to other shores, or hearing different voices, fails to account for the spectral histories of caring labour, sensibilities of connective knowing and care-based epistemologies that exist beyond the white imagination and have played a crucial role in Islamic knowledge preservation. Such knowledge has been held in place and sustained primarily by racialized, Black and Indigenous Muslim (m)others. What about the African mothers who braided rice into their daughters’ hair to prepare them for their forced journey to the other shore (Sharpe 2016)? What about Palestinian expecting mothers who must make the difficult, and often deadly, pilgrimage to Jerusalem to give birth (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014)? What about the Punjabi mothers who were forced to give birth in the transience of a moving kafila during the partition of India in 1947 (Butalia 2000)? What of the
enslaved Muslims who carried knowledge of the Quran in their hearts and on their tongues to Turtle Island (Ibn Said 1831; Ware 2014)? What about the epistemologies, and the Others, that have been denied passage by escaping or evading the sensors of whiteness, as a straightening device?

Echoing Puig de la Bellacasa’s call for connective knowledge practices, James Tully also urges political theorists to build relationships with communities of struggle within their present horizon. In *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, Tully articulates a practical, historical-critical framework of political theory in which the purpose of political theory is to (Tully 2008, 15–26):

1) Transform existing practices of governance into problems for reflection and reform,
2) Focus on disclosing “historically contingent conditions of possibility of this historically singular set of practices of governance and the range of problems/solutions to which it gives rise” as opposed to creating a vision of the normative,
3) Articulate conditions of possibility, also echoed by Wolin, as historically contingent to communities of struggle and help them envision possibilities of “governing themselves differently” and,
4) Build an on-going mutual relationship with “concrete struggles, negotiations, and solutions” and with those who “experiment with modifying the practices of governance on the ground” (Ibid.)

Tully argues that political theory is a dynamic practice that is necessarily connected to the struggle for freedom. And so, it requires political theorists to perform historical genealogies of practices of governance, critical surveys of political concepts and facilitate “interlocutory intervention on the side of the oppressed” (ibid). In this light, scholarship must remain attentive and responsive to the care and access needs of the communities whose truths it seeks to articulate and advocate for. As political theorists we must embody a “reciprocal relation to the present, as a kind of permanent public critique of relationships of meaning, power and subjectivity in which we think and act politically” (Ibid). This requires evaluating our complicity in practices of governance that define our knowledge relations.
Here, I push Tully, and Wolin, further towards a (de)colonial direction, in that practicing such answerability begins not only with working within our relations and situatedness in the present, but also working through our complicity in (re)presencing coloniality into our horizons by inheriting colonial economies of attention that shape our sense-abilities as political theorists. Beyond the horizon of the present, we inherit histories of relationships, ways of relating, that shape our situatedness and our sense-abilities. Inheriting colonial modes of inquiry, as well as sense-abilities that have been oriented by such histories, places in our hands the potential to harm those with whom we share this world and align with in solidarity. To even make this argument, I have to argue that the work of speculative care for others in political theory is done by embodied humans deeply situated in interdependent relationships that extend across time and space. This requires re-interpreting tradition not as birthright but as relational authorship that is sustained by the birth work of multiple co-authors spread out across multiple temporalities and spaces. Although Wolin assumes political theory begins in the West and can be expanded to account for the unfamiliar and the “new”, he does not acknowledge that this inheritance can have multiple heritages, multiple points of origins and be shaped by interlocutors, epistemologies and histories outside of Europe. Political theory as a dialogue does not take place in the minds of political theorists, as individual readers, and their relationship with the disembodied minds of dead European white men and their observations of unpeopled landscapes.

In authorizing herself as the sole interpretive authority of translating the care and access needs of the Other, the political theorist is complicit in the work of authorizing, as well as authoring, the displacement and dispossession of others from their bodies, relations and lands. It is not the case that the colonized, or the “care-receivers”, are not capable of speaking back or responding to violence, but rather the situatedness of such a relation of dependency care within
the apparatus of coloniality delimits and distorts the colonizer’s capacity to witness. Often researchers exploit narratives of inequality, violence and oppression suffered by racialized, Indigenous and Black communities to gain material profit in the forms of grants to sustain their positions and scholarship on such violence (Bejarano et al. 2019). Approved, and consented to, by the University’s ethics board, such funds for knowledge extraction sustain the scholar’s experience of caring about another community (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 58); however, once the academic has abstracted situated stories through translation and answered pre-formed research questions, the non-reciprocal and non-consensual relation of care is absolved. The scholar goes on to publish, and the community is left to perish (Tuhiwai Smith 2012). Or worse, the anxiety, envy or fear of thinking-with the Others you live-with results in engaging with only dead Others or ancient non-Western texts in your scholarship (Chaudhry 2018).

Through Tully’s frame, we can spatially expand Wolin’s scope of inheritance to account for the relations of responsibility political theorists have with those who share their spatio-temporal horizons, and, with those whom we have absenced as the ancestors of our traditions as well as the histories we have denied entry into our conceptions of the “political” and the “historical”. We are not only complicit in their absence and erasure, but also, materially benefit from such continued displacement and dispossession. Tully (2008) asks, “how do we attend to the strange multiplicity of political voices and activities without distorting or disqualifying them in the very way we approach them” (20)? Expanding the scope of our roots does not mean appropriating histories of violence for material gain, stealing epistemologies or assuming Indigenous ancestry or interpretive authority as a representative of the “Other”, but rather dismantling and disinheriting white supremacy as an ethical orientation and sensibility in our praxis and within our selves. It means empowering both the critique “produced in and through existing structures
of governance” and critique “from the governed” as active agents engaged in “everyday acts of world-building, acts of resistance, and acts of negotiation through existing practices of governance” (Tully 2008, 30–36). Unlike Wolin for whom the political theorist is the one who shapes the boundaries of “the political”, the heart of Tully’s approach is placing the work of understanding within the hands of the people engaged in (re)defining cartographies of their freedom and prioritizing the work of locating possibilities of freedom before articulating what is justice.

Attempting to speak Wolin against Wolin, if political theory is a practice of speculative care, then what may be “new” and unfamiliar to us may not be as such for someone else based on their situatedness; re-picturization, which engages faculties of imagination, may reveal new ways of seeing the picture, but it does not interrogate, or reveal, the (non)ethical orientations and desires that texture our sensory-reception and abilities to perceive various aspects of the picture. Although Wolin offers a sense of social location, the work of re-picturization does not account for our embeddedness as participants in the worlds, the peopled histories we observe and our relationships with the communities we speak and write about. Social location in this paradigm is a matter of locating where you are in a tradition, and not who you are, and with whom are you in a relationship of responsibility. In such perspectival reasoning the moral imagination and the moral boundaries of the self, as well as colonial textual sensibilities somehow remain sanctioned and tightly sealed off from inquiry. Desire to chart new epistemic and ontological terrain is taken for granted and naturalized without questioning our inheritance of the sense-histories of colonial contact through which such desires have been cultivated. For Wolin and Tully, the political theorist is embedded in a web of relationships with other political theorists all of whom have been charged with the care work of politicalness. However, the relational and interdependent
thinking self that Wolin describes is missing a body and faculties of sense beyond sight, speech and hearing, as well as, non-secular sense-orientations and sense-abilities.

Cultivating this desire to know the Other without opening up our selves leaves one crucial question unaddressed: in what ways is our ability to witness, to respond to, to address, and care for the histories and (con)texts of others interrupted through the inheritance of colonial models of inquiry? Which practices, or sensibilities, of textual interpretation, of reading and of writing, delimit our capacity to care, or (dis)orient us to care for others in violent ways? I argue that the colonial baggage of political theory, as a field, as a practice, and as a subjectivity is inherited by us in our modes of knowing (teaching, writing, and reading) and embodiment of interpretive authority, as knowers and makers of the “political”. This inheritance is not a dead thing, or a dead body, that is hidden in the chambers of the past, but rather is an active ethical orientation that shapes our sense-ability, deeply permeates our world-building practices, and textures our storied lives to continue to presence coloniality—making us deeply complicit as its authors.

1.8 With Loving Eyes: The Political Theorist as a Witness

In addition to inheriting colonial sensibilities and orientations of whiteness, we cannot discuss the notion of birthright without asking who is the mother? The image of the horizon is not a floating line that hangs above our field of vision; rather, for ethics of care theorists the horizon dwells within the face of the Other, or the mother as witnessed by the newborn. In the politics of recognition paradigm, “the Other is internal to the self’s substantive content, a part of its own horizon, and thus a part of its own identity” (Alcoff 2006, 45). The primary paradigm through which care ethicists imagine relational intersubjectivities is the mother-child relationship because we are all “some mother’s child”. In this model, care ethicists assume familiarity, as
opposed to estrangement, as the natural condition between a mother and her child. In *The Capacity of Care*, Wendy Hollway (2007) uses psychoanalytical methods to build this notion of relational subject formation to illustrate how infants, whose bodies are read as incapable of care and concern, begin to develop and organize a sense of self inter-subjectively through their relationship with their mothers as the first Other they encounter. At the heart of her argument is the mother-infant relationship as paradigmatic of the dialectical relationship between inter-subjectivity and individuality which contains movement from total infant dependency, to separation, to reciprocal care, to geriatric care. Hollway echoes Arendt and Levinas in framing difference, how we encounter the Other, co-existence, as the starting point of ethical life (Hollway 2007, 102).

Though she argues that caring subjectivities are formed through intimate familial relationships developmentally, such a maternal subjectivity is transposed onto networks beyond the scope of our kin. She quotes Levinas, that ethics is being for an Other, which requires, “truly going to the other where he is truly other” (Hollway 2007, 102). The transcendence Levinas speaks of echoes Butler’s discussion of coming undone through the narrative standpoints of others, as strange, unfamiliar and distant as they may seem. Reading the mother/child paradigm through Ahmed’s notion of domestication helps us trouble Levinas’ account of the Other as: “introjection of the other into the self, without which the psyche could not come into being. I unavoidably suffer from the other’s suffering. The self does not volunteer, it is enlisted” (Ibid). In Levinas’ notion of radical alterity, subject-formation, just like home-making, is read as essentially and naturally conflictual and the capacity of care is a way to transcend this drive to kill the Other because: “a person would rather not be troubled by another but there before the other, the self is troubled, a moral self that rises to the occasion and aids the other” (Ibid.) It is
through love’s knowledge, preservative love in Kittay’s sense, or loving perception in Lugones’
sense, that the capacity to care is realized. Margaret Urban Walker (2006) complicates the notion
of love’s knowledge as a remedy to moral injury with her argument that what requires care is not
just the injured body, or the core self of the individual, but also the relationships that hold us
accountable and recognizable to one another. Before attempting to venture to other shores,
political theorists still need to do the work of moral repair within our knowledge relations and
this begins with accounting for our complicity in authoring coloniality. Walker introduces the
notion of moral repair as the process of “restoring or creating trust and hope in a shared sense of
value and responsibility” (Walker 2006, 28).

From Kittay’s dependency critique, to Butler’s conception of vulnerability as a political
resource, to Tronto’s vision of care as a democratizing force, existing literature on care ethics
centres in on the point that: situated and embodied knowledges reveal different orders of moral
responsibility, possibilities for freedom, and material terrains of violence and precarity. By
framing the practice of care as revelatory, as the work of moral repair, care ethicists open up
critical, conceptual space to (re)articulate critiques of how the public/private split and the myth
of the atomistic individual and rational political citizen within modern political theory delimit
possibilities for relational autonomy and moral personhood. I argue that the work of speculative
care should be to reveal orders of relational responsibility and contact histories of sense-ability
by which we learn to read, write, think and care about the other. This requires looking within, not
travelling to or going to visit new shores or into the Other, and undoing the boundaries of the
self-same, as well as opening up the moral inscrutability of the “I” that inhabits the body of the
political theorist. In addition, as I argue in later chapters, addressing such sense-histories shows
us that the history of political theory as a tradition and its sensibilities are deeply embedded and
informed by the sense-contact histories of imperial expansion in which such speculative care was a force of sanitization in civilizing missions.

Care-based modes of knowing the “political” and the “Islamic” charge me to first disinherit the violence-prone colonial textual sensibilities within care ethics and CPT scholarship. Historicizing Eva Kittay’s notion of dependency care invites us to not only undo colonialist ways of doing political inquiry but also, to embrace the radical heterogeneity of the (m)others of political theory by authorizing care-based epistemologies of knowing the “Islamic.” In her seminal text Love’s Labour, Eva Kittay shares a vision of a political order rooted in connection-based equality in which we “are all equally some mother’s child” (Kittay 1998, 19). Articulated as a critique of liberal individualism, Kittay’s aphorism “some mother’s child” centres the unequal relationship between a dependent and a dependency worker as a universally shared point of origin for equality. Moving away from the social contract tradition, in which equality is a birthright, Kittay argues that equality is cultivated in and through dependency work. By framing motherwork as the conditions through which we become persons, Kittay guides us towards a world in which the status of care-work is intimately linked to the moral personhood and dignity of the individual as “some mother’s child.” And so, the transformative potential of Kittay’s thesis is framing dependency work, the labour of love, as an incubator for moral personhood in which both the charge and the dependency worker are valued in and through the relationship they share. Kittay concludes that the condition for the possibility of equality is the “inevitability of human interdependence” (50). Connection-based equality centres in on what we are due “by virtue of our connection” to those with whom we share relations of dependency.

Throughout this dissertation, I hope to create a tension within Kittay’s notion of connection-based equality and relations of dependency care as life-sustaining, by exploring
dependency as a colonial institution that denies (m)others moral personhood by appropriating their caring labours to sustain the Master’s house at the expense of and in spite of their care. For Kittay, this violates the dependency worker’s claim to “a socially supported situation in which one can give care without the care-giving becoming a liability to one’s own well-being…and the entitlement to care itself” (66). Critiquing the vulnerability model, Kittay argues that “an equality that begins with caring relationships can give no moral warrant to actions or relationships that are coerced” (Kittay 1998, 73). However, in this decolonial spin of Kittay’s call to support dependency workers, what (m)others are due through their forced connections to the Master is reparation and redress not just for the violence done to their bodies, their relations and their lands, but also, for the appropriation of their knowledge practices and caring labours. Whereas Kittay’s assumes the mother-child relationship as a point of universal identification, and the mother as a figure that pours her love into the child, historicizing maternity as a category of analysis enables us to consider how colonial violence estranges and displaces us from our mother(lan)ds and how motherhood itself can be a site of colonial violence.

I translate Gadamer, Wolin and Tully’s definitions of tradition and inheritance into the notion of maternity as situated within the contact zone within which speculative care takes place. Mary Louise Pratt defines the contact zone as “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other to establish ongoing relations” (Pratt 2008, 6–7). De-colonial Christian feminist Musa Dube (1997) argues that the contact zone is where two epistemological frameworks that have been “geographically and historically separated” meet; what is of contention here is not world-travelling itself, but rather the method and sensibilities with which we travel as it guided by the colonizer’s desire “to take control of a foreign land—culturally, economically, politically and geographically” (67).
What needs to be interrogated is “how we authorize travel” within our modes of inquiry (ibid.) and how we represent foreign land and people “as in need or desiring” to be translated by “superior and exceptionally favoured” white, western intellectuals and their agendas of cosmopolitanism (117).

Laura Donaldson (2006) further interprets the contact zone as a space in which there are “ongoing relations” of “severe inequality and intractable conflict” (160). Such a space is not just a colonial frontier where the colonizer does violence to the colonized, but rather, also a place of “co-presence, mutual influence and interlocking understandings that emerge from deep asymmetries of power” (ibid.). There is an “improvisational dimension of colonial encounters” that is often erased in narratives of conquest to deny the sense-ability of the “colonized” to speak back or respond (ibid.). For example, although the Bible was used as a colonial weapon, through her positionality “as a person of Cherokee descent and as an informed biblical reader”, Donaldson practices “responseability” by re-reading Orpah’s exit in the biblical story of Ruth in the Christian context to respond to the historical situation of the colonization of Indigenous peoples and their right to refuse assimilation and return to their motherlands and natal homes (Donaldson 2006, 168). Whereas white political theorists set out to venture to other shores, as a Muslim and racialized settler it is this longing to return, to our mothers and our motherlands, or to have our mothers and our motherlands returned to us, that I tend to and read as the impossible mourning for that and whom have been denied passage into world history and denied their inheritance. In her collection of essays, “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens”, Alice Walker (1983) imagines worlds of gardens in which the creativity and lived testimonies of her enslaved ancestors are in gestation awaiting safe passage into the world on earth:
they forced their minds to desert their bodies and their striving spirits sough to rise, like frail whirlwinds from the hard red clay. And when those frail whirlwinds fell, in scattered particles, upon the ground no one mourned... Our mothers and grandmothers, some of them: moving to music not yet written. And they waited (402).

Did you have a genius of a great-grandmother who died under some ignorant and depraved white overseer’s lash? Or was she required to bake biscuits for a lazy backwater tramp, when she cried out in her soul to paint water coulours of sunsets, or the rain falling on the green and peaceful pasturelands? Or was her body broken and forced to bear children (who were more often than not sold away from her)—8, 10, 15, 20 children—when here on joy was the thought of modelling heroic figures of rebellion, in stone or clay (403)?

Through the written word, Walker creates a space to hold her ancestors, to grieve for the unconsolled, to articulate that which they were denied to say or do within their horizons. She charges herself with the work of inscribing her ancestors’ truths, their secret rebellions, into the space of appearances, into the memories of Black women, into history. She speaks of an extraordinary quilt made with “bits and pieces of worthless rags” that hangs in the Smithsonian representing the story of crucifixion (406). Below it there is a note about its creator, “an anonymous, Black woman in Alabama, a hundred years ago” (407). Intending Black women as her audience in her use of we and our, Walker argues that “if we could locate this “anonymous” Black woman from Alabama, she would turn out to be “one of our grandmothers”—an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use” (Ibid). And so, despite colonial and white supremacist attempts to kill the (m)other, the truths of her ancestors, “our mothers, and grandmothers, ourselves”, have not “perished in the wilderness” (403). For Walker the work of Black scholars is to “fearlessly pull out of ourselves and look at and identify within our lives the living creativity some of our great-grandmothers were not allowed to know” (405). And so, the work of interpreting her ancestors’ songs of sorrow requires the reader to first acknowledge that it is not what her
ancestors sang, but *that* they kept alive “the notion of song” (Ibid) in hopes that “the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see” will one day be planted, or that “the sealed letter they could not plainly read” would one day be read, and received (407). Walker’s text therefore contains not only her stories, but the stories of Black women, and their mother’s stories. And, guided by this heritage, in search of her mother’s garden, Walker finds a garden of her own (409). Her desire to know her ancestors’ songs is made accessible through subjugated histories of care-based epistemologies by which her ancestors preserved for her the notion of song. And so, the point of entry, or access, that racialized, Indigenous and Black scholars have for studying “non-Western” political theory is different in texture and in desire than white political theorists desire to know, and to travel.

Practicing speculative care within the contact zone can enact colonial violence but also, open up space for the “transculturation of meaning”, resistant reading and return (160). Yet, I argue that through the study of political theory, through our relationship as interlocutors with colonialist writers that serve as gatekeepers of the tradition, we also inherit a place, a situatedness, within this contact zone, and relationships with the people (colonizer and colonized) within such imperial settings. And so, if speculative care involves charting sense histories of contact, we must explore how our (in)ability to respond and address colonial violence in our knowledge practices is not only contoured and shaped by coloniality but also, complicit in its (re)production. Cultivating de-colonial sensibilities of speculative care as political theorists requires us to orient our reading of texts to ask:

1. Does this text [or author] have a clear stance against the political imperialism of its time?
2. Does this text encourage travel to distant and inhabited lands, and if so, how does it justify itself?
3. How does this text construct difference: Is there dialogue and mutual interdependence, or condemnation and replacement of all that is foreign?
4. Does this text employ gender representations to construct relationships of subordination and domination? (Dube 2012, 57)

Within my undergraduate and graduate instruction within political theory, these questions were rarely asked or considered, or worse dismissed when raised, in the instruction of political theory in the western academy. Referencing Satya Mohanty, Linda Alcoff (2006) argues that “our relation to social power produces forms of blindness just as it enables degrees of lucidity” (43). Alternatively, de-colonial scholars argue that such blindness is an epistemological privilege (Santos 2015, 145). The metonymical use of blindness here to refer to unknowing, or the unknown, or in this case, a refusal to know, or what rests beyond our horizons to signify an actor that lacks self-awareness is of course ableist and reads sight-impairment as a mark of epistemic inferiority or ignorance (Schalk 2018, 39). In response to metaphors of disability as forms of narrative prosthesis, Amy Vidali advocates for a “disability approach to metaphor” that “is not solely based on critiquing metaphoric disability representations” but instead “actively mines our own stories and artful re-renderings that play on the diversity of ways that we come to see and know” (Vidali 2010, 34). In addition, Black-feminist disability scholars such as Sami Schalke (2018) call to historicize, as opposed to condemn, representations of disability as both metaphor and materiality in order to “read for the possible metaphorical, allegorical, or otherwise abstract ways in which the fictional representation of disability alludes to race, gender, class, and sexuality” and the role (dis)ability plays in “historical realities of these mutually constitutive social systems and to erase the presence and importance of disabled people within other marginalized groups” (41). Such an approach is critical and activist and attends to “how diverse bodies impact metaphor acquisition and use, which shifts disability away from something only
“used” or “represented” by metaphor” and how “disability interprets, challenges, and articulates metaphors (Vidali 2010, 42). Interrogating ableist metaphors in political theory requires us to engage the “full range of disability; resist the desire to simply “police” or remove disability metaphors; actively transgress disability metaphors by employing a diverse vocabulary; and artistically create and historically reinterpret metaphors of disability” (35).

Such ableist metaphors of blindspots within our epistemic horizons, which exist both in Islamic thought and praxis, as well as political theory, do not identify the epistemic limits of the political theorist but rather are a privileged refusal to acknowledge the “subject status” of the colonized and “recognize them as creative, innovative subjects of their own history” and “violating the most fundamental way a person or people know themselves” (Donaldson 2001, 48–51). Who is cast as blind, not-knowing, or as epistemically inferior is often not white political theorists studying non-Western traditions but rather racialized scholars working within their respective traditions. Building upon Spivak’s notion of sanctioned ignorance within knowledge production, Donaldson re-defines the concept of the blindspot to interrogate “the way in which certain forms of not-knowing are both legitimated and rewarded in the Euro-American academy” (45). In particular, political theorists profit from the “logic of translation-as-violation” without doing the work of emancipation that requires them to account for their complicity in authoring and authorizing the structures that seek to destroy such knowledge systems (ibid.). In addition, in the study of the “Islamic”, ableist metaphors not only serve to justify the exclusion of disabled Muslims, Queer Muslims, Black Muslims and Muslim women as interpretive authorities in our knowledge relations but they also ignore how interlocking systems of coloniality work to disable Muslim bodyminds through various orders of physical and psychic harm to constitute white, secular and cis-het bodyminds as capable of knowing, and as knowers (Schalk 2018, 6).
1.9 Research Questions

In this dissertation, I hope to develop an Islamic ethic of care that engages all five of the ethical sensibilities of care, noted by care ethicists, and the methodological aims of CPT as noted by Warren and Williams. However, I aim to do so in a way that disrupts the colonial approaches of such methods by disinheriting the colonial textual sensibilities that texture the tradition of political theory. To do so, I have created a set of questions as a gauge to ensure that my caring labours of imagining and designing Islam as a care-based epistemology are intersectional, de-colonial and embedded in my positionality:

1) Caring About: If moral personhood is formed in and through dependency care, what of the ways in which dependency care has been institutionalized in the contexts of the Transatlantic slave trade, European colonial rule or settler-colonialism to deny racialized, Black and Indigenous mothers their moral personhood in and through their care-for the Master’s house and the Master’s care-for her? In such contexts of coloniality, can there be a non-ethics of care in which the care-receiver can exist, refuse and deny consent as the Master’s identification of “unmet needs” are driven by colonial desires and modes of caring? How can we cultivate ethical sensibilities through de-colonial and Islamic modes of knowing that engage the heart as a sensorial faculty of judgment by which we pay attention to the needs of others and build consensual and reciprocal relations of care?

2) Caring For: If, through connection-based equality we are owed what we are due, what is the enslaved mother and her ancestors owed by virtue of her connection to the Master and the violence he has done to her relations, her body and her lands through his “care”? How can we extend the cosmological horizons of moral responsibility by inheriting the
“burden” of responding to the weaponization of care in colonial contexts in our knowledge production (Tronto 2013, 35)? With de-colonial modes of judgement, how can we move beyond the politics of recognition in which harm is framed as inattention and unintentional and prioritize impact, as opposed to intention, in addressing harm and moral injury in colonial relations of care? And in what ways are we complicit and responsible for reproducing coloniality in the speculative care we practice as political theorists?

3) Caring-With: Eva Kittay’s model of doulia entails that “just as we have required care to survive and thrive, so we need to provide conditions that allow others—including those who do the work of caring—to receive the care they need to survive and thrive” (Kittay 1998, 133, emphasis added). I ask Kittay, what are the boundaries of this we she speaks of, and how has this boundary that ensures the conditions for her to thrive, maintained through the caring labours of the (m)others she speaks for?

4) Care-giving: If the care-giver has a “responsibility to care-for the dependent”, what if he practices this care in an irresponsible, incompetent and violent way, and is still entitled by the “larger society” in institutions of slavery and (settler)colonialism to be cared-for and tended to by (m)others coerced into dependency? What conceptual space and tools do de-colonial modes of knowledge production offer in evaluating such coerceive and incompetent care?

5) Care-Receiving: And finally, according to the politics of recognition paradigm, if the Master, or in this case the Great White Mother’s, refusal to attend to the needs of the Other in a life-sustaining way results in the absolution of the bond, “from its most fundamental obligation...to its founding possibility”, then how can we theorize the origins
of the Master’s subjectivity as founded upon such dependency in the same breath as his willingness to abject himself from such a position of authority?

With these questions in mind, I challenge political theorists to open up their selves and consider how we build relationships with Others as political subjects, and as witnesses, in the knowledge production process. According to Kelly Oliver (2001), the political subject is a “result of a response to an address from another and the possibility of addressing itself to another” (105). She argues that the way “we conceive of subjectivity affects the way we conceive of our relationships and responsibilities to others, especially others whom we perceive as different” (19). And so, the technologies of address-ability and response-ability compose “the process of witnessing” through which we become political subjects. Whereas Puig de la Bellacasa focuses on relationality, moving beyond the politics of recognition, towards an ethics of response, Oliver frames responsibility as a “double sense of opening up the ability to respond…and ethically obligating subjects to respond by virtue of their very subjectivity” (91). Refusal to respond, in Eva Kittay’s words, in a relation of care results in the bond being absolved “from its most fundamental obligation…to its founding possibility” (Kittay 1998, 131). What makes witnessing relational is that the reader shares in carrying the narrator’s burden of witnessing through an encounter of “coming together…which makes possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing” (Oliver 2001, 91). Conflictual models of relating within the field disrupt our capacities of response- and address-ability by encouraging deconstruction, the division of “webs of thought that share a history”, and splits and compartmentalization (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 73). Thinking with care entails thinking with engagements with inherited worlds, collapsing single-issued worlds and developing within readers an “awareness of multiple
heritages” by creating “lines of surprising connections”, to open up possibilities for speculative care (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 75).

This labour of love requires of political theorists to ground our practices of critique within a hermeneutic ethos of openness. Similarly, Edward Said (1983) argues that the task of interpretation calls upon the reader to acknowledge that no “reading is neutral or innocent”, to avoid falling into an “ideological” trap in which “theories become unanswerable and limited in their uses” (241). Such a task requires practices of reading that enable us to resist theory, “to open it up toward historical reality…human needs…” by maintaining an openness to its own “failings” and by “keeping the concrete, presentness of the everyday proximate in our abstractions” (ibid.) And so, for Said, textual interpretation takes place in various interpretive communities defined by a spatio-temporal situatedness, political interests and social-historical configuration. Whereas Said calls for the political theorist to be responsive and attentive to the present and to her positionality, Gadamer (1960) calls for her to practice an openness to the opinions of the other, to the otherness of the text by “setting it in relation to the whole of one’s opinions, or setting oneself to it” (72). To be ready to “be told something” (xxxii) by a text is to be willing to open up your horizons of self-understanding and to come undone by the practice of reading. Instead of attempting to speak for past Others, Gadamer asks of readers to “to learn instead to recognize in the object the Other of its Own” (78). In addition to opening up the boundaries of political theory as a field and practice, and one’s subjectivity as a political theorist, Brown and Puig de la Bellacasa also ask of us to acknowledge that our thinking is situated in crowded worlds. Wendy Brown (2002a) develops Edward Said’s method of contrapuntal to demand political theorists to practice an “openness” to different perspectives in our praxis and acknowledge that our lived experience “is not the only possibility for meaning” (573). She
derives the notion of counter-point from a music metaphor that “describes the texture that results from combining different musical lines, juxtaposed to make a new melody” (Brown 2002b; Foss, Domenico, and Foss 2012, 240). Such a method allows various truths to be “enriched by coming together and playing off of one another” (Brown 2002b).

Whereas Said, Gadamer and Brown, speak of an openness within our thought processes, the framework of thinking with care opens up space to consider how textual interpretation is connected to thinking, building and dwelling; and so we must not only open up our minds, but also other sensibilities of moral judgment engaged in the work of care. A question for political theorists is: how are our thoughts embedded in the worlds we care for (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 76)? How do we care for the “unavoidably thorny relations that foster rich, collective, interdependent albeit not seamless” layers of meaning that tie together our sense of “we” (79)? And how can we create articulations of a “caring we that conveys learnings from complex conflicts as vital to thinking-with” (Ibid.) For Puig de le Bellacasa, it is through dissenting-within, of recognizing withinness, “to the worlds we engage” that we learn to relate with “the complex layers of one’s personal and collective historical situatedness in the apparatuses of the production of knowledge” (80). To dissent-within a collective requires “testing the edges of a we of that we consider our world”, accepting “one’s thought as inheritor, even of the threads of thought we opposed and worlds we would rather not endorse” (ibid.). Instead of epistemic de-linking (Mignolo 2009), I argue that through my instruction in a western academic institution, I have inherited deeply colonial (con)texts of political theory and have no choice but to engage with them in order to uproot them from my knowledge practices.

The refusal to acknowledge the attachments and inheritances that shape our knowledge relations is seen in how we strive to achieve and embody distance in theory. Those we study and
write about are “not there only to think-with but also to live-with” and this requires envisioning “necessary joint futures” not just shared fate in which we live “hand in hand with the effects of one’s thinking” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 83). Puig de la Bellacasa notes that “recognizing vulnerability as an ethical stance could be an inescapable price of commitment and involvement” but, “if care moves relational webs, even by creating critical cuts, those involved in caring are bound to be moved too (ibid.). Through our practice, we are not merely tied in discourse as interlocutors but situated and bound to others within relations of care across time and space. These relations constitute a contact zone between readers, writers, publishers, knowledge-keepers etc. that is an extension of our bodies and serves as a dwelling place we share with others (Ahmed 2004b). I ask of the political theorist to care-for the (m)other by first addressing within himself the impact of his inheritance and the harm he can cause to the communities he intends to care for in his scholarship.
Chapter 2: In the Waiting Room of History

“I leave you in the care of Allah, as nothing is lost that is in her care.”

Surely, unto our Nourisher we are returning. O Allah, we ask you on this journey for goodness and piety, and for works that are pleasing to you. O Allah, lighten this journey for us and make its distance easy for us. O Allah, you are our Companion on the road and the one in whose care we leave our family. O Allah, I seek refuge in you from this journey's hardships, and from the wicked sights in store and from finding our family and property in misfortune upon returning.

-Duas (Invocations) for travelers, and readers, embarking upon a journey

2.1 The Plight of Zaynab and Bishan Singh

Like every beginning, I begin with birth—the birth of Tanveer Kaur, and the twin births of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1947. Tanveer Kaur is the daughter of Buta and Zaynab Singh notoriously cast as the Heer and Ranjha of Partition. In the wake of the brutal violence, neighbours became enemies overnight, and when the Chenab River filled with blood, Buta Singh a Sikh farmer purchased a Muslim girl, Zaynab, for 1500 rupees from her abductor. In the months that followed, Zaynab converted to Sikhism, and gave birth to two daughters, Tanveer, “a miracle of the sky,” and Dilveer. As part of the Inter-Dominion Agreement and the Central Recovery Operation, the Indian government recovered Zaynab back to her natal home, with her family in Lahore. Interpretations of the story speak of Zaynab’s lament, her heartbreak and discord of being forcefully taken from her new family. Upon arrival in Lahore, for the sake of transferring inherited property, Zaynab was immediately remarried. In grief, Buta Singh cut his hair, converted to Islam, as Jamil Ahmed, and decided to illegally cross the border into Lahore with Tanveer, now named Sultana Ahmed.

After the difficult journey across the border, upon arriving at Zaynab’s village, Buta Singh was beaten by Zaynab’s male relatives and placed in jail as an undocumented, and illegal trespasser. In trial, he begged to be reunited with his wife and daughter, for them to return to
India together. At the end of his trial, the judge ordered Zainab, to appear in the courtroom. Popular accounts of this story depict Zainab’s testimony as a veiled Muslim woman, surrounded by her male kin, who was denied the conditions to speak for herself. All available interpretations end with Zainab refusing to go back to India and disowning Buta Singh and their two daughters. That night Buta Singh died by suicide at a nearby train station survived by his daughter Tanveer. He left behind three notes, the first demanding Zainab to take care of their daughters, the second in which he entrusted his remaining wealth to a masjid, and the third in which he requested to be buried as a Muslim in the village of Nurpur. Zaynab’s family refused to bury a Sikh man on their land and so, he was buried in Miani Sahib, the oldest graveyard in Lahore. Faint remnants of the story speak of Muslim students across Lahore linking arms to protect his gravesite; however, his grave was razed by members of Zaynab’s family and it is unclear where he was buried in the graveyard today. There are rumours that Zaynab is still married to an abusive husband in Lahore and Sultana was adopted by the first female judge of the Lahore High Court, Rabia Qari, and is now married. The traces of this story that have been inscribed are of course incomplete, possibly incorrect, and misreadings; but this is all we have.

The partition of Punjab, the event that marks the birth of free nations, has been inscribed into the land with the barbed wire of fences and onto maps and passports with black ink. What remains as a spectral layer of this boundary are the stories of the millions killed in the name of a motherland-to-come that live on in the margins of historical archives. Whereas material regimes of surveillance maintain the upkeep of borders, it is through the work of remembrance, in the form of oral storytelling and the written word that the spectral layers of the event have been inscribed within the individual and collective memory of the survivors’ descendants. But what of the gravesites? Who cares for, watches over, visits the dead? Without the work of mourning and
moral repair, of visiting and caring for the dead, gravesites cease to exist. What of the remains of the unburied refugees who were killed in transit? These apparitions have folded into deeper boundaries between South-Asians, as open wounds left uncared for. Yet, partition is written as a story of birth, a birth that came with the death of many mothers: in the name of the Motherland, in the name of the Creator herself, and in the name of freedom from Queen Mother. And so, I ask, what do we make of a maternity without a mother?

In the story of Zaynab and Buta Singh, for example, all we have been left with are two sides of a story: the tale of a heroic Sikh man who overcame all odds to fight for the honour of a Muslim woman, his wife, the mother of his children and a tale of a manipulative, controlling group of Muslim-Pakistani males thirsting to acquire Zaynab’s inherited property through forced marriage. Where do we locate the inner life-world of Zaynab as a Muslim woman whose truths remain stillborn and lost in transition? What would she have chosen for herself had circumstances honoured her moral personhood? Displaced and dispossessed from her home, she is abducted and transferred to a place near the border she does not yet know of and then is recovered and returned to her natal home without her consent. She must marry her abductor for her protection, and then later, is forcefully married as part of an attempt to usurp her inherited property and land by her natal family. She gives birth to daughters as a Sikh woman only to have to abandon them as a Muslim woman.

Of Zaynab’s plight during the partition is also Bishan Singh. In the story “Toba Tek Singh”, Sadat Hasan Manto bears witness to the unsayable and unspeakable horrors of the violent and violating birth of India and Pakistan through the narrative frame of lunacy and the liminal location of mental asylums during the Partition. “Upar di gur gur di annexe di bedhiyana di moong di daal of di Pakistan and Hindustan of di durr phitey mun.” This medley of English,
Punjabi and Urdu words belongs to Bishan Singh, the protagonist who is a Sikh farmer housed in a mental asylum in Lahore a few years after Partition. He is characterized as a wealthy landowner from the town Toba Tek Singh who falls into the deep hole of mental illness. Having witnessed and lived through the violence of Partition, Manto, as the narrator, places himself with the madmen in the asylum as they struggle to locate themselves within the newly drawn borders of the nation-states. Bishan Singh, in particular, roams the asylum asking about the whereabouts of his hometown. The name of the village mirrors the story of the Sikh Saint Tek Singh who once settled near a pond (*toba*) and committed his life to charity by supporting vulnerable peoples, regardless of their religion, caste or race, to access the water for nourishment. Like Zaynab, as his family is forced to relocate to India, Bishan Singh, is also displaced and is scheduled to be transferred, without his consent, at the Wagah border in exchange for “Muslim lunatics”. At this point of transit, he asks a border guard about the whereabouts of his hometown, to which the guard sarcastically replies with, “Pakistan”. Distraught, and unable to return to Pakistan, he stands still in protest. The story ends with a jarring image of Bishan Singh, a man “who had stood on his legs day and night for fifteen years” prostrating on the ground in between wired fences that marked Hindustan from Pakistan, dead “on a stretch of land that had no name” (Manto 1955). The narrator inscribes Singh’s death as the death of Toba Tek Singh, somewhere that no longer is exists as a place to retreat to or return to for shelter or nourishment for vulnerable peoples.

The stories of Zaynab and Bishan Singh, among millions of others, remain unburied at this borderland from where I descend. The anonymity of Zaynab’s silence and Bishan Singh’s madness have been attributed to the muteness of violence or madness as a horizon that refuses its subjects the comfort of sensibility. Both have been thrown into a community of shared fate
(Williams 2001). The author of the social contract that ties them to the nation-state also remains anonymous and the perpetrator of the event(s) of violence remains faceless and unaccounted for. The notion of violence as senseless, as a fate that befalls upon Zaynab and Bishan Singh like a dark veil, leaves no space to locate intentional agency within the actions of perpetrators and the deeper colonial structures that force the fatedness of such relations and situations. Here, the veil serves a b/ordering purpose to domesticate and contain the unsightly and dependent disabled or female body to uphold the myth of the free political subject as an abled-bodied male. Such b/ordering of interpretive authority within nationalist renderings of these two stories cast Zaynab and Bishan Singh as anonymous, faceless, disabled figures and dependency as a decapitating force that eats away at the person until the body is abandoned. The mad, or the female, body is marked as anthropologically illegible and incapable of self-representation and is objectified as a metaphor to signify the senselessness of the violence of the Partition, of being forced into a community of shared fate.

I begin this chapter with these two stories of Partition to draw a parallel between nationalist and imperialist sensibilities of reading dependency not only as a limit on interpretive and epistemic authority but also one’s ability to acquire citizenship as a free political subject. Here, dependency is understood through the colonial politics of recognition in which personhood is formed through the death-drive and the master-slave dialectic. In this paradigm, what ties the slave to the Master, or the child to the mother, in a relation of dependency is the notion of shared fate in which each is thrown into the bond without consent. It is force, and the fear of death via life without the Master or at the hands of the mother, that sustains this connection. And so, in a situation where the death drive is naturalized as a feature of dependency in which the slave, or child, obsessively desires and aims for the death of the (m)other, liberation can only be
conceived as the process of becoming a citizen through matricide and absolving all bonds of dependency. At the crux of the colonial politics of recognition is a demarcation of readable ontology, and reading as an ability, as inherent properties of white bodies. Whether it is through the purdah system, institutionalized care, or the colony, the inability to be recognizable as a human in the white gaze and to transform into an autonomous, free subject of the nation-state casts racialized, disabled and gendered bodies to the netherworld of dependency. (Inter)dependency is not only rendered as a mark of ontological and epistemic inferiority but is also a situation that destines one to live in the inescapable space between two deaths—where the only ethical possibilities are death or being forced to rely on others to be seen, rescued or returned.

Reading racialized, gendered or Muslim bodies as killable objects, or ontologies that are differentially prone to be dependent and proximate to death and dying, serves to sanction the Master’s complicity and uphold the colonialist defense of ignorance. Instead, I challenge political theorists, and Islamic scholars, to open up their self-understandings and explore how we are complicit in creating mis-fits between disabled, racialized, religious and gendered Others in the worlds we inhabit and create through imperial readings of (inter)dependency. Whereas Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011) focuses on how the disjuncture between flesh and the material environment inform ableist representational practices, and Islamic-feminists focus on anti-patriarchal reading practices, I explore how the misfittedness of dependency and disability in our knowledge relations in Islamic scholarship and in the field of political theory is authored by the same logic of coloniality that dislodges the secular from the religious, the Home from the world, the Self-same from the Other, and the mother from the event of birth. In becoming a primary care-giver for my father, I have learned as a political theorist and as a Muslim, that there
are violent and violating effects of the colonial poetics of reading disability, the ideas we think about disabled others, our ableist sensibilities of knowing and our world-building practices—in between hospital waiting rooms and the waiting room of History.

There are three orders of analysis within this chapter. First, I outline the ableist logic that underpins the colonial politics of recognition in which liberation is imagined as becoming a free, rational and autonomous citizen. I argue that the ableist and white-orientated narrative habits, shared by third world nationalisms and imperialism, operate through four main premises that: 1) white and able-bodied domination are divinely ordained or fated, 2) the disabled, racialized or gendered body is so naturally frail and helpless it is always proximate to and surrounded by death, 3) the dependent Other is born as a slave and finally, 4) because the Other’s body is read as the property of the slaveowner and therefore, incapable of being inhabited sensorially, she cannot read against how she is read by the Master. Here, the body of the Other is territorialized into the netherworld of dependency, and of the self-same, upon which the Master’s sense of place, subjectivity and freedom is founded.

Second, through a critique of care ethicist Margaret Urban Walker’s metaphor of the runaway slave, I argue that the lack, or inadequacy, that is projected onto the bodily ontology of the disabled, racialized, gendered or Muslim Other is a projection of the Master’s sanctioned ignorance and refusal to be response-able and address-able for his complicity in coloniality. The inscrutability of the Master sustains various forms of hermeneutical injustice and white epistemic privilege in how we produce and consume knowledge about the “Other” in both political theory and Islamic thought and praxis. By opening up the relational phenomenology of sense as an ability, I investigate how whiteness as a textual sensibility is oriented by colonial sense-contact histories and the impulse to sanitize and domesticate Indigenous cosmologies and knowledge.
systems through knowledge translation. Relatedly, just as cultural appropriation by white bodies relies on absencing and displacing Indigenous bodies from their knowledge systems and sensescapes, heteropatriarchal textual sensibilities of reading the “Islamic” also serve to presence the white or racialized, able-bodied and male body as a knower of Islam and discredit the witnessing capacities of Muslim women and disabled Muslims in our knowledge relations. As colonial violence serves to “decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism” (Césaire and Pinkham 2007, 35), heteropatriarchal violence too is a sin and compromises the perpetrators’ witnessing capacities as knowers of the “Islamic” (M. Dube 2012).

In the third and final order of analysis, I offer an Islamic and de-colonial paradigm of witnessing by which Muslim scholars can disrupt and disinherit colonial textual sense-abilities, engage body-sense and practice intersectionality in their Islamic thought and praxis. Through such an Islamic and de-colonial ethic of responsivity, I attempt to read disability and (inter)dependency differently, de-colonially, by re-modelling the notion of interpretive authority through an Islamic sense of witnessing as a multi-sensorial and pluriversal relationship between multiple others that extends across time and space by which we: 1) pave openings (or closings) in our epistemological horizons, 2) co-author material and ontological fits (or misfits) in our worlds and relations and 3) hold in place or displace disabled and dependent others in our knowledge relations. Built into this ethic is a sensitivity to mis-fits and our complicity in the work of mis-fitting. I conclude the chapter by applying this de-colonial and Islamic ethic of care to re-read my father’s hospitalization through the plight of Prophet Yunus in the belly of the whale.
2.2 Through Whiteness or By Death: The Colonial Politics of Recognition

Who gets to know? Who gets known? Where is knowledge kept, and kept legitimated? What knowledge is desirable? Who profits? Who loses/pays/gives something away? Who is coerced, empowered, appointed to give away knowledge?

(Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, 2014, 812)

The deaths of Buta Singh and Bishan Singh have been appropriated as imaginary tombstones in the national consciousness of Pakistanis and Indians—a place to visit and remember the horrific violence of Partition and the price of national independence. In remembering the event as senseless violence, and the loss of life as fated, tragic and inevitable, we completely disregard the complicity of every individual within the stories’ horizon who played an intentional and active role in authorizing and authoring such violence. How we remember the events of Partition has been deeply whitewashed by the imperial project of nation-building. Just as the ghosts of colonialism continue to haunt political theory as a tradition, the nation-state, as an inheritance, also comes with its baggage of colonial orientations. Postcolonial theorists Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) and Ashis Nandy (1983) argue that coloniality is a shared culture and a psychological state co-created through a double-bind between third world nationalisms and imperialism. Such complicity is difficult to dismantle as “the West” controls and regulates not only its interpretations, but also, the boundaries by which it can be legitimately critiqued, or dissented (Nandy 1983). Secular and white-orientated models of political inquiry “make all kinds of suppositions about the cultural sufficiency and breadth of their own thought”; and thus, any refusal or disavowal of the secular as a monolithic framework is rendered as a “covert way of taking up…a position within that framework” (Butler 2009b, 103). And so, in the struggle for liberation, we are forced to “identify with the aggressor” and make our platforms
recognizable through the Manichean binaries of: savage/civil, us/them, West/Orient, and Islam/Secular (Nandy 1983, 70). Whiteness as an orientation positions the West as a protagonist in world history and the moral epistemologies and knowledge practices of subaltern, non-secular, racialized, Black and Indigenous scholars as its inferior, shadow selves.

Thus, liberation, conceived as acquiring citizenship within the nation-state, is rooted in the wounds of colonial subservience—as if liberation is an act of retribution for being treated as incapable of meeting the ableist and “secular ideals of citizenship” within the British Empire (Chakrabarty 1992, 7). We cannot transpose the linear (and imagined) plot structure of the birth of the nation-state and the formation of the political subject onto the migration journeys of those who were displaced, disappeared and dispossessed from their homelands. The scurried and fearful footsteps with which our (great)grandparents fled religious persecution and colonial occupation were acts of survival, not liberation, induced by the sheer fear and anticipation of mass violence. Containing struggles for liberation through regimes of national citizenship is part and parcel of the colonial project of modernity within which de-colonial and Islamic histories of resistance can only make sense through the narrative of transitioning to, and consolidating power within, the nation-state (Chakrabarty 2000).

Here, liberation is only attained through Eurocentric modes of political sovereignty; and for imperialists and nationalists alike liberation is the ascent from darkness into the light, from the womb into the world, from colonial dependency to a state composed of rational, autonomous citizens. Achille Mbembé (2003) argues that the biopolitical dimension of sovereignty, the right to kill or decide "who may live and who must die, intrinsically links the politics of race with the work of death” (14). He defines sovereignty as a two-fold process of self-institution and self-limitation: the latter entails "society's capacity for self-creation through recourse to institutions
inspired by specific social and imaginary significations" and the former focuses less on autonomy and more on the "generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations" in the name of nationalism (ibid.). If whiteness operates as a “straightening device”, then regimes of citizenship serve to b/order how bodies (dis)appear by lining them up and distributing them across the various horizontal and vertical hierarchies within the nation-state (Ahmed 2006, 137). Whether it’s being born into a higher-caste, or a specific sect of Islam, or lighter-skinned, movement upwards does not translate into naturalization as a “fit” but rather is a continual state of walking the line, of following the “lines” of whiteness that we have inherited by always aspiring to “pass” (ibid.). Passing is a way of "keeping the colonizer happy by not disturbing the peace, containing the matter that is potentially out of place" (Campbell 2008, 156). What is seldom discussed is how the nationalist’s desire to emulate whiteness is usually white male able-bodiedness.

A key feature of such regimes of citizenship is the logic of ableism and citizenship as a "condition for the acceptability of putting to death” (Foucault 1992). Using disability as a frame of analysis to study coloniality helps us ask the difficult question, "who’s not here and why?" (Burch 2014, 142). Such a project requires surfacing dislocated histories of those, such as Bishan Singh, who were "removed from their communities" and placed into institutionalized care and insane asylums (Burch 2014, 143). For example, the necropolitical framing of the Black, racialized or Indigenous body relies on systems of ability and ableism which frame race, ethnicity or culture as forms of embodied difference that mark one as physically inferior, incompetent and unworthy of being mourned. Such depictions are ableist because they are rooted in a "set of beliefs, processes and practices that produce--based on abilities one exhibits or values--a particular understanding of oneself, one's body and one's relationship with others of
humanity, other species and the environment and includes how one is judged by others" (Wolbring 2008, 252). Racism, in particular, is driven by many forms of ableism based on the premise that some "socially defined groups of people have inherent, natural qualities or essences that assign them to social positions, make them fit for specific duties and occupations" (ibid.). It is "the preference for certain abilities over others leads to a labelling of real or perceived deviations from or lack of essential abilities as diminished state of being, leading or contributing to justifying various other isms" (ibid.). Ableist knowledge systems obsesses over reifying the construct of normalcy by domesticating and containing “abnormal” bodyminds and cosmologies in society.

If we inherit the nation-state through a white supremacist institution (the British Raj in this case), then a major concern of nationalist storytelling is property ownership and the differential distribution of whiteness, and ability, as properties of citizenship. Both Zaynab and Bishan Singh were usurped of their properties by kin and hence, denied access to citizenship in India or Pakistan as well as, passage to freedom from British rule. Because whiteness as a property “justifies and (re)iterates the centrality of the non-disabled white heterosexual male body as the most productive and profitable citizen for the burgeoning capitalist society” ability, too, then becomes a coveted, “safeguarded, protected and defended” property by which one acquires citizenship (Erevelles 2013, 19). Possessing whiteness and ability as properties determine the extent to which an individual can lay claim to recognition as a citizen (Aho 2017). Zaynab as a Muslim woman, and Bishan Singh as a Sikh man and disabled elder in institutionalized care, are made to suffer because they are least proximate to this standard of whiteness; just as enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke used disability as a metaphor to set the limits of political membership and personhood, Muslim women and persons with disability are also cast
as unfit and incapable of consenting and contributing to the capacity contract upon which the nation is founded (Simplician 2015, 27). Citizenship is maintained through the coloniality of being (the work of invisibility and dehumanization) by which ableist, white supremacist and heteropatriarchal conceptions of ontology placed droves of racialized, Black and Indigenous peoples into the sub-ontological category of the damné, the non-being (Maldonado-Torres 2007).

Another paradigmatically ableist feature of Eurocentric and secular conceptions of citizenship is the heuristic of the Face as a mark of political subjectivity. Passing as a citizen requires one to possess the following abilities: be recognizable to Others as a human, to have a perceptible face and to appear in public. If not literally, then metaphorically, the face must be perceptible and visible through the capacities of sight and hearing prior to the birth of the knowable and the self-knowing political subject. Our ability to read a face is mediated through grids of recognizeability by which we are able to demarcate “who counts as a subject…as a life…who can be read or understood as a living being” and “who lives, or tries to live, on the far side of established modes of intelligibility” (Butler 2009a, iv). Judith Butler (2009b) marks a distinction between recognition (as a scene, act or practice between subjects), apprehension (as a mode of knowing that operates through sense-perception) and recognizeability (normative regimes of intelligibility). This helps illustrate the role sensorial reading abilities play in subject formation. Recognizeability and apprehension precede recognition and are forms of making by which living beings are crafted into recognizable political subjects. Therefore, grids of recognizeability inhibit the critical capacities of care by which we are able to respond and attend to needs of illegible Others. In this paradigm, Islamophobic sentiment, for example, is an effect of abstracted regimes of representation that de-limit our capacity to care for Muslims.
As I will illustrate later, here the white body is active as a reader of difference, yet passive, as an enactor or author of prejudice because her sense-abilities are conditioned by her environment or horizon. And so, for Butler the work of speculative care, entails investigating: “through what operations of power are the schemes that regulate and distribute recognizability working, and how might we critically evaluate those forms of inequality and regulated ‘non-being’ that are its effects?” in order to expose “the implications that such schemes have for the differential prospects of living and dying for various populations” (Willig 2012, 141).

Beyond sidelining the complicity of the colonizer, fixating on describing the ontology of the Other as (il)legible reduces our attention span to only see the effects of colonial violence on the body and dismiss its impact on the cosmological and epistemic dimensions of embodiment. Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) re-interprets Descartes’ cogito ergo sum to illustrate the various dimensions of the ableist logic of coloniality: “I think (others do not think, or do not think properly), therefore I am (others are-not, lack being, should not exist or are dispensable)” (252). The ableist logic of coloniality, within which whiteness operates as an orientation, shapes how the citizen is conceived in third world nationalist discourse, as well as, within the imperial imagination. Both employ reading practices by which the life of a deviant Other is read as “below Being” and dispensable (254). Whereas critical disability scholars refer to this as ontological imperialism (Corker 2001), de-colonial scholars argue that the aim of such a colonial narrative habit is to produce sub-ontological difference by which society can be divided into hierarchies (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 254).

Foucauldian scholars of necropolitics build the politics of recognition by asking “if one is not a human being, then what is one (Mbembé 174)? Those who dwell within the “margins of the world”, or “outside the world” especially those whose embodiment and existence threatens state
sovereignty, are differentially exposed to violence, genocide, and exploitation (Mbembé 260). And so, bodyminds that “deviate” from norms of personhood are signified through interlocking systems of representation as inadequate and expendable, making them targets for elimination by the necropolitical gaze of statecraft. Samira Kawash, for example, explores how the marking of the homeless and Indigenous body, as “not belonging to the spaces of respectable citizens” translates into the formation of a placeless body and the marking of territory (of public space) as a settler-space (qtd. in Razack 2015, 44). The eviction, or expulsion, of an Indigenous body when it is written and read as “abject” from public space is an event that consolidates “not only public space but the space of the nation” (ibid.). The Indigenous, homeless, body, in this context, is not “allowed to rest, to heal, or to thrive in settlers’ spaces”; it is a body that must be contained, made to “bear the imprint of colonial power” and exists in a “perpetual state of movement” (22). Marked bodies, in the paradigm of necropolitics, are rendered as “the living dead”, populate “death-worlds” and face “infrastructural warfare—control of water, air, and space—[which] performs a kind of “invisible killing” and denies the “slain and wounded body” care (52).

Extending Rod Michalko’s use of disability as a frame of analysis, Sherene Razack compares the “killing rage” of nondisabled people, who support eugenics through mercy killing of disabled people when they realize that “disability cannot be easily cured or managed”, to the rage and neglect with which Indigenous peoples in custody of state institutions are treated. Through ableist tropes, Indigenous bodies in state care are rendered as pathologically frail, "people that no one can really harm or repair"; and so, "no one can be held accountable" for the deaths even if caused by the hands of the state's doctors or policemen (ibid). In the state’s care, the Indigenous body is seen through the eyes of healthcare professionals as so "so deeply destroyed by alcoholism that nothing else can destroy it, a situation that renders the body one that is not worth
caring for, and on that can be violated with impunity" (354). They are "marked for exploitation" and "marked for death" (358) especially because they remind settlers of "something they know but they would rather not: that the land is stolen" (ibid.). Through the connection of ableism with racism, indigeneity is framed as "a disabling condition" (372) because by typecasting Indigenous and disabled bodies as flawed bodies the settler with the same natural body is installed as "owner of himself and as owner of land" (ibid.).

Such violence is not only representational as a set of interrelated signs that “presents themselves…as an indisputable and undisputed meaning” but is also a cultural praxis, a social imaginary, that permeates every layer of society and “pursues the colonized even in sleep and dream.” (Mbembé 2001, 175). Cast as unknowable, the racialized, Indigenous or Black Other is “never him/himself, but is always the echo of our irreducibility…veiled from his/her own gaze” (178). As seen in the writings of various European philosophers, such as G.W.F Hegel’s description of Africa as devoid of history and Native Americans as biologically pre-disposed to conquest, to John Locke’s writings on Indigenous people as incapable of inhabiting a place, to John Stuart Mill’s racist essay on civilization as a mark of whiteness, the ontological difference between the conquerors and the conquered is justified by ableist logic of race as a mark of cultural decay and natural inferiority. Such narratives give breath to larger structures of coloniality such as slavery, the control of labour and exploitation of land for profit through regimes of settlement and colonial governance. The wretched of the earth, or the damné for Fanon, are read as non-humans; the non-human worlds they inhabit are not cast to the margins of ontological difference but are instead cast into nothingness, as nothing, and in the language of ethics of care theorists, and are left alone to die.
For example, in the stories of Zaynab and Bishan Singh, dependency has many layers, that of colonial occupation, the purdah system in which women are folded into the domesticity of Man, and the mental asylum where the body of the lunatic becomes the site upon which the narrator, an able-bodied man, makes sense of his unfreedom. The body situated in colonial dependencies, in both stories, is emptied of its sensorial capacities and appropriated by the witness, the storyteller, as a signifier in his description of violence as unimaginable, as senseless and as mute. Just as the homeless, Indigenous body is expelled or evicted from public space to territorialize the location as settler space, Bishan Singh and Zaynab are domesticated and contained from public space at the dawn of freedom to mark the boundaries and standards of national citizenship. The nation is imagined as a “masculine nation” through “the violations inscribed on the female [and mad] body (both literally and figuratively) and the discursive formations around these violations” (Das 2007, 8). In particular, the purdah system in late-colonial India and post-Partition South-Asia was a system of interconnected practices of governance that instrumentalized the fear of death to control the mobility, self-expression and veiling practices of Muslim and Hindu women. Islamic and Hindu nationalisms, as well as modern Empire, compete to regulate the practice of purdah; the latter punishes deviations from purdah as dishonourable, the former punishes the choice to practice purdah as a mark of cultural decay and grounds for in Tully’s words, “intervention on the side of the oppressed” (Tully 2008, 17).

Competing narratives on purdah, how it should or should not be practiced, chronically situate Muslim women in between two deaths. Of the many different ways power represses sexuality, the cycle of prohibition, in particular, exhibits how power regulates deviancy by making it a matter of life and death. And so, “power constrains sex only through a taboo that plays on the alternative between two non-existences” (Foucault 1992, 84). As theorized by Queer de-colonial
scholars (Henderson-Espinoza 2017), this place between-two-deaths constitutes an ontology of risk where the individual must constantly erase, hide or make invisible parts of their self-understanding and embodiment or “suffer the penalty of being suppressed” (Foucault 1992, 84). In this scenario, the only ethical possibility available to the plight of damné that remains for those who cannot pass or follow the lines of whiteness is death or assimilation.

Here, ethical responsibility is defined by the death drive, a desire for transcending the limits of signification through symbolic or actual death. Veena Das (2007) frames this place between two deaths not as a determined fate or a path towards death, but rather as a limit, “the point at which death is engaged with life”, as a “zone from which alone a certain kind of truth can be spoken” (60). The situated, embodied knowledges that are rooted in this place between two deaths reveal the “unspeakable truth about the criminal nature of the law” (ibid.) An individual’s death in this situation is made to symbolize a release from prevailing normative standards—as a point of departure for political critique as the text of her life-story is released from its horizon. For example, meaning within the Greek tragedy Antigone is embodied in the form and content of the play’s text and the text compels the reader, and the audience, to read Antigone’s suicide and lament as the critique of Creon’s laws. Creon’s laws as a horizon de-limit Antigone’s capacity to speak and do as she desires in her fight for justice for her brother. And so, psycho-analysts like Lacan interpret the meaning of the play to be situated in the interplay between its form and content; the site of this movement is the reader’s and narrator’s senses, emotions and desires because they are situated outside the horizon. The movements generated through this interplay reveal to the reader, or witness, that which cannot be said or spoken from within the horizon of the text. And so, responsibility is a shared labour that requires nurturing receptivity and affirming the ethical obligations that arise from the stories we bear witness to.
If not through actual death, Jacques Derrida (1995) argues that when one is placed in such a proximity to death one must sacrifice the horizon of ethics that regulates the decisions made available to her:

absolute duty demands that one behave in an irresponsible manner (by means of treachery or betrayal), while still recognizing, confirming, and reaffirming the very thing one sacrifices, namely, the order of human ethics and responsibility. In a word, ethics must be sacrificed in the name of duty. It is a duty not to respect, out of duty, ethical duty. One must behave not only in an ethical or responsible manner, but in a nonethical, nonresponsible manner, and one must do that in the name of duty, of an infinite duty, in the name an absolute duty (65–67).

To act irresponsibly, in Derrida’s sense, or to rupture the symbolic order through symbolic death in Lacan’s sense, is to speak when and where speech itself has become a crime. It is through this resistance, the rebellion of speech, we are able to reclaim a sense of the person that inhabits the body that is imprisoned. It is only through sacrifice (of one’s body, one’s self, one’s relations or one’s standards of ethics) that the individual can attain recognition in the eyes of the Master, of the reader, and be released from the place between two deaths. She is released only to have her lived story be re-captured by an inheritor, or descendant, of the same knowledge systems that chased her to death. Just as ableist tropes of disability contain the life trajectories of disabled persons within the narrative arc of tragedies to appease the compassion and sympathy of nondisabled persons, stories about Zaynab’s and Bishan Singh’s plight are appropriated by the nation-state to justify violence in the name of the motherland-to-come. Both characters are read as fated to be situated in this place between two deaths, are refused citizenship and offered death as the only ethical possibility. The purpose of such a grim fate is so their bodies can serve as a reminder to witnesses as the price of national independence and the horrors of dependency. Those who exist “at the ends of the curve” of whiteness are thrown onto the slaughterbench of history and their lived stories are trapped in the poetic structure of a tragedy—forever damned as
bodies that were not fated to inherit from the white man the capacity to be free and independent (Garland-Thomson 2002, 10).

2.3 Forced Intimacy and the Master’s Refusal to Respond

Just as Zaynab did not choose to be born a Muslim woman who marries a Sikh man in Punjab during the Partition, we do not choose the worlds, relationships and the mortal bodies we are born into and how our stories are told and read by others. Melissa Williams’ notion of shared fate captures how the world we come to share with others is a world “that has been shaped by forces other than our intentional agency” (2001, 44–45). Within this community of shared fate, the work of witnessing, of care, is differentially distributed. Though “we do not choose to be born into such communities” we have little choice but to “act within the set of relationships they structure” (ibid.). We live together in this world, “socially related to one another in the past and the future,” nestled in a web of stories that (de)legitimize the boundaries of community, our identity and citizenship (ibid.). Williams argues that to continue, to begin anew, to share the labours of peaceful co-existence, we must be willing to tell our story, and to listen to the stories of others. Building upon Hannah Arendt, Williams’ case for narrative agency is grounded in the hope that the act of bearing witness (listening) and the act of authorship, (telling the story) reveal new orders of responsibility. However, if the impact of violence in its muteness escapes interpretive sensibility, and can only be sensed by the individual who experiences it in the depths of radical subjectivity, how do we show others violence what is invisible to the ear- or eye-witness? How do we centre the faces of its perpetrators in our knowledge production?

Sometimes our ability to speak, to remember and to communicate is impeded by the experience of pain, illness or trauma that plunges us into a radical subjectivity, away from the space of appearances, where we become “unrecognizable” to others as our testimonies and scars
of unimaginable pain cast us to the margins of intelligible personhood. For Arendt (1958), bodily pain is “the only experience which we are unable to transform into a shape fit for public appearance,” because “it actually deprives us of our feeling for reality, to such an extent that we can forget it more quickly and easily than anything else” (51). She grounds our ability to be recognized as human beings, in the capacity to appear, to exist in the public realm “in which things can appear out of the darkness of sheltered existence” and that “even the twilight which illuminates our private and intimate lives is ultimately derived from the much harsher light of the public realm” (ibid.). This Arendtian movement from darkness to light, from senselessness to sensibility, from the private to the public, from the ghar (home) to the bahir (world) (Chatterjee 1990), from colonized to an independent political subject, relies on the notion of publicity—offering oneself to be seen among others, as a precondition for voice. In addition to this, individuals living in pain, trauma, or “darkness” in Arendt’s words, are excluded from “the political” as the inability to speak from within the depths of pain strips them of their ability to appear and be recognizable to fellow-others.

If the anti-thesis of voice is violence (Gilligan 2011), then placed between these two deaths, both Zaynab, Sultana and Bishan Singh were fated to survive unspeakable violence, and have been charged with the unimaginable generational burden to birth a future out of darkness, out of muteness. Beyond the erasure of Zaynab’s and Bishan’s self-understanding, what is also silenced is Sultana’s grief for the loss of her mother and father, the violations to her identity, and the ambivalence over her future. The ableist male-centered trajectory towards achieving freedom through national liberation folds the voices of women and disabled people into the domesticity of Man, as extensions of his body, his borders, his honour, his property and his personhood. And when Buta Singh dies, and the mental asylum closes, we reach the end of the narrator’s attention
span and he takes with him the little access we had to the inner life-worlds of Zaynab, Bishan Singh and Sultana. The liminal space between the birth of the nation and the death of the colony maps itself onto their lives by perpetually locating them in between two deaths. I argue that the violation that comes with the liminality of this space is not that the person’s body is made to speak against itself, but rather, one’s credibility, as well as ontological and epistemic capacities, as a truth-bearer are rejected. The only truth their marked, deviant bodies are made to represent through the poetics of a tragic plot structure is to be enacted as a reminder of the worst case scenario for able-bodied man: to be dependent on others to be delivered, to be born, from the darkness of the womb, or inhabit a body that is not allowed to speak for itself under the violence of colonial rule.

Whereas Lacanian theorists interpret two deaths as the difference between actual and symbolic death, Margaret Urban Walker (2007) would interpret this space between two deaths as created when a body is instrumentalized against its personhood to articulate speech, make decisions and perform labours, against its intentions—actions without meaningful authorship and intelligent embodiment. When one is placed between an actual or a symbolic death, it leaves her little place to have agentic intentionality. For Sultana, she must either be killed in her father’s act of suicide or suffer persecution by her mother’s family for having Sikh ancestry. For Zaynab, she must either suffer rape by her abductor or marry Buta Singh; she must either live with her in-laws, be punished by her family or be forced to disown both to protect herself. For Bishan Singh, he must leave his homeland to return to his family, or never see his family again but remain near Toba Tek Singh. The decisions presented to the characters in the stories through the prevailing ethical order are roads that all lead to either a symbolic or an actual death as the only narrative opening.
Just as the colonizer sees land as uninhabited and empty, the body of the colonized in his gaze is uninhabited by a person that can think, a person that can speak back. Similarly, Mbembé (2001) describes the colony as the “peak of corruption and mortality” where “life is worth nothing…sometimes it turns into darkness, loses its sight and hearing” and “enveloped in the stench of death, it no longer smells even its own stench” (186). Here the body is not only unable to speak for itself, and is made to speak against itself, but it is also denied the sense-ability to smell itself and inhabit her body through her senses. In the colony, the colonized subject is an “embodiment” that “belongs to the universe of immediate things--useful things when needed, things that can be molded and are mortal, futile and superfluous things, if need be” (187). The native’s body is appropriated into thinghood, matter, and is “nothing but an appearance” that serves as material fodder for settler-colonial statecraft (186). For Mbembé, “the question that arises in these circumstances—and acquires tragic sharpness in a colony—becomes that of knowing how to exist as a human being in a universe inhabited by what is not myself, is not in myself, and has no relation to myself” (191). And so, apprehension is actually the colonizer’s inability to “identify, through feeling, with the native’s nature” (193).

Walker’s metaphor of the runaway slave also relies on an image of a racialized person who is incapable of inhabiting his sense-abilities as a reader and whose body can only be read as an object. She argues that “rights to truth must encompass a right to voice: an entitlement to witness one’s experience of violation out of one’s own mouth and in one’s own terms” (Walker 2007, 211). This is because an individual’s authority to tell her story is intimately connected to our entitlement to demand individuals to tell their story for the sake of accountability. Together this set of rights constitutes a “full moral standing that places people in relations of reciprocal and symmetrical moral accounting” and, when “either is compromised or forbidden, those who are
disqualified or discredited have something less than full moral standing, and are consigned to relations of accountability that either are not reciprocal, or are reciprocal, but on unacceptably asymmetrical terms” (ibid.). To make her point, she invokes the image of a body, that “speaks in spite of itself and against its interests”, like a runaway slave with the tattoo “Stop me, I am a runaway.” In this case a body is “made to speak in his own first person” and in doing so, speaks against the interests of the “person who inhabits it” (277).

In this metaphor of enslavement, Walker illustrates the embodiment of voicelessness and how the written word transforms the materiality of the body into a limit on the agency of the person. And so, similar to Derrida, having a voice, for Walker, is the will to speak in spite of fear, the means to say what you intend, the opportunity to speak to those who you need to hear you, and the moral standing to do so (Walker 2007, 228). She equates the ability to “speak for oneself about oneself” and be entitled to asked the same of others as “dignity” (231). In doing so, she redefines citizenship as “full membership in a moral community” and so, when “people are silenced and disqualified as self-describers of their actions and choices, they lack the status of self-accounting actors in relations of mutual accountability” (232). Walker defends a view of morality as “culturally situated and socially sustained practices of responsibility” through which “we learn who we are, to whom we are connected, and what matters enough to care about and care for” (235). In her metaphor, the individual who is enslaved is placed between two deaths, one from which he is escaping and another at the hands of the person who re-enslaves him. In the space between two deaths, through Walker’s paradigm the slave’s absence of voice is made to speak in place of his person. However, I argue that it is not the individual’s silence that re-enslaves him but the reader and the writer of the text that form a social contract and collaborate to enslave and capture the individual.
The recognition paradigm within political theory not only makes a metaphor of slavery but misses a crucial point: slavery is not an original position. No one is born a slave, individuals are enslaved. In teaching this concept as a political theorist, students are always perplexed by what Hegel takes for granted: what determines how one enters into this relationship as a Master, or as a Slave? What role does violence play in creating a chronic fear of death as the defining feature of this relationship? Can self-understanding only occur in relations where we fear our (inter)dependencies on the Other for our existence? And which dependencies are structurally created to enslave and to mobilize death as an ever-present force in the Other’s life? It is violence, not the natural fear of death or our mortality, that drives the desire for recognition in this model. What also remains unclear is: how does the Master’s recognition of himself as Master, where he sees the relationship for what it is and acknowledges his dependency on the slave’s recognition, translate into the abdication of his rank in this relation of domination? And what are the moral consequences of understanding the Master’s complicity as mis-recognition, amnesia or unwilled ignorance (Maldonado-Torres et al. 2008, 107)?

Within Hegel’s vision for a just social order and diagnosis of relations of domination as a threat to difference (Markell 2009), dependency is inscribed as an ontological characteristic of the slave that makes him naturally pre-disposed to enslavement, conquest, and passivity (Buck-Morss 2009; “Time on the Move” Mbembé 2001). The Master, or in this case the colonizer, cannot “see or register how the very condition of coloniality reveals another side of themselves” (Maldonado-Torres et al. 2008, 99). Temporally, recognition occurs retrospectively as an act or re-cognition where the Master, or the actor, becomes aware of himself as Master. This implies that his subjectivity as a Master is partly unknown to the actor himself, as a type of mis-recognition, or unintentional practice of mastery. Through the “double-movement” of
understanding, whereby the slave begins to recognize his self-worth, and the Master becomes aware of the slave as Master over him, the Master and the Slave absolve the bondage that ties them to each other. In this context, dependency is clearly inscribed as a relationship of domination with unintended and unknown, yet fated, origins (Coulthard 2007). In this situation of dependency, ethics becomes “non-sense” as colonality in its “intentionality” is a “radically anti-human, anti-ethical world” in which death is not something to be anticipated, but rather, a defining feature of “ordinary life” (Maldonado-Torres et al. 2008, 100). Through the colonial politics of recognition, imperialism is the “institutional and geopolitical reinscription of the master/slave relation in naturalized form” (106). In the Master/Slave dialectic, God “becomes the privileged Other projected by the master in order to obtain recognition and to sustain the identity of the master and the imperial order of things” (108).

The non-ethics of care in the context of coloniality entails that the formation of the post-colonial political subject as a Master, and as an independent political subject, relies on exploiting the situation of dependency and appropriating labours of care in order to manifest as a Master in the Arendtian space of appearance. In his essay, “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question”, Partha Chatterjee (1990) argues that nationalist ideology freed itself from the pulls of colonialism in South Asia by separating the “domain of culture into two spheres—the material and the spiritual (238). From technology, science to modern methods of statecraft, the material sphere became the host of Western civilization. Chatterjee argues that in order to survive, to protect essential aspects of their culture, the colonized must learn to organize material life, by incorporating only what will help them thrive materially in the world-outside, while preserving the spiritual dimension of their culture within and through the Home-inside (239). Similar to the colonial logic of secularism, in which the practice of religion is domesticated in the private
sphere and within the interiority of the self, the logic of de-colonization in this context lodges the spiritual within the Home and the woman’s body, and the material structures and secular sensibilities of colonizers into the world outside. In locating the spiritual within the home, safeguarded from the “profane activities of the material world” (Chatterjee 1990, 238), the primary mode of nation-building becomes home-based activities, such as care and worship—making women the representatives of the “essence” of the nation. In such a heteropatriarchal cartography of decolonial activity, the “world” was where “the European power had challenged the non-European peoples and, by virtue of its superior material culture, had subjugated them”; however, the colonial powers failed to “colonize the inner, essential identify of the East which lay in its distinctive and superior, spiritual culture” (238–239).

Through the activities of the Home, such as care, worship and kin-making, the colonized remained “undominated, sovereign, master of its [their] own fate” (Ibid). Women’s labours of care and bodies were to be appropriated in the apparatus of national resistance. The world-outside-the-home was not only the location of the oppressor, but also, where national independence, liberation was to be won. Any breach by Western civilization to the spatial boundaries of the Home, in a nationalist context, meant the “annihilation of one’s very identity” (ibid.) The main consequence of how South-Asian nationalist movements answered the “women’s question” is the way the bodies of women living in (post)colonial nation-states were upheld as sites of meaning-making, or more particularly, of transferring meanings of (dis)honour. Through the exercise of control over the bodies, minds and spirits of women, the (post)colonial nation-state identified itself as sovereign and men living in (post)colonial nation-states identified themselves as masters over their selves. And so, the woman’s body as placed within the domesticity of the purdah is made to stand in place of the the interiority of the
Master’s ethical self upon whose labors of care he depends on to appear in the world outside as a political subject.

A woman’s body here is only a site upon which truth can be marked, as the runaway slave is marked; and the truth of the injustice of such a violent script can only be inherited and received by a reader outside the relational context of enslavement. Similarly, in the case of Antigone, the miracle in Antigone is not the formation of the political subject as Master, but how Antigone presents herself as “the pure and simple relationship of a human being to that which it miraculously finds itself carrying, that is the rupture of signification, that which grants the person the insuperable power of being—in spite of and against everything—what she is” (Lacan 2013). In defying Creon, Antigone consciously seeks physical and symbolic death and in doing so, presents a sublime form of critique that transcends all normative categories. The truth her story carries places upon the reader an ethical obligation to hear her truth from within its (con)text, its internal contradictions etc. and not from external models of theory, regimes of truth. Interestingly, at the heart of Lacanian analysis of the play is the theme of the womb and shared fate in the philological intricacies of the Greek word for “shared” or “held in common” (Miller 2007, 3). The term shifts from referring to the womb as shared by Antigone and her sister Ismene, to Antigone referring to herself “as one who does reverence to those who have shared the same travails” to an image of “one flesh, inseparable in the womb and beyond” (ibid.). Lacan focuses on Antigone’s death drive and presents an “ethics of transgression of the law as its universal maxim” (Miller 2007, 13), as a rupture to the womb, but also a shared labour by individuals like Antigone who find themselves at the limit of what is rational. In his reading of Antigone, the womb represents the symbolic order that binds individuals in a self-enclosed tautology and Antigone’s death symbolizes a point of departure, “a desire that points beyond
rational calculations of symbolically determined utility”—a release from the very signification which authored the material conditions of her tragedy (ibid.). Whereas the reader has the choice to re-enslave, or to abolish slavery, the marked body remains without agentic capacity, uninhabited by a person who can be a bearer of truth within her horizon.

What is problematic here is how the political theorist marks a body as dead or dying, and then places herself within the position of a witness who is capable of understanding the injustice of the runaway slave’s re-enslavement, or Zaynab and Bishan Singh’s silence. In narrativizing the Runaway Slave and Zaynab as constantly lodged in a place between two deaths, and conjecturing the injustice of their situation of dependency through detached plot speculation we position ourselves as interpretive authorities, as truth-bearers and knowledge keepers. In tandem, we relegate those whom we speak for, and care about, in our knowledge production and consumption not as interlocutors but as marked bodies. Eve Tuck argues that such research is “damage-centered” and is “damaging research” because it relies on diagnosing deficits and appropriating narratives of pain and violence (2014, 413). It is through the appropriation of colonial situations of dependency and the silence of marked bodies that we assume the position as interpretive authorities, as Masters of our fate as storytellers.

2.4 Disability à Light / Dependency à Freedom

If we subvert the colonial politics of recognition into a point of departure for a de-colonial ethos, resistance is read as re-cognition. These are the movements by which one acknowledges that mutual and reciprocal interdependency are not possible in the context of the coloniality and that one has no choice but to break free from the chains of dependency, reject the mastery of the great white mother, and recognize her self-worth as a free, independent political subject (Coulthard 2007; Markell 2009). Here coloniality is dislodged from the colonized body
and thrown into the heart of whiteness, into the pre-history of the nation-state and into the intentions of its makers. Yet the design and the signature of coloniality, which weaponizes dependency as a mark of the damné (Maldonado-Torres 2007), continues to be inherited and worked upon by its human makers, and resisters, in both their knowledge production and world-building practices. Maria Lugones and Jodi Byrd compel de-colonial readers to identify how acts of resistance that seek to address coloniality can also be complicit in its (re)production. For example, although Nandy paves way to understand the relational and interdependent creation of coloniality, Tuck and Yang argue that by placing the boundary between the West and the Other within the interiority of the colonial subject and the colonizer, he seriously delimits the material and analytical leverage of his framework for dismantling settler-colonialism. Nandy’s notion of cultivating an inner resistance to second colonization struggles to speak to settler-colonial (con)texts which continue to exist today by placing the work of “conscientization to stand in for the more uncomfortable task of relinquishing stolen land” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 19). Because “critical consciousness does not translate into action that disrupts settler colonialism” such a move of containing decolonization within psychological resistance or text-based reading practices are settler moves to innocence (Tuck and Yang 2012). Containing resistance within the interiority of the self through the written word, is a way of sanitizing de-colonial resistance and de-centering Indigenous communities’ work to reclaim land. Just as white non-Muslim scholarship on Islam for non-Muslim audiences lacks baraka (blessings), how does writing, thinking, and dwelling on unceded, stolen and occupied territory without being response-able and address-able to Indigenous peoples compromise the baraka of our knowledge production? Also, what role does the land as an agent, and author, in our knowledge relations play in shaping and cultivating our textual sense-abilities? Finally, in what ways can Muslim-settler scholars
orient their scholarship to turn away from serving the multicultural interests of the Canadian state, and move towards supporting the decolonial projects and interests of the rightful owners of the territories their scholarship is sustained by and takes place on? It is the labours of care and histories of resistance to settler-colonialism by Indigenous peoples that has paved way for decolonial scholarship in Canada, and as a de-colonial Muslim scholar, I must carry out the ethical obligations that come with this inheritance. Here, the Islamic ontology of the political theorist as a subject includes relationships of responsibility, the land as witness and communities of practice.

In addition to the work of sanitization, Tuck and Yang argue that such a move to innocence also relies on problematic narratives that frame decolonization as an internal \( \rightarrow \) external movement (5), of travelling from a state of darkness into a state of light, through mental emancipation. This narrative is fueled by colonialist narratives of progress that center the event of birth as a point of origin for freedom—to give birth to oneself as a free, thinking subject. Unlike Nandy and Fanon, Judith Butler locates darkness within the disposition of statelessness as both embodied but also materially territorialized, contained within the boundaries of the nation-state and the state one is put in such conditions, as opposed to a fixed embodiment. Just as Butler argues that stateless individuals can create dwelling-places through coalitional politics, de-colonial movement building and non-formal regimes of citizenship, Audre Lorde also opens up possibility of moral personhood and freedom within the “darkness of the cave”:

These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman's place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep…The white fathers told us, I think therefore I am; and the Black mothers in each of us - the poet - whispers in our dreams, I
feel therefore I can be free …first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action” (Lorde, 1984, pp. 36-38).

Instead of framing the darkness as a state in which one is devoid of moral personhood and is bewitched by the Fanonian inferiority complex, the darkness of interiority is framed as a “place of power” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 20), a dwelling place in the Levinasian sense where one realize return.

Expanding Pratt’s notion of the contact zone, can Nandy’s notion of shared culture be a place for the transculturation of meaning and resistant reading? Butler, for example, puts into practice Nandy’s possibility of engaging non-Western normative frameworks within the semantic field by using “Muslim religious law and its history”, instead of Western political theory, to articulate cases of hate speech as blasphemy in the case of Charlie Hebdo, to reveal new orders of moral responsibility (Butler 2009b, 103). Such an interpretive move by a non-Muslim theorist poses a “problem of translation” for her reader as the task of moral judgment asks of the reader to interpret the moral injury not “within one framework or another but which emerged at the very site of conflict, clash divergence, overlapping…” (ibid.). Her interpretation of an Islamic (con)text in this case caters to claims to justice articulated by Muslim communities. The task of unlearning colonialism as a shared culture through translation requires not only multiplying and locating the intersections between the various moral discourses through which we identify moral injury but also, understanding how such moral injury is produced in and through the ways of relating in the interdependent performance of political. Butler argues that political inquiry is not always about judgement, but rather sometimes about the “conditions of possibility that make judgment possible” (ibid.). Similar to Walker’s notion of moral standing, along with Saba Mahmood and Talal Asad, Butler explores how the right to demand
accountability from others in our own terms underpins the “foundation of all understanding” in that political inquiry functions to explain the relation between knowledge, action and “other persons” (ibid.). Here the burden of resistant reading that addresses the violence of secularism does not rest solely with the Muslim community but is taken on by a non-Muslim scholar as Butler calls for legitimating and revealing orders of responsibility that could arise from an Islamic understanding of moral injury in response to hate speech. Such is the work of witnessing and charting alternative histories of sense-abilities by which we can respond to moral injury.

In different, yet connected ways, de-colonial scholars problematize domesticizing coloniality into a particular horizon, dyadic relation, or within an individual. Nandy teaches us that coloniality is a shared relation, and culture, co-authored by many within and beyond the colonized/colonizer relation. In this relation, the “West” is territorialized as morally superior and this categorization appears within the psyche of the Colonized. Butler teaches us that this boundary is not only contained within the dispositions of the colonizer and colonized, but it is also mapped onto the juridical-discursive cartographies of citizenship to produce the dispositions of statelessness within the territorial boundaries of the state. Tuck and Yang guide us beyond the (post)colonial limits of Nandy by showing us the ethical and material consequences of interiorizing decolonization as a settler move to innocence for Indigenous communities. This move reproduces settler-colonial ways of relating to the dispossession of Indigenous people from their lands in our knowledge systems. And finally, Lorde, teaches us that the darkness of interiority does not translate into unfreedom or the stage one must transcend to acquire moral standing in society as a moral person.

Simultaneously, resistance to slavery, colonization and heteropatriarchy by imperial subjects also relies on the emancipatory and enlightenment imagery of darkness and light. For
example, slavery as a metaphor is used to signify the situation of dependency as a mark of cultural, ontological and epistemic inferiority of a nation or Other beings (Buck-Morss 2009). Whether it is to signify legal and political tyranny by Enlightenment thinkers (Locke and Shapiro 2003), or cultural backwardness as in the writings of imperial feminists, slavery is read as the anti-thesis of freedom (Buck-Morss 2009). The imperial origins of a feminist ethic of care can be traced to the imaginaries of British men and women, such as Lady Dufferin, Edith Brown, and other Lady Doctors working as Christian missionaries in British India. There are many archives that capture the self-understanding of British women engaged in delivering care to Indian women in the form of diaries, speeches, political writings etc. Zenana hospitals in British India, for example, were part of the colonial machinery. Through “the feminization of empire”, British colonial women sought to make healthcare accessible to Indian women through British-built women-only hospital spaces staffed by female medical staff as a way of challenging the “barbaric practice of female seclusion” in Indian society (Sehrawat 2013, 65). The introduction of western medicine to Indian women by British women was a civilizing mission, a Christian mission—a moral responsibility women of the Empire felt they owed to the women of the colony, to save Indian women from the barbarism of Indian culture and brown men (Dube 1997). Antoinette Burton (1994) notes that British feminists “cultivated the civilizing responsibility and its attendant imperial identity as their own modern womanly and secular burden” (48). Their care for the liberation of Two-Thirds world women was not a call for decolonization but rather a point of departure for justifying suffrage for British Women, as saviours of the nation, the race and of the Empire.

From the work of Lady Dufferin on colonizing Bengali women through the Christian mission/western medicine, to the feminist writings of Helena Swanwick and Mary Carpenter, the
burden of white women to save the Other woman from the evils of Empire was an argument not for intersectionality, but for the political usefulness of British women to the imperial nation. Victorian suffragettes relied on using oriental images of the Eastern, colonized woman, in all her misery, to articulate a grim future of an Empire that does not politically empower its women, as destined to fail, to become inferior (Burton 1994, 102). Through this rhetoric, British women not only refused to accept the colonial condition of the Other woman for themselves, but also, tied their own emancipation to the success of Empire and the Nation. At the center of this relationship were British-Feminist perceptions of Purdah, that due to rules of female seclusion (read: dependency), Indian women were not allowed to seek medical care, and avoid contact with men outside the home. The exclusionary impulse, or narrative habit, of Victorian suffragettes was to tie their feminist agenda to the “Victorian ethos of civilizing reform” (95). Through “benevolent maternalism” (Garland-Thomson 1997) early suffragettes constructed images of oppressed, helpless, barbaric Indian and Turkish women as marks of cultural decay in order to “displace the source of patriarchal oppression onto ‘Oriental’ society” and define their feminist agenda as “the removal of Eastern elements from Western life” (Burton 1994, 186). In this discourse, the moral imperative was the liberation of British woman as equal members of society as a way to preserve the cultural superiority of the British Empire. Such discourses marked the bodies of Indian and Turkish women as the objects of “humanitarian concern” and also served as “…a pre-text for feminist imperial intervention” (Burton 1994, 163). Enslavement by “eastern” patriarchy was framed as a mark of cultural decay that justified the physical, moral and spiritual weakness of the “lower races” and pre-ordained their colonization (210).
2.5 The White Body as a Body that Reads, Feels

Despite Butler's attempt at distinguishing the different orders of receptivity, the politics of recognition paradigm conflates white-orientated practices of reading with the work of recognition and presents sight and hearing as the sole sensibilities by which we apprehend another being as a human. It also does not account for the colonial histories of sense-contact that have been inherited as aesthetic orientations that shape our sense-abilities and desires to de-veil the face of the Other. It is not that the frames of Foucauldian necropolitics, Hegelian master/slave dialectics, Arendtian natality or Levinasian ethics of responsivity lack historicity; rather, I argue that they differentially distribute reading as an ability and property of white bodies and therefore, contain and sanction the work of recognition within white-orientated modes of knowing and relating with the Other. Just as ableist disability tropes serve to "justify the ongoing naturalization of Indigenous peoples as belonging to "spaces of prostitution, crime, sex and violence" (Greensmith 2012, 28), in academia when we continue to read Indigenous bodies as illegible and situated in “death-worlds” we naturalize the inability to be read, of reading, or being a reader, as constitutive of Indigenous ontologies. While the capacity of the white body to read and read Others remains inscrutable, the bodies of the colonized subject are objectified through monolithic, pathologizing and static descriptions of colonial violence. In describing the dehumanizing effects of colonial violence, we also run the risk of dehumanizing the very subjects we attempt to represent by possessing the power of read-ability not only over the dead, the unspoken and the silenced but also over the Indigenous communities whose lands we occupy.

Our reach, ability to extend, towards the Face of the Other has been facilitated by the very colonial violence we set out to critique. The access we have gained through white-orientations and sense-abilities of spectatorship remain inscrutable and accounted for yet part and parcel of
process by which we have acquired knowledge. Anecdotally, I learned this during a visit to the U’mista Cultural Centre on Kwakwaka’wakw territory where various ancestral inheritances that were confiscated by the Canadian government during the potlatch ban (1885-1951) are now on display for the general public. While I was reading descriptions of colonial violence, I was reminded that the very thing I am performing a critique of through the practice of reading enabled my reach, or access, to this land, and quite literally the Face of the Other (as many items on display were sacred mourning masks). My experience of moving through this space, of knowledge sharing, was deeply asymmetrical as it was mediated through settler-colonial and white-orientated textual sensibilities. My learning, and movement, on this land continues to be induced by such a forced intimacy which must be accounted for in my practice of Islam (Mingus 2017a). Conversely, the experience of visiting the Museum would feel very different for an Indigenous elder, or descendant, whose family member’s inheritances were confiscated only to be returned after years of negotiation and political advocacy. And so, I argue that the extent to which an Other is recognizable or intelligible as a person tells us more about the sense-abilities of the reader (and their complicity in maintaining the differential distribution of recognize-ability) than the ontological properties of the body being read. If we understand readability as an ability and not an ontological or epistemic capacity that the Other lacks, then we can begin questioning how white-supremacist and colonial textual sensibilities compromise our ability to read difference and relate with Others. As a first-generation Muslim-migrant settler, this journey begins by first accounting for anti-Indigenous and anti-polytheistic sentiments in my inheritance of Islamic thought and praxis and then unpacking my attachments to, and sense of, passing as a Canadian citizen. Instead of transposing onto the body of another person the property of strangeness or otherness, I ask instead what about my upbringing, historical orientations, sense of
place etc. makes others appear strange or unfamiliar to me? Why and how am I processing and registering this difference in a particular way and what is my relationship to these feelings?

The post-colonial reverie of a subject that speaks for herself, on her own conditions, relies on the tropes of transcendence and emancipation as well as the performativity of speech as vocality and of political subjectivity as sensible. Authorship and moral accounting, in this sense, demands of the political subject to be readable, intelligible, translatable to others not only in her intentionality but also in her sense-ability as one who can be seen, heard or touched. What of the spectral others whose histories, embodiments, attachments and subjectivities exist beyond the spatio-temporal and bodily horizons of our senses, beyond the limits of our moral imaginations, beyond our empathic capacities? The notion of authorship, as self-enclosed and self-disclosure, written against the possibility of being spoken for, leaves little space of imagining how (inter)dependencies form political (inter)subjectivities, for better and for worse. In this scenario of two-deaths, speech or death (actual or symbolic) are read to be the only ethical possibilities by which the womb of symbolic order can be ruptured. The burden of delivering this birth rests on the oppressed. And for the political theorist who perceives an Other to be trapped between two deaths, ethical sensibility becomes the work of appearance, of illuminating that which dwells in the darkness of dependency through speculative care—by reading and speaking for the bodies of the damné that we judge as unable to speak for themselves—bodies that have been made to speak against their selves. But the problem is that there are so many other ethical possibilities available to those within our horizon that are complicit in the banality of evil as perpetrators, bystanders, witnesses, etc. Even within the narrowest of horizons, the only option cannot be that the individual in harm’s way has no choice but to make, or to be made, an example of to throw light on the injustice she faces. Here, justice can only be realized posthumously.
Placed in between two deaths, individuals such as Zaynab and Bishan Singh are written about as having dwelled and died “in the non-place of the Voice” (Agamben 2000, 129–30), whose stories of suffering have been inscribed in the flesh and not in the written word. The notion of voice, and the category of the voiceless that comes with it, is an archetypal concern of political theorists studying the effects of violence on agency, and the extent to which the oppressed can speak and know of their conditions. Strangely, there is very little interrogation of who we authorize as an interpretive authority and which forms of knowledge we legitimize as capable of representing the “political”. In studying the plight of the voiceless, one not only authorizes oneself as having a voice, but also assumes the interpretive authority to speak in their name as a translator and as a witness. The anti-thesis between voice and violence, and in between the sensory embodiment of violence and the interpretive (im)possibilities of making sense of violence, have serious implications for the moral person that inhabits the body. Despite the metaphysical allure of radical alterity, of the untranslatable, political theorists remain deeply limited in our practice to address and respond to the possibilities of authorship beyond audible and verbal forms of sentient expression. Assuming that those situated in relations of dependency (colonial, patriarchal, or ableist) have no voice, and thus are incapable of leaving material, or publicly archived, traces of their voices to translate, no audible or readable echoes to decipher, as political theorists we inherit and assume “the charge of bearing witness in their name” and acknowledge the “impossibility of bearing witness” (Agamben 2000, 34).

Such disembodied, decontextualized and individualized modes of witnessing in which the person that inhabits the body is cut off from the knowledge they are consuming, interpreting or appropriating folds into awkward, to say the least, situations. A theatre production of slave songs performed by an all-white cast; a white scholar of race relations in the US writing from the
standpoint of being Black; a public intellectual that writes and thinks about Islamic feminism for a living yet his name travels through the whisper networks of women as a sexual offender; a philosopher who defends life and liberty for all whose ideas and material sustenance is deeply implicated in the slave trade; an academic conference on care ethics that begins with no land acknowledgement, or mention of Indigenous peoples that sustained the land on which our conversations take place or the agency of the land itself as a host that shapes, textures and contains our knowing. These are not merely cases of intellectual appropriation, neglect or contextual ignorance, but rather a failure of due care, a refusal to respond to our complicity in coloniality, and open up our subjectivities as knowers. The problem here is not the inability to read the unreadable, invisible and unintelligible or a crisis of representation in our portrayals of the voiceless, or the impossibility of cross-cultural understanding or political incorrectness, but rather, a moral failure to open up our hearts to Zaynab and Bishan Singh’s cries, a critical sense organ by which we receive others, in our knowledge relations. How can we disrupt the colonial desire to know, unveil, and see the Other without first lifting the veil that prevents our hearts from receiving them?

Through comparative care ethics, and textual exegesis of the Mahābhārata, Vrinda Dalmiya offers the notion of relational humility as an intellectual virtue. She argues that by humbly acknowledging that there are limits to our knowledge, also espoused by Wolin in his sense of perspectival reasoning, we acknowledge ignorance not as an absence or lack but rather at the edge of the (un)known. It is at this edge we experience a shame for not-knowing, mark our selves as epistemically inadequate, seek teachers and knowledge to learn from and account for our not-knowing and finally, submit to “surprising epistemic others” (Dalmiya 2016, 114). Instead of reading the bodies, wounds, and worlds of others as epistemically or ontologically
inferior, and attempting to think-for others, our epistemic efforts are directed to identifying and accounting for the limits of our knowledge and constructively engaging with a will to ignorance and the shame it harnesses. As seen in the examples above, a will to ignorance does not merely mean acknowledging our positionality and social locations but rather surveying the ethical consequences of how we inhabit, or are made to inhabit, our sense-abilities as knowers, as readers, of other bodyminds, histories and (con)texts. What were to happen if we did not read de-linking from the symbolic order or behaving irresponsibly through one’s death as grand acts of rupture, departure, or resistance? What happens when we read Zaynab, Bishan Singh, and the runaway slave, not as the living dead but as individuals placed within relations and worlds in which the work of enslavement, silence and dispossession was authored by humans and not fate?

When violence is authored to escape sensibility, how does its memory, and its witness, travel until justice is delivered? And, “what happens to the subject and world when the memory of such [violent] events is folded into ongoing relationships” (Das 2007, 8). It is “through complex transactions between body and language,” women in (post)colonial contexts: 1) “voice and show the hurt done to them”, 2) “provide witness to the harm done to the whole social fabric” and 3) care for “the injury to the very idea of different groups being able to inhabit the world together” (60). Secondary texts of oral histories of the Partition, in Spivak’s sense of the term, mimic the narrative form of an Aristotelian tragedy, where the medium of the spoken or written word is used to create a representation of the actions of characters to signify the plot, as opposed to signifying the character’s self-understandings. The stories are turned into a spectacle through various medias from films, to plays to investigative journalism. Yet, all attempts to understand Zaynab’s side of the story attribute her silence to her abusive family members in Lahore, as well as her neighbors in the village, who refuse to speak of the contentious event due
to their “conservative” values. The chorus, in this context, is us, the readers, the inheritors, of these stories upon whom the silence of Zaynab impresses upon. This inheritance charges us with the work of translation of responding to and addressing Zaynab’s silence as moral witnesses. And so, the work of authorship is relational, interdependent and spread out across various generations. More importantly, the work of authorship is inherited and engages the faculties of moral judgment that engage our capacities to witness. As readers, it is us, and not some other readers out there in another historical context, who are complicit in the violence that enslaves, silences, and denies personhood. It may be fate or inheritance that throws us in the position of being a witness, but how we witness, and whether we assume the responsibilities that come with such complicity, depends on our ethical sense-abilities.

2.6 The Relational Phenomenology of Sense as an Ability: Translation as Sanitization and Domestication

In this section, I shift from providing a general critique of the colonial politics of recognition and explore how the inheritance of white-orientated notions of citizenship shape the boundaries of our knowledge relations and our study of the “Islamic.” An emerging trend within contemporary historical-critical scholarship is the study of colonial archives such as travel writings, correspondence, and autoethnographies to reveal the sensory histories that were constitutive of the imperial attitude. These textual archives, as inscribed in the written word, represent the first-hand eye- and ear- witness testimonial accounts of the first encounters between agents of empire, such as land surveyors and cartographers and Indigenous communities. They were also a medial channel by which local and natural knowledge about the colony was transported back to the colonial administration, translated through colonial sensibilities and transformed to expand European knowledges in a global context. These points
of “first contact” are mediated by various inter-sensory exchanges: 1) European bodies found the hostile, foreign landscapes irritated their sensibilities and in response, imposed upon themselves regimes of sensory control and bodily discipline to avoid becoming like the native, 2) conversely, the bodies of the enslaved were forced to make sense of their new environments without “making sense of their enslavement” (Raapke 2017, 116 Footnote 4), and 3) the Indigenous populations whose epistemologies were held in place through place-based ways of sensing, were bleached, de-odorized, surveilled, and co-opted to meet the standards and aesthetics of European sensibilities and sustain the material reproduction of the colony.

The coloniality of sensibility seeks to purify, contain an domesticate the Other for the sake of civilization, territorial expansion and cultural appropriation. However, despite colonial efforts to sanitize aesthetic cultures and sensescapes of the colony, or of non-Western knowledge systems, the poetic signature of textual matter lives on in the witness and evades the sense-ability of the colonizer by refusing to be contained. It lingers as a scent, as a sound, as a touch, that bothers the reader with colonial impulses and makes him despise his proximity to an Other who he cannot ever totally dominate or annihilate.

For example, Xuelei Huang (2016) studies sanitation policies implemented by the British administration, colonial correspondence, records of punishment and travel writings to explore “how China smelled to the Western nose” (1094). The witness accounts of colonial administrators speak of the Chinese as having a “different bodily sensibility”, embodying “the habit of depositing garbage and their filthy matters in the public streets in front of their residence” and as prejudiced towards cleanliness (1104). And so, as seen in the Shanghai Land Regulations, the British attempted to de-odorize the environment by prohibiting “the heaping of filth, running out of gutters on the roads” for “the lasting peace and comfort” of the “mercantile
community” (1101). From within the foreign settlement, the British administration sought to
“lead” (1112) by example with their sanitation practices to teach the native inhabitants about
European standards of civility as sanitation. Deodorization of the environment was a way to
induce, or pave way for, “enlightenment” (1117). Huang notes that such smellscapes were to the
benefit of foreigners, and not natives, as the establishment of such sanitation regimes and a
“public health administration system” resulted in higher taxes for peasants who were paying for
the improvement of a city “they could not enjoy” (1118).

Whereas in the case of Shanghai the local environment was sanitized of smell as a form of
colonial discipline, in Algeria, the French colonial administration relied on various surveillance
technologies to study and track the domestic listening habits of Algerians to restrain the rise of a
revolutionary “auditory culture” (Scales 2010, 396-414). Such measures included banning
records in Arabic. In both cases, the colonial administration attempted to disrupt the sensescapes
of the native population by sanitizing, and clearing, the land for the ease and comfort of colonial
commercial activity, or by disrupting Indigenous auditory cultures by surveillance to suppress
the cultivation of revolutionary or decolonial sensibilities. In the case of Shanghai, that which
could not be sanitized of its stench was the nightsoil, and in the case of Algeria what could not be
captured were the sounds of the revolutionary music on the radio and their impressions upon the
hearts of Algerian people. However, the witness to such resistance, is not always embodied in the
faculties of speech and sound but rather rests within the sense histories inscribed into the matter
of the radio airwaves and the traditional fertilizer. These represent a material history of refusal.
Here both land and song carry within them witnessing capacities and a refusal to be made sense
of by European sensibilities, a way of a text denying a readership access to its contents but still
haunting the colonizer.
How did these defiantly invisible sencescapes and sense histories of (de)coloniality become inscribed into the written and spoken word? Annika Raapke (2017) explores how the bodies of Europeans responded to such stubborn, untameable sensory-material environments with a peculiar type of pain: sensory escape. She explores how colonial subjectivities were formed through the senses by studying accounts of pain in the travel writings and letters of French settlers in the Caribbean. The letters reveal language that represents sense escape as the painful process of *acclimatizing* to a natural environment with repertoires of air different than the air in one’s motherland (119). She defines this process as sensory disorientation and the pain as sensory irritations. The heat of the tropical regions in particular is framed in colonialist correspondence as causing fatigue, pain and weakness which attacks “mental faculties” (118). There was a fear within colonial settlers that such acclimatization to the sensibilities of the natives would destroy their bodies and intellectual capabilities. As per the Hippocratic note that “every place had its specific air”, French settlers saw the climate environments of colonies as having “bad air” and feared the possibility of bodily transformation (123). Such accounts were inscribed into collections of letters as a representation of sensory histories “constructed with care” by writers to address specific readerships back in Europe (ibid.). The strangeness of the sencescapes is translated into the familiar through the written word as writers communicate to their families that there are “irreconcilable differences” between Europeans and the Caribbean people. And to begin to “make sense” of the environment sensorially is “not an option” due to the “insurmountable strangeness” (ibid.). And so, the colonizers imposed upon themselves regimes of sensory governance that limited “sensory impressions” (Raapke 2017, 130) “to keep the body under control” (131). In the case of Bengal, colonial administrators practiced extreme caution and restraint in their diets as seen in the writings of James Ranald Martin, President of
the East India Company’s Medical Board, who attributed the “degenerate culture of the Bengalis” to the climate of Bengal:

when we reflect on the habits and customs of the natives… 'their long misgovernment, their religion and morals, their diet, clothing, etc., and above all their climate [his emphasis] we can be at no loss to perceive why they should be what they are’ (Sengupta 2010, 86).

In addition to such body discipline, another role sense-perception played in the formation of colonial subjectivity was the formal training in autoethnographic methodologies that intellectual elites designed “to teach Europeans a way to see the world”—which detailed not only what was to be perceived, from the coasts, the flora and fauna etc. to the Indigenous inhabitants and their customs of living, but also how to organize sensory data into a testimonial account that is readable to colonial administrators. Daniela Hacke (2017) frames such texts as the “epistemological core of colonial writing” in that they represent a third space on the literary plane, or “a contact zone”, within which interactions across cultures took place, and the documentation of sensory processes of colonial knowledge acquisition were inscribed (160). Hacke studies the travel writings of geographer Thomas Harriet who was appointed by the English court to assist in surveying land in North America for “the founding of English colonial settlements” (165).

Beyond representations of people, land was inscribed into travel writings as an “idyllic place, a locus amoenus,” sanctioning it for settlement. Hacke argues that “travel accounts did not only reproduce a “world”, but in their writing depictions contributed very significantly to the making of it” (168). Such projects of knowledge production were part in parcel of the imperial intention to “expand European knowledge as well as England’s power” (165). She argues that the interpretive processes “by which Harriot came to his understanding of the new world…were
based on sensory modes of perception of a “world” which figured “in the text as discursive worldmaking” (ibid.). Such historical scholarship shows us that “the perception of the world and the production of knowledge are almost inseparable here from the empirical methods, and from the manner of their pictorial and written presentation” (173). Sensorial testimonies were received as “a new way of eye-evidence” (170). And so, upon returning home to Europe, the interpretive authority of colonial surveyors was legitimized when they texturized their eye-witness accounts through the Other’s senses, such as their acoustic experiences of hearing and vocalizing Indigenous languages or tasting vegetables from the foreign world. Interpreters mobilized their eyewitness, their “earwitness”, and even their tongue as a witness to re-enact the acoustic soundscapes of first contact scenes to their readers, and future settlers, in Europe by reproducing the vocality of Indigenous languages and then translating through the repertoires of English culture (179).

The work of geographers, such as Thomas Harriet, was to not only survey the land through sensory observation, but also, in his own words, to deal with the “natural inhabitans” (176). The acoustic experience, in particular, was understood by Harriet as the “phonetic transposition of sound into writing” (180) by which one translates what he saw (as foreign) into the written word (as familiar). Through sense proximity to Indigenous food systems, land-based cultures and languages, colonial geographers like Harriet claimed access to local knowledges. In translating sensory knowledges “unavailable to European readerships” (183) through European languages and frames of reference, travellers, in Euben’s sense, not only claim a sense of familiarity over the “foreign culture” but also become part of the regime of colonial knowledge production as both writers and authors. Writing in this context is a “medium of transfer” by which the intersensory accounts of the foreign world by the travellers are domesticated, in Ahmed’s sense, and
placed at the disposal of “educated readers of the English courts” (ibid.). It is through the
inscription of sensory experiences into the written word that Harriet’s ethnographies become “a
global knowledge repository in which the local knowledge (in the form of language and natural
knowledge)...of an almost entirely untextualized culture is preserved, passed on and integrated
into a global flow and transfer of knowledge” (187).

However, just as the stench of the nightsoil and the radio waves disrupt colonial regimes of
sanitation, what disrupts the coloniality of knowledge is “the cry”, not in the form of the spoken
word, but in the form of an interjection, “a call of attention to one’s own existence.”
(Maldonado-Torres 2007, 256). This cry is the answer to the existential question of “Why go
on?” under such conditions of death. Do our theoretical frameworks and interpretive methods
enable us to respond to this cry? And in what ways can we ground our knowledge production in
an ethic of care or love, instead of a non-ethic of care, that Fanon speaks of? What de-limits our
sense-ability or body sense to respond to and attend to the plight of Zaynab and Bishan Singh
who dwell within the belly of the whale? If we look more closely at these stories, it is not
violence to the body that throws one into a radical subjectivity but rather the face of violence and
its perpetrators that is marked as illegible, fated and beyond apprehension. Naturalizing the death
drive as a constitutive feature of (inter)dependency renders enslavement, domination and
bondage as inevitable, necessary and natural consequences of co-habitation (Butler 2012).

2.7 Resistant Texts and Mis-Fits

Resistant texts, that refuse to be made sense of, deny the reader sense-ability, invoke
within the reader an irritability, a sense of dislocation, that seizes the colonialist desire to
appropriate, occupy and contain Indigenous knowledges. Such texts mark the colonizer’s body as
a mis-fit in the colony. While critical disability scholars focus on the body as Other, I explore
how cosmological dimensions of Islamic embodiment are made to mis-fit in the world through colonial forces such as secularism, white supremacy and heteropatriarchy and how colonial representational practices shape the material world and our world-building practices to sustain such misfits. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson theorizes disability as “a way of being in an environment, as a material arrangement” that can be a “sustaining environment” (594) in which the makers and the mould of the place are responsive and committed to creating and maintaining a fit between the material and social structure of the space and the bodies that inhabit or move through it. Misfitting, in Garland-Thomson’s sense, is different than Rod Michalko’s definition of fitting in as containment or assimilation. In this case, the person with disability performs acts of fitting in such as passing as able-bodied, or making a disability such as blindness fit into a “sighted world.” to keep one’s “particularity to himself” (Michalko 1998, 139). Such an agenda of making fit is also seen in the colonialist aim of inclusion, as identified by former World Bank President James Wolfensohn, is to “bring into society [those people’ who have never been part of it before…in order to make the unfit, fit” (qtd. in Dingo 2007, 93). The poetic architecture of accessibility is not shaped by the “narrative line of exile” and return that enables members of the disability community to move from the “darkness into the light” (Butler and Spivak 2007). Rather, Garland-Thomson’s notion of misfit invites investigation into the spectral poetics of space-making by which we are held together in place or are displaced.

When the environment fails to “sustain the shape and function of the body that enters it” then the world-making process by which it was constructed, and its world-makers, must account for their complicity in co-authoring and co-constituting this misfit. Understanding sense as an ability requires us to always be exercising and developing our capacities of responsivity (Garland-Thomson 2011, 594). Refusal to respond, which can be both intentional and
unintentional, as well as the desire to appropriate, conquer and contain results in such a mis-fit being coded onto the Other’s body; and so, “to mis-fit renders one a misfit” (593-595). Unlike the politics of recognition and Foucauldian necropolitics which read bodies within colonial relations as fixed by the white gaze and located in a discursive state of darkness, or nonbeing, the material feminist notion of mis-fit reads how such dis/appearances are co-authored, materially situated and relationally held in place as (mis)fits. The burden of translation here is to read and recognize the processes that sustain and make invisible such mis-fits instead of naturalizing bodies as misfits that are unrecognizable or beyond apprehension. Such (mis)fits between the socio-material world and the body are openings that invite investigation into the inaccessible architecture of colonial spaces and the world-building practices by which they are sustained.

Here, teachability rests in the mis-fit and its authors and not in the bodies, moral injuries or radical alterity of the Other.

Answering Linda Alcoff’s call to merge hermeneutic inquiry with the study of phenomenology, I re-define the notion of epistemic blindspots as misfits caused by breakdowns in response-ability and address-ability in the relational practice of speculative care. Such breakdowns are not organic, fated or inevitable but rather a consequence of inherited colonial textual sense-abilities which weaken our capacities as witnesses in our knowledge relations. Opening up the moral inscrutability of political theorists, I explore how complicit scholarship of Muslim scholars and political theorists at the fractured loci folds into our world-building practices to erect inaccessible and exclusionary worlds that displace and dislodge disability and interdependency from our horizons. The colonial signature of the authors, as inscribed in our intentions, our inheritance, and our orientations, becomes inscribed into the shape of the world, our sense-abilities, the shapes of our bodies and how we fit together; these shapes carry our
stories, our memories and impressions of our identities. The architectural and aesthetic arrangement of matter and our embodied, relational identities goes beyond the spatial-temporal continuity of our identities (Bynum, 13, 2008). How are we complicit in our scholarship as co-authors in the misfitting of others in our knowledge relations? How does such complicity orient our sense-abilities to refuse to address the ways in which our modes of knowledge production and world-building erase and deny the mark of (inter)dependency? And how does this denial of dependency in our knowledge relations fold into the shape of the world as a deeper rejection of blighted bodies, epistemologies and cosmologies?

Finally, what role does the intentionality of the authors, the world-makers, play in designing materialities that are responsive (Held 2006a; Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Tronto 2013), dynamic and oriented to not only creating spatial fits between bodies and material environments, but also epistemological, ontological and cosmological fits with religious, disabled, and racialized Others? If mis-fittedness marks a body as a misfit, then how do forms of colonial difference deny the authority of other epistemological horizons and ontologies. Mis-fits are not abstractions of colonial violence but rather active modes of refusal, abandonment, dispossession and denial of locatedness as seen in the following situations: Turkish-Muslim transwomen who are denied rites of passage into the afterlife by family who refuse to perform burial rituals (Zengin 2019); enslaved Black-Muslims who are denied the ability to recite, read and own Quranic material and must preserve their relationship with the divine through forced conversion to Christianity (Ibn Said 1831); there is space for white non-Muslim visitors within the architecture of mosques but no space for disabled Muslims, Muslim women or Queer Muslims; a world in which Muslim girls and women must choose between riding public transit to university or wearing a niqab as the city’s secularism law prohibits access to public services
for those who practice veiling; a world in which the same misanthropic skepticism that drives the
*ego conquiro* to cast doubt on those who are of the “wrong religion” (Maldonado-Torres 2007),
or have no religion (Grosfoguel 2012), is mirrored in the dismissal of deaf, blind or “physically
defected” Muslims as interpretive authorities and designating their hadith-transmissions as
transgressive, faulty and unreliable (Richardson 102-106).

Whether it’s the forced displacement and re-location of Black-Muslims, or the denial of
access to public space for Muslim women in Canada, or the erasure and denial of disabled
Muslims as knowers of the “Islamic”, misfittedness goes beyond the spatiality of matter and
extends to the cosmological, the epistemic and the ontological dimensions of the world. In all of
these scenarios the imperial attitude programs our capacity to care for an Other, either through
forced conversion (in which the soul of the *damné* is at stake), assimilation (in which unveiling
makes one a recognizable, knowable, political subject) or erasure (in which the erasure of
disabled Muslims’ contributions to hadith preserves the purity and authenticity of the traditions
for other Muslims). These are scenarios in which a Black Muslim, Muslim transwomen, a
Muslim woman, and a disabled Muslim are absenced and denied entry into the material
inscription of history, the afterlife, the “political” and scholarship as knowers of the “Islamic”
and as Muslims in the eyes of Allah. Such refusal is rooted in discourses of purity and
purification and the binary logic of religious/political and sacred/profane binaries. How can we
learn de-colonial textual sense-abilities by which such mis-fits can be read and addressed in our
relations and in our worlds? While disability scholars focus primarily on the relation between the
body and the material world (Miller 2016), I extend the category of mis-fit to explain how
colonial textual sensibilities seek to displace, and render unfit, Islamic cosmologies through
sanitizing the sensescapes of the colony, as well as, our knowledge relations. Conversely, in the
case of de-coloniality, what is rendered as a mis-fit is the colonizer’s body within the colony and his intrusion as a translator of native epistemologies. Or in another sense, what is rendered misfit is the epistemic reliability of Muslim women as witnesses in our knowledge relations.

Re-visiting the notion of sense within hermeneutic inquiry through the phenomenology of the body provides some pathways for understanding how colonial textual sense-abilities shape the Islamic. As theorized by Michael Staudigl (2013), descriptions of violence as senseless and indescribable in situations of colonial dependency serve to describe “what violence is” instead of “how violence is experienced”, or the “sense of it” (43). In this reading of violence, the enactor of violence “gains sense”, the recipient of violence experiences “a loss of sense” and the duty to “articulate sense” is “attributed to third persons” such as witnesses or the narrator (44). Here, the burden of translation rests with the witnesses. In the case of sexual violence, the testimonies of survivors of sexual violence are often cast as epistemically and ontologically suspicious (Wadud 1999, 85). The sense-ability of the perpetrator of violence remains unquestioned. However, if we understand sense-ability as relational as something that “unfolds in-between the one and the other” and therefore, “unfolds in the subject’s relation with those it encounters in this world, who can make this world appear to it, d appear, or finally disappear” (Staudigl 2013, 44), then different registers of responsibility arise. Now, what is on trial is not only the moral character of the perpetrator, but also the systems, norms, and inheritors of his knowledge as architects of the scene and incidence of violence. For example, what enables and empowers Male scholars to use their positions of authority to enact violence against Muslim women and get away with it are the mass social platforms and privilege they are granted by fellow Muslims within our community. In refusing to associate their acts of violence with their textual exegesis, male privilege is authorized and unquestioned by their readers and allows such scholars to be disembodied and
morally inscrutable. Such moral inscrutability is a mode of disappearance by which their complicity as perpetrators of violence remains invisible and outside our field of attention, or care.

In the former reading of sense, the witness is charged with the burden of reading not only the actor’s intentional agency, but also reading the loss, or void, in sense experienced by the recipient of violence. In the latter reading, just as Wolin’s optometrist plays with our range of vision, what makes sense to us, appears or disappears in our sensorial field of attention, is relationally constituted and shapes our sense of the person (Staudigl 2013, 44). Reading sense-ability as relational entails that violence is not an extraordinary rupture to our horizons of sensibility, but rather, “social orders in which we move, perceive, and act “always carry within them violence” (45) that shapes what and who is made to make sense. The witness’ work here is not to interrogate the senselessness of how such an individual can do such an act of violence, or try and locate the practices of governance that shape how the recipient of violence is made to dis/appear; but rather, the witness’ work of knowledge translation here is identifying the deeper relational structures that made such violence possible and (in)visible as well as locating her self within the same sensorial scenescape, or world, within which such violence takes place and shapes the bodies of those within its contact zone. Here, the work of witnessing transforms and affects the witness as entangled in a relation of responsibility. Through a relational frame of sense-ability, we must ask how continuing to give platform to such scholars in our communities, in our knowledge relations, makes us complicit and dis-ables our witnessing capacities. And so, it is not only the case that patriarchal readings of Islam are harmful, but rather, the patriarchal textual sense-abilities by which we author and authorize patriarchy guide us to found notions of the Islamic within patriarchal violence as its origins.
More straightforwardly, sense cannot be reduced to “a subject’s activities nor to anonymous processes of signification”; sense-ability is shaped and textured by sense-histories which can only be understood through affective horizons that open up the “pre-given structures of meaning” (Staudigl 2013, 49). Through this frame of sense-ability, Staudigl designs a relational phenomenology of violence in which a “refusal to respond to the appeal of the other is to violate her, i.e. her embodied being and/or the claims that make up her self-referential integrity” (50). Just as the rivers that run through the Punjab border, the truths of these stories, and its many sides, disrupt not through their written or spoken inscription but in the poetics of the plot and the questions that arise through the absences.

In the next section, by applying such de-colonial and Islamic-feminist modes of inquiry, I explore how the de-colonial and Islamic technologies of body-sensing and world-sensing can disrupt our inheritance of colonial textual sense-abilities. By closely analyzing the role sense and sense-ability play in the work of sanitization, I outline the extent to which colonial sense orientations compromise our faculties of witnessing by which we desire to know the Muslim Other, and represent the Islamic, in our knowledge production. Guided by colonial textual sense-abilities, as non-Muslim scholars seek to sanitize the study of Islam by focusing on its cosmopolitan or democratic dimensions and sanitize representations of colonial violence against Muslim communities, many Muslim scholars aim to write for primarily white audiences and present a “public relations (PR) image of Islam” as a “religion of peace” (Chaudhry 2013, 18). In addition, Muslims political theorists must be certified and receive instruction in western modes of inquiry as a mode of disembodying and purifying their senses of bias, tradition, or religiosity to become able and qualified as scholars to produce scholarship on the Islamic. Similarly, the disembodied and decontextualized study of Islam as a theoretical category of analysis in
classrooms entails abstraction but never oral recitation of Arabic script from the Quran, engagement with living Muslim scholars or communities, or producing scholarship that is responsive to the self-identified needs of Muslims. Islam, as a theoretical terrain, is emptied of its flesh and bone dimensions, in order to transform it into sensible and translatable matter to be consumed by non-Muslims and within the neo-liberal academy.

As violence disrupts and disorients both the harasser and the harassee, sense-ability is not lost but rather differentially distributed through epistemic hierarchies that shape our knowledge relations. Within the colonial matrix of power, epistemic hierarchy entails that racialized, Indigenous and Black persons are objects that cannot “harbor subjects”; and so, any communication across these intersubjectivities can only be a “relation of externality” (Quijano 2007, 175). The same invisible line that once divided “metropolitan cities from colonial territories” (Santos 2015), the home from the world, lives on today to distinguish the political from the Islamic, the European Subject from the Muslim Other, and the secular from the religious, the rational from the barbaric and insane. And so, I interrogate how radical subjectivity, that comes with the experience of violence, and radical alterity of the untranslateable or the unknowable, are both used as signifiers of the limits of human understanding. Such dark matter, or epistemic terrain, can only be rendered and made sensible by western and able-bodied experts. In this system, “political” Islam can only be theorized by non-Muslim political theorists through secular, non-Islamic modes of theorizing about Islam and the Muslim Other as radically fundamentalist (Grosfoguel 2012):

Western modernity, rather than meaning the abandonment of the state of nature and the passage to civil society, means the coexistence of both the civil society and the state of nature, separated by an abyssal line whereby the hegemonic eye, located in the civil society, ceases to see, and indeed declares as nonexistent, the state of nature. The present being created on the other side of the line is made invisible by its being reconceptualized
as the irreversible past of this side of the line… The same abyssal cartography is constitutive of modern knowledge (Santos 2015, 122).

Situated within the colonial matrix of power, the political ecology of our knowledge relations and modes of knowing the “Islamic” are deeply hierarchical, genocidal, individualistic, white supremacist, neurotypical, Eurocentric, speech-based, decontextualized and atomized. Within the horizons of political theory, and in the selves of political theorists, there is little room for “radical co-presence”, epistemic diversity, sentient modes of receptivity beyond speech and expanding our relational ecologies to account for non-human/more-than-human forces that are a part of our life webs (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017; Santos 2015, 200). Binary thinking that divides the world into secular/religious, Islamic/West, private/public, intimate/political, rational/insane and autonomous/dependent folds into a deeper disregard for both care-based and Islamic epistemologies as they are both read to be located within the sphere of dependency and b/ordered as inferior. Although Latin American de-colonial scholars identify western European colonial rule as the originating context of modern coloniality, my de-colonial approach to doing political theory interrogates how the interlocking structures of heteropatriarchy, secularism, ableism and white supremacy not only devalue care-based epistemologies but also Islamic practices of care-knowing.

2.8 Hermeneutical Injustice and Epistemic Privilege

Using Miranda Fricker’s notion of epistemic injustice, the credibility injustice of colonial readings of Islam is not a matter of “non-receipt of one’s fair share of a good (credibility)” but rather testimonial injustice is a “distinctively epistemic injustice” in which “someone is wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower” (2007, 18–23). Fricker defines the material, ontological and epistemic dimensions of such harm as hermeneutical injustice (151). In critique of such
ableist readings of political subjectivity, ethics of care theorists urge us to move towards a “radically intersubjective” and relational model of the self (Hollway 2007, 101; Nedelsky 2012) that is shaped in and through material histories of contact (Ahmed 2004b, 40). As I illustrated through a critique of Margaret Urban Walker’s metaphor of the runaway slave, a relational and contextual model of political subjectivity enables us to: 1) sense hermeneutical injustice in the shape, the feel and the texture of the space, 2) place our embeddedness and complicity as a co-author of such injustice, 3) locate the design and programming of such injustice within our inheritance, and 4) cultivate and re-imagine de-colonial sensibilities and world-building practices to address such complicity, as well as, a response to those we have harmed in our knowledge relations.

Fricker argues that “different groups can be hermeneutically disadvantaged for all sorts of reasons...but only some of these cognitive disadvantages will strike one as unjust. For something to be an injustice, it must be harmful but also wrongful” (151). As our bodies, material situations, and relations change, the way we (mis)fit together will inevitably cause gaps in understanding, for both the perpetrator of violence as well as the person who has been harmed; she identifies this as “the hermeneutical lacuna” (ibid.). Through the example of sexual violence in the workplace, Fricker illustrates that what produces such a gap in cognitive advantage is that “the harasser’s cognitive disablement is not a significant disadvantage to him” and the impairment asymmetrically disadvantages the harassee (ibid.):

The cognitive disablement prevents her from understanding a significant patch of her own experience: that is, a patch of experience which it is strongly in her interests to understand, for without that understanding she is left deeply troubled, confused, and isolated, not to mention vulnerable to continued harassment. Her hermeneutical disadvantage renders her unable to make sense of her ongoing mistreatment, and this in turn prevents her from protesting it, let alone securing effective measures to stop it (ibid.).
And so, Fricker defines hermeneutical injustice as:

the injustice of having some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource (155).

Similar to the critique of the medical model by critical disability scholars (Arneil and Hirschmann 2016, 21), Fricker places impairment not within the body or testimony of the person who has been harmed or marked as the “living dead”, but rather, within the relational, material situation within which the harm was caused by not only the actions of the aggressor but also the normative environments that enabled such harm. Similar to my critique of the Master’s sanctioned ignorance, what I find interesting, and possibly problematic, is Fricker’s ambivalent description of the aggressor’s intention to harm as cognitive impairment. In what capacity is the wrong-doer unaware of, or unable to witness, the effects of his actions on the person he is harming? Of course, the discourse of “perpetrator of violence did not know what he was doing” is deeply gendered, racialized and ableist and is an assault on the survivor of violence’s capacity to testify to the fact that such events did indeed occur and that the perpetrator is indeed capable of such violence. What, or who, is on trial is often the credibility of survivors of violence, as the burden of responsibility rests with them to prove the guilt of the perpetrator. Rarely is the lack of sense-ability of the wrong-doer questioned when violence is perceived as senseless or it is rendered as insensible or unimaginable that such a person could commit such a horrific crime. The idea of a Master that knows not about the dead body that dwells in his chambers, or that his subjectivity as Master relies on the enslavement of Others, or the Master that can only account for the harms he causes in retrospect, is a paradigmatic feature of the colonial politics of recognition and of epistemic white and male privilege.
This ambivalence that the aggressor did not know, or could not know, to any extent what he was doing folds into a deeper denial of colonial agency that also secures the moral inscrutability of political theorists and excuses their complicity as a lack of intentionality. What Fricker identifies as hermeneutical injustice are the gaps in our cognitive understanding of the situational, eventual and relation dimensions of harm; I argue that the source of hermeneutical justice is the aggressor’s complicity in authorizing and exploiting the misfit of the harasee (her body, her words, her epistemological horizons, her precarious social location) in the sphere of hermeneutical participation (Garland-Thomson 2011). In addition, through a model of radical intersubjectivity and relational authorship, whoever is witness to such wrong-doing, either as readers, inheritors, as publishers, as employers etc., is also complicit. So, if it is the case that the aggressor cannot sense what he is doing, then what makes us also not sense-able in inheriting the legacy and work of coloniality in our relations and histories of contact with him? The world in which a Master who knows not how he enslaves, or how he became a Master is similar to Williams’, Arendt’s and Walker’s worlds in which the slave is thrown into a relationship of dependency where his body is made to speak against his person. I argue that what enslaves the runaway is a shared and co-authored action constituted by the intention of he who inscribed the tattoo onto his body, and the individual who inherits and completes the work of his intention by reading the inscription and acting accordingly. It is not what the individual’s body is made to say, but rather, how the writer and reader relate to his body through their reception of a text. The reader inherits from the writer the work of enslavement, of building and co-authoring a world that enslaves. More frankly, Walker and Williams are both just as complicit in epistemic violence as the reader in the metaphor who re-enslaves. It is through white supremacist violence that the individual’s future and body continue to be irreversibly tied to and enslaved by the
descendants of her ancestor’s captors. It is the interpretive community of readers, of those who inherit the intention of the slaveowners, that continue to build worlds in light and continue to do the work of their ancestors’ blueprints. What I read in Walker’s metaphor is: 1) the violence of the written word and how it inscribes itself onto the body to make it speak in place of and in spite of the person that inhabits it, 2) how authorship goes beyond the vocality of a single body, but rather is a shared condition of dependency that can either address and bear witness to the moral and material injury caused by the violation, or continue to do the work of violation by inheriting the intentions of the writer and reader—to reproduce a world and ways of relating with others in which such violations are possible.

Whereas de- and post- colonial scholars disrupt the domestication of decoloniality within the interiority of the self, Islamic-feminist scholars challenge the domestication of “despised genders” (Dube 2003, 69) as unfit to know of the Islamic. Islamic feminist scholarship on interpretive authority offers various textual sense-abilities through feminist Quranic hermeneutics in response to the “colonization of Islam by patriarchy” (Grosfoguel 2012, 16). As theorized by amina wadud, Asma Barlas, Ayesha Chaudhry, and Ayesha Hidyatullah among others, heteropatriarchal claims that cast doubt upon the interpretive authority of Muslim women as knowers and makers of Islam rely on marking women’s bodies, feminine modes of expression and rituals of care as ontologically and epistemically inferior to the authority of Muslim men as knowers of Islam. In response to what Chaudhry (2018) categorizes as patriarchal Islamic legal studies, Islamic feminists have designed various methods of textual interpretation and exegesis from within the tradition of Islam, from hermeneutics, to de-colonial thinking, to intersectional Islamic studies to not only subvert and resist patriarchal interpretations of Revelation, but also, surface from within the Islamic tradition pathways for social justice and moral accountability,
especially in regards to women’s rights. For example, building upon the writings of wadud, Barlas (2006) argues that exposing the patriarchal impulses of Quranic exegesis requires us to interrogate “who has read the Quran, how and in what contexts” because “…the problem is not inherent in the text itself but in the relationship between knowledge and the means of production” (144). An example of contextual analysis is how Fatima Mernissi (1991) debunks the hadith in which Muslim women’s bodies are framed as impure obstructions of a man’s prayer, or wadud’s refusal to accept that women cannot lead prayer (1999), and Chaudhry’s feminist intervention in patriarchal readings of the Quran verse 4:34 on (im)permissibility of domestic violence (2013). Such feminist readings debunk patriarchal and ableist understandings of the Muslim female body as “deviant and inferior”, impure and abnormal in order to restore the position of Muslim women as authors of the Islamic (Garland-Thomson 1991, 19).

What remains unquestioned within Islamic-feminist hermeneutics is the interpretive authority of patriarchal readers of Revelation, in particular, the authority of Muslim men, as authors of the Islamic. The violence of their textual interpretations is accepted as “plain-sense” or traditional readings of Revelation against which Muslim feminist readers build their negations (Chaudhry 2013). In the #metoo era, for example, various cishet male Muslim scholars, and their supporters, have been called upon by survivors of sexual violence to account for their sins and the harm they have caused Muslim women. Yet the scholars and their scholarship on Islam remain morally inscrutable and authoritative. Considering sense as an ability urges us to consider Islamic ontologies of self-making and how bodily discipline and moral character training “shape lowly clay into the walking Quran” (Ware 2014, 42). We refuse to ask how such scholars, who are perpetrators of sexual violence, tarnish their textual sense-abilities to interpret the Islamic as such violence darkens the critical sense organ of the heart and pre-disposes them to mark women
as mis-fits within their textual exegesis and knowledge relations. If only chains of isnad could speak of the hearts and hands of the men we have inscribed as interpretive authorities.

2.9 The Poetics of Mourning: Maternity and the Mother(land) as Sites of Violence

Metonymized as nothing but the birth-canal, woman is the most primitive instrument of nationalism.¹

Gayatri Spivak

Through the poetics of mourning, I open up the relational phenomenology of sense as an ability to argue that (inter)dependency is not a relation of lordship and bondage. Nested within our interdependencies are multiple relationships (of which only some are based on domination), modes of sentient expression, and possibilities for embodying narrative agency that do not cease to exist within the horizon of violence. Through the writings of Amrita Pritam, Rabindranath Tagore and Fahmida Riaz, I critique the naturalization of the death drive as the primary desire with which we gain a sense of our boundaried selves. In doing so, I move away from the politics of recognition paradigm within which the face of the (m)other can only be translated through the capacity contract of the Master-Slave dialectic towards a multi-sensorial, multi-generational and de-colonial model of receptivity. With this shift, I extend the contact zone beyond the Master/Slave relation to account for its embeddedness in colonial modes of relating that enslave in order to centre impact, over intent, as the field of moral responsibility. What we also inherit through this contact-zone are vibrant histories of caring labour and (inter)dependency, connection-based modes of knowing and resistance that have been held in place by our (grand)mothers and hold open fugitive pathways for escaping, and healing, from relations of violence.

¹ I want to thank Areeka Riaz for sharing this quote with me.
From the netherworld of dependency relations, to the “invisible hands” of informal caregivers (Exel et al. 2008), to the *Precarias a la Deriva* movement, a critical theme within ethics of care literature, policy and activism is the immateriality and illegibility of care-based epistemologies and the precarious place of relations of care and caring labour in society. Housed in the “darkness” of dependency care are some of the deepest expressions of vulnerability and violence. Underpinning these critical strains within ethics of care literature is the project of unravelling the myth that practices and relations of care re characteristically non-violent. As noted by Sara Ruddick (1995), the myth of men’s war, women’s peace, a warrior’s murder, a child’s birth (151), territorializes caring labor, such as “sheltering, nursing, feeding, kin work, teaching the very young, tending the frail elderly” (Ruddick 1995, 158), as contained within the domesticity of what is Man. It also assumes that the domain of such work is non-violent, in that the interiority and intimacy of dependency, is a space where men return and retreat to be cared-for, a space that cannot be permeated by the violence of the world outside. Within this paradigm, there is also little space to consider maternalist violence and the mother as a perpetrator of violence and care as a site for violence.

Bound in a Manichean stronghold, it is the death drive that fuels the desire for third world nationalists to mobilize and demand the Queen Mother to recognize their “reality as authoritative” (Kohn 2005). And so, in this relation of recognition, “each self-consciousness tries to force the other to recognize his point of view while withholding reciprocal recognition from the other” (497). Taking cue from Queer-Muslim contributions to intersectional Islam, I trouble how narratives of God as a maternal benefactress, as seen in imperial feminism and third-world Islamic nationalisms, can also rely on a capitalist logic of labor-normativity instead of interdependency (Aho 2017). Upon the birth of the nation, the motherland, or the nation-to-
come, is cast as the maternal benefactress who is “empowered with voice, self-determination and agency” as “vulnerable figures languish on the narrative margins, ensnared by the limitations of their own bodies” (Garland-Thomson 1997, 94) Femaleness and mental illness, for example, are read to disable one’s capacity for voice and serve as a reminder of liability, “bodily impotence and victimization”—situations of dependency that must be fled (ibid.). Both the imperial feminist, and the third world nationalist, rely on different, yet connected, myths of the maternal benefactress that governs, surveils and controls the subject formation process for the sake of nation- and empire-building to “patrol forms of material and structural resistance” (Aho 2017, 328). For example, it is in the eyes of some mother that Muslim women are forced to be veiled, or de-veiled, for the sake of being recognizable as humans worthy of being cared for and attended to. Similarly, the various relational ontologies and epistemologies that constitute the disability community, which includes disabled persons and care-givers, are also de-legitimated and cast to the underworld of the nation-state. Relatedly, as noted by Queer-Muslim activist and one of the founders of Unity Mosque, El-Farouk Khaki, this paradigm binds us “to images of Allah as a man, Lord Master” and is based in the class-based feudal system and heteropatriarchy (We Resist 2018). As embodied in Unity Mosque’s community agreement, a care-based and intersectional Islam compels us to re-imagine our relationship to Allah, Rabbanah, not as “Lord” but as “Sustainer, Nourisher or Cherisher” and Taqwa as “being Allah-conscious rather than “Allah-fearing” (el-Tawhid Juma Circle: The Unity Mosque).

Learning a colonial mode of relating with the Master, or the Mother, through the colonial and white-oriented paradigm of recognition is reproduced in our relations with our kin, our mothers, the motherland, the nation-state etc. Just as the British Raj hung citizenship over our heads like a guillotine, the foot-soldiers of the nation-state also instrumentalize death to govern
both our relation to the maternal, as well as affective and embodied dimensions of social belonging. By exercising control over the bodies, minds and souls of women, the nation-to-come identifies itself as sovereign, and colonized men claim self-mastery and freedom. Through a poetics of mourning within South-Asian literature, in this section, I trouble how territorializing care-work within the domesticity of woman and violence within the publicity of man, of political subjectivity, thrives on the notion that “caretakers work with subjects; they give birth to and tend self-generating, autonomously willing lives” (Ruddick, 131). In doing so, what is cast out of sight are not only the forms of national, colonial and religious violence done to South-Asian women within and beyond the Purdah, but also, the ways in which dependency is institutionalized as a form of violence and enforced as a relation of domination. In this sense, dependency is not a universally, shared condition, but rather a relationship of domination and a condition of subordination nurtured through non-consensual modes of care. The caring labours of South-Asian women are objectified, alienated, and appropriated to build the nation-to-come. Through a poetics of inheriting an impossible mourning, and an Islamic ethic of witnessing, we can begin to nurture the capacities for response-ability and address-ability to pave safe passage for them to return to their worlds, their relations and their lands. Whether it’s Hajar’s groundspring, the remains of Bindu’s letter, or the ripe dates that fall down for Maryam, or the stench of a carcass, or the ghost of Waris Shah, or the Ayat Al-Kareema on my mother’s lips, the (m)other’s cries do not go unheard, as the responsibility to care-for these women is inherited by creation and the Creator.

2.9.1 Mourning the Motherland

An example of how affective modes of knowing are appropriated by the apparatus of third world nationalisms is embodied in the archetype of mater dolorosa. Through the
violence/care binary, the body of the mother is instrumentalized as affective machinery in articulating national consciousness. The mother is held responsible for performing the labour of witnessing the horror of violence, to care-for those in suffering, to grieve-for the lives lost in men’s war. In her poem “Ajj Aakhaan Waris Shah Nu”, Amrita Pritam challenges how such dichotomies destroy the relational ecologies of maternity by challenging the interiorization of mourning as a mother’s work. Punjabi women, for example, are charged with the burden of processing the grief that comes as the price of national independence through rituals, affectivity and prayer. Similar to Eduardo Galeano’s poetic critique of modernization theory in his essay, “Be Like Them”, Pritam uses images of decay, disease and destruction to paint a grim picture of Punjab during the Partition of India in 1947: rivers filled with blood, poisoned waters moving through its irrigation systems, fertile fields sprouting venom from their pores, bamboo-shoots turning into deadly snakes and its limbs turning black and blue with pain. She compares her motherland to a body diagnosed with auto-immunity, whose immune systems have been wired to turn against itself. In addition, she releases grief from domesticity by personifying it as a disease that infects human and more-than-human layers of the biosphere to disrupt the processes of maternity.

She writes of her people dying as her motherland is filled with venom, to be given a life of its own. But paradoxically, this new life, this birth of the motherland is the poison, the environment in which her people’s will to live is met only with death and destruction. This image of the motherland as an origin of both care and violence, as that which sustains and destroys, captures how practices of care can be instrumentalized to direct the caring labours of those nestled in the relation of dependency to sustain motherlands in spite of their mothers. Working within Dipesh Chakrabarthy’s notion of the double-bind (1992), I argue that the
ghar/bahir divide, as an inherited mode of relating, maps itself as a boundary, not only as a border that runs through Punjab, but also, as a disjunction that marks a transition in the history of South-Asia as pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. Pritam articulates the artificity of history of the nation-state as that which displaces and dislodges the sensory and bodily histories of the (m)other, the narrator of the poem, from what she is witnessing. Inscribing the violence of 1947 as a flight from colonial dependency, as the birth of twin nation-states, of Pakistanis and Indians as free, expunges from the this (con)text the faces of the Punjabi, Hindu and Sikh (m)others killed in the fight for a motherland. Here, the Great White Mother is substituted with Mother India and a motherland is created by killing many (m)others—a maternity without a (m)other. The poem is a performative gesture of mourning the violence done to that which sustains Punjab, its five rivers, and the loss of a world, of Waris Shah’s Punjab.

In this time-space between British occupation and the birth of a nation, Pritam locates herself in between the living and the dead, between a homeland she remembers and what her homeland has become. She begs Waris Shah to speak from his grave, to address the daughters of Punjab, but finds that the idea of the motherland denies the daughters the ability to be addressed and demand a response. Therefore, Waris Shah’s medicine can only be harnessed as a absence, through the cries of Punjab’s daughters, in their lamentation, their grief, and emotions. Pritam shows us that it is through the care of women, their labours and their bodies, as they are positioned within the netherworld of dependency relations, can we receive this medicine. Inviting investigation into the ways in which violence dwells within the domestic, Pritam also presents to us a bitter-truth, that sometimes our relations and ways of relating to the motherland, and with our mothers, through the practice of care are violent. What Pritam is grieving is not only lives lost to gendered forms of national violence, but also the violation of an individual’s
right to nourishing relationships with her mother, and her motherland. Beyond this, I sense that Pritam is also in a deep mourning over that which was denied passage into this world, the trajectories of possible futures, pasts and presents without the interruption of colonial rule. These histories have literally interrupted the birthing (m)other’s right to safe passage as seen in the story of the displaced woman forced to endure the pangs of labour within a moving *Kafila* (Butalia 2000). And so, what Pritam also mourns is the mother’s right to a healthy, safe and nourishing environment for her pregnancy.

In Amrita Pritam’s poem I have shared with you a tale of the living dead, bodies with compromised immunity, bodies that turn against themselves, and of unnourished bodies. I have talked about a type of violence that seeks to do damage to the moral personhood of the (m)other by placing her within an environment that denies her witness sense-ability. But yet, she wakes.

In this next poem by Urdu-Feminist Fahmida Riaz, titled “Chador Aur Char Dewari”, I want to juxtapose Pritam’s story of a phantasm of maternity that destroys the (m)other with the spectre of a dead (m)other who speaks not in place for the victim but in place of her witness that was denied passage into her world’s horizons. Whereas in Pritam’s poem, the birthing (m)other is nestled in a moving *kafila*, dependent on unfamiliar others, awaiting to be delivered into an unfamiliar world, in Riaz’ poem the corpse of the dead (m)other and her waking stench is the mark of the Master’s dependency on the (m)other to be birthed as a political subject, as someone who appears among others in the world.

2.9.2 The Dead Body in the Master’s Chambers

Returning to Ruddick’s critique (1995) of the myth that “mothering begins in birth and promises life”, violence not only threatens the reproductive potential of caring labour, but it also, threatens the existential and ontological project of birthing the nation-to-come. And so, the status
of caring labour, and of women as carers, is folded into the domesticity of man, only allowed to
dwell within extensions of his property and his moral personhood. Along with this, “maternal
thinking” becomes a “subjugated knowledge…erased in the triumphal history of ideas” (Ruddick
1995, 130). The ghar/bahir and care/violence dichotomies disjuncture the body that labours from
the hands that build, to write the nationalist revolutionaries as founding fathers, and faceless
births as the founding moments. For a man to appear in the public realm as equal, as master over
himself, his subjectivity is cultivated within the interiority of his home in and through the caring
labours of his wife, mother and daughter as contained within a relation of dependency and
domination.

“Chador Aur Char Dewari” was written as a practice of dissidence against the 1979
Hudud Ordinances introduced under the dictatorship of Zia ul Haq (Ahmad 1991; Anantharam
2012). Riaz articulates an unapologetic stance against state-sanctioned and societal violations of
female embodiment, personhood and sexuality. The poem is a monologue performed by a
woman forced to wear a Black chador by the “Master of all Men”. The textual intricacies of her
monologue maintain an ambivalence over whether the audience of the narrator’s plea, “the
Master of Men,” is the Almighty located in the fragrance of Paradise or an earthly sovereign who
invokes Allah as the source of his authority. Riaz visualizes the Black chador as four walls,
intended to “fence in,” to contain the mobility and embodiment of women as if their features
were unsightly and disruptive displays of grief, sexuality, sickness and abnormality. In her poem,
she subverts the meaning of the Black chador from a garment forced upon women, to a garment
the King should use to cover the rotting carcass in his chambers. The poem moves from the
image of a white beard stained by the blood of a young handmaiden, to the stench of the
uncovered dead body personified as a veiled woman that walks the alleyways, to locating the
“bloody spectacle of the murder of humanity” within the fragrant chambers of the Master. Within this rich symbolism is a deeper claim about domestic, sexual and gendered violence as what strips a woman of her dignity and forces her to be naked amongst others. And so, she speaks of the stench of the rotten carcass, as a woman that “walks huffed and breathless in every alleyway/Bangs her head on every door frame/Covering her nakedness/Listen to her heart-rending screams/Which raise strange spectres/That remain naked in spite of their chadurs” (93). Riaz asks, “who are they? You must know them, Sire/…/These are the handmaidens/The hostages who are halal for the night/With the breath of morning they become homeless…” (Ahmad 1991, 5). In this move, Riaz argues that the woman in the Black chador though veiled remains naked as long as she is dispossessed from her body through violating and violent relationships with men and the state. Through this statement, she sharply introduces the difference between the materiality of nakedness as not necessarily sexual and the materiality of a veiled body as forcefully sexualized. The difference is that in the latter, the woman’s body is objectified, placed within four walls, as a material fodder that feeds the sexual desire of men. The rotten carcass in his chambers is an embodiment of the violence through which the Master has realized his self-understanding as Master. His property, the four walls of his chambers as metonymically tied to the chadur, embody not only his paternal authority as that which contains the woman but also that which conceals gendered violence, as a matter of domesticity.

In counseling the King to re-purpose the Black chador as a burial sheet, Riaz is labeling such violence, as what truly needs to be addressed, marked as the problem, and rendered as unacceptable. By personifying the stench of the carcass as permeating through the four walls of the Master’s house, she renders invisible the boundary between domestic and state violence, by showing how the intimacy of dependency can be disrupted by violence to turn against the
(m)other. As Antigone laments for her brother’s burial, Riaz tends to the unburied (m)other’s body within the Master’s chambers by calling for the Black chador to be repurposed as a burial sheet to cover the (m)others he has killed within the Home, to appear as a Master of himself in the world outside. However, just as one cannot give birth to himself, one cannot expunge oneself from the marks of his dependency, from maternity itself, and it is this maternity that continues to watch over, to wake, and to be vigilant, to offer witness.

She calls for an end to the degradation, objectification and violation of Muslim women inside the intimacy of the home, by the state, and in shared spaces and relationships. The rhythmic and linguistic motions of the poem play with the meaning of the chadur as 1) a garment meant to conceal death, contain sickness and bodily abnormality, 2) a garment meant to inhibit the materialization of male desire, and 3) a constraint on the moral personhood and mobility of Muslim women. Although the four walls function to conceal the dead body in the King’s chambers, the stench of the rotten carcass is visible, sensible to the narrator. The Master’s refusal to cover the dead body compels the woman in the Black chador to place herself in risk to be in a position to beg the Master to respond to, and address the dead body in his chamber, by allowing her to use her chador to bury her (m)other.

Whether it’s the unburied corpse of (m)other that wakes, or the daughter’s eyes that witness their mother(land) turn against their (m)others, or in this next case of an orphaned daughter who is denied identification with her (m)other, the poetics of mourning, in which authorship is relational, and the work of grief is shared, welcomes ways of relating which require us to merge “inherited and constructed relations” to open up possibilities for speculative care (Puig de la Bellacasa, 74). Puig de la Bellacasa argues that “what and how we enter relationships affects positions and relational ecologies” and so, a relational way of thinking must move beyond
conflictual models of relating that encourage deconstruction, dividing “webs of thought that share a history”, splits and compartmentalization (ibid.). Just as Riaz collapses the boundary between the *ghar/bahir*, the Master as Allah and the master as man, Pritam collapses the notion of a non-violent mother, of a motherland that only sustains, and is free of the violence done to (m)others under colonial rule.

### 2.9.3 A Childless Mother and the Spectre of the Colonial Metropole

For Pritam, it is through the wake work of the daughters of Punjab that the veil between the living and the dead is lifted to hold in place the inter-faith and pre-colonial history of Waris Shah’s Punjab. Similarly, for Riaz, the veil as a material garment is repurposed as an instrument of care by which the dead body in the Master’s chambers can be buried and returned to creator. In these narratives, it is through fugitive and affective modes of care-based knowing we are able to mourn violence to, and by, the motherland and the mother. In the short story, *Streer Patra* (The Wife’s Letter), Rabindranath Tagore maps the cartography of the purdah system onto the “dark veil” of custom that delimits the mother’s capacity to care for and respond to the needs of her kin. The text was first published in the Bengali journal *Sabuj Patra* and later anthologized as a part of Galpaguccha in 1914. The story is structured as a letter written by Mrinal, the *mejobou* (the wife of the second brother) from Srikkhetra (Puri) to her husband living in colonial Kolkata. The story begins with the protagonist Mrinal, like Hajar and Maryam, standing at the edge of an ocean in Puri, writing a letter to her husband in Calcutta. She likens her husband’s relationship with the colonial capital, as a “snail to its shell”, “stuck fast” to his “body and soul”, denying him leave from work, having ownership over over his time. She writes this letter not as the *mejo-bou* of “27 Makhal Street” but as someone with other relationships with the “world and the World-Keeper” (Tagore 1914, para. 3). The letter is often read as a feminist gesture, of a woman freeing
herself from domesticity. However, what runs through the letter is the (Derridean) lament of being-born as a Bengali girl under colonial rule. It is with the death drive, as conceived in the womb of colonial (inter)dependency, that Mrinal sits down to “explain” at length in her letter.

Through the medium of the written word, upon the end of her pilgrimage to the coast, at the margins of the colonial capital of the Raj, Mrinal communicates what she could not have spoken to her husband from within the veil of his home: that she will not be returning to his home. The specter of maternity permeates each spatial and textual layer of the story, from the metropole of the British Empire, to the emotionally abusive mother-in-law, to the colonial capital of the Raj, to Mother India, to Bindu’s dead mother, to Mrinal’s miscarriage, to Tagore’s neglect of his first wife and mother of his children, Mrinal Devi. What sets into motion Mrinal’s self-imposed exile to Puri is the suicide of Bindu, an orphaned Bengali girl for whom Mrinal develops a maternal affection.

The story is really of two letters, one sent by Mrinal to her husband and one sent by Bindu to Mrinal before her death; the latter was burned by Bindu’s in-laws, with only a small trace of the paper received by Mrinal through her brother. The medium of the hand-written letter here is significant because it is a material mark of both education and subjectivity in that it gives Bindu ownership over her death, and through the written word, she places her story in Mrinal’s care for the afterlife of her story. Bindu’s letter is a mark of Mrinal’s care as it was her who taught Bindu how to read and write. Although Bindu’s situation in colonial Calcutta society as an orphaned, lower-caste Bengali girl denied her a dignified life, we are able to receive Bindu’s story through Mrinal’s intelligence and ability to read and write, or less literally, her ability to respond, the very thing feared by her in-laws. With her pen, Mrinal weaves the end of Bindu’s world into the beginning of her world not as mejo-bou, but as Mrinal. In carrying this trace
within the text of her own narrative, Mrinal not only inherits responsibility for the justice denied to Bindu, but in claiming Bindu as her own daughter, in caring-for her without the spectre of the mother-in-law always watching. Mrinal takes responsibility for writing out of her life the same forces that lead Bindu to her death. Mrinal’s labour of writing the letter to her husband is a labour of love, of mourning and of maternity.

And so, Mrinal is both a messenger of the unspoken violence of the past, but also, an agent in writing out violence from her future. In phrasing many worlds together, she escapes many deaths at the hand of the mother, this time not by what is inscribed on her forehead as her fate, but rather, the exit she inscribes in her letter to her husband. Mrinal carries Bindu’s truth for her, just as she carried Didi’s love for Bindu through her body and caring labours. Bindu, Didi and Mrinal in different yet connected ways were all denied the ability to care for each other and the capacity to be cared-for by one another.

In this letter, she remembers the day her husband’s brother journeyed from the city to the country to her village to measure her potential as a bride; as the “the wedding flutes wailed, setting the skies to mourn” she was married for her beauty at 12 years old (Tagore 1914, para. 10). Her mother likened her intelligence to an “affliction”, that will drive a woman to “run into so many walls that she’ll shatter her forehead and her future” (Tagore 1914, para. 11). As a child bride, Mrinal found company among the cows and the calves in the cowshed where she wrote poems in secret within which she would create a dwelling-place for her freedom, for her self. A defining moment in the text is her recollection of her miscarriage. In labour, Mrinal was sent by her family to the darkest, smallest and dirtiest room of their compound, a practice that disgusted the English doctor, and the Great White Mother, to deliver her still-born, and left Mrinal grief-stricken:
My daughter was born--and died. She called to me, too, to go with her. If she had lived, she would have brought all that was wonderful, all that was large, into my life; from Mejo-Bou I would have become Mother. And a mother, even confined to one narrow world, is of the universe. I had the grief of becoming a mother, but not the freedom... In the delivery room, death came and stood by my head; I felt no fear. What is our life that we must fear death? Those whose life-bonds have been knotted tight with love and care, they flinch before death. If Jom-Raj had caught me that day and pulled, then, in the same way that a clump of grass can easily be pulled out from loose earth, roots and all, I too would have come out in his hand. A Bengali girl will wish for death on the slightest pretext, but where is the courage in such a death? I am ashamed to die--death is too easy for us...Like an evening star my daughter glowed bright for a moment, then set (Tagore 1914, para. 17).

For Mrinal, Bindu’s entry into her life, after her miscarriage, was like a tiny seed blown in the wind that if “lodged in a brick terrace...[it can] put down the roots of a peepul tree...[and] split open the heart of brick and stone” (Ibid).

Similar to Hajar’s place in Abraham’s household, Bindu too was on the margins of a kin-based community of care and was treated as an “uninvited guest” or “unwanted clutter” that “makes it own space around the house and people forget it’s there” (Tagore 1914, para. 24). For the “neglected and uncared for”, Mrinal notes that it is most difficult to give shelter to. Whoever needs greatest shelter also faces the greatest obstacles in obtaining it. In addition, the weather of anti-Blackness, in Christina Sharpe’s sense, as encapsulated in the caste system denied Bindu’s sister, Didi, the ability to care for her kin in order to appear as a doting wife and survive within her husband’s household. In witnessing Didi’s grief in the inability to support Bindu, Mrinal took it upon herself to care-for Bindu, to become a carrier for Didi’s love for her sister. And so, Mrinal created space for Bindu in her own room, reminded her that there was a reason for her existence in this “great universe.” (Tagore 1914, para. 25) With time, Mrinal developed an
“intense attachment” to Bindu (Tagore 1914, para. 29), a love that she described as a breeze that had found its way into the confines of Purdah:

There’s not even a yard of free space in the inner compound of your house. Near the north wall, next to the drain, somehow a mangosteen had taken root. The day I saw its new leaves budding forth, bright red, I’d know that spring had truly touched the world. And when I saw-in the middle of my routine life-this neglected girl’s heart and soul filling up with color, I realized that there was a spring breeze of the inner world as well, a breeze that came from some distant heaven, not from the corner of the alley. (Tagore 1914, para. 30)

As Mrinal’s attachment and care grew for Bindu, her in-laws’ anger increased, but Mrinal knew that “deep inside” they were afraid of her, that they respected “the intelligence that God had given” her (Tagore 1914, para. 11). Eventually, the family arranged for Bindu to be married to a groom they had not seen, met, at his family’s request to pay for the entire wedding. Mrinal did not stop the wedding for at the end of the day Bindu “Was a girl...dark-skinned...”, and who would care-for her after Mrinal’s death (Tagore 1914, para. 11)? Before her wedding, Bindu asked, “can’t I die before then?”, a request Mrinal secretly wished to be delivered (ibid.).

A few months later, Mrinal found Bindu crying in the cowshed, she had fled from her new home upon finding out that her husband was “violent” and “insane” (Tagore 1914, para. 23).

Mrinal’s family refused to believe Bindu’s story, and as Mrinal attempted to make a case for her to stay with them, Bindu had fled ashamed of the conflict she had brought upon Mrinal.

To this Didi’s only reply was, “she has an ill-fated forehead; how can I grieve over it? He may be crazy, may be a fool, but he’s her husband, after all!” (Tagore 1914, para. 43) Disgusted by her family’s inaction, Mrinal’s “heart burst for Bindu” and she arranged with her brother, Shorot, to meet Bindu in secret at a train station to Puri. Reaching the train station, Mrinal learned from Shorot, that “last night she [Bindu] set fire to her clothes and killed herself” and that she had left
a letter, a “destroyed letter”. For Mrinal, this was “peace at last” for Mrinal and still her death did not spark an outrage,

„even in her last hours it didn’t enter her head to find some new way to die, some novel exit that would please the nation’s men and move them to applaud her! Even in dying she only angered everyone…She had only died; who knew what might have happened if she’d lived?” (Tagore 1914, para. 65)

In reading and receiving Bindu’s letter, Mrinal finally saw “the worth of a woman in this world”, not just any girl, a Bengali girl:

And I’ve seen also that even though she was a girl, God didn’t abandon her. No matter how much power you might have had over her, there was an end to that power. There’s something larger than this wretched human life. You thought that, by your turn of whim and your custom graved in stone, you could keep her life crushed under your feet forever, but your feet weren’t powerful enough. Death was stronger. In her death Bindu has become great; she’s not a mere Bengali girl anymore, no more just a female cousin of her father’s nephews, no longer only a lunatic stranger’s deceived wife. Now she is without limits, without end (Tagore 1914, para. 45).

Although Bindu’s and Mrinal’s in-laws refused to perform the burial rights for Bindu’s safe passage from this world into the afterlife, Mrinal ends her letter with the image of Bindu’s letter floating “across the river” as notes of a flute to be heard by Mrinal, in her witness. Just as the spectre of the dead (m)other that wakes, and the witness of Waris Shah that lives on in the daughter’s tears, the spectre of Mrinal’s stillborn child, of Bindu, remains in this world to walk-with Mrinal on her pilgrimage from within the four walls of the “inner compound” towards the vast, blue ocean. Through this movement, Mrinal is able to “slough off Mejo-Bou’s shell”, to pass through the darkness of a dependency that seeks to annihilate the (m)other, to arrive where maternity is not bounded by the wretched of the world—by the “snakes of habit that bind and coil and squeeze.” She notes that when “flute of death begins to play”, the “mason’s solid-brick wall”, the “barbed-wire fence of dreadful law” are dissolved:
The dark veil of your custom had cloaked me completely, but for an instant Bindu came and touched me through a gap in the veil; and by her own death she tore that awful veil to shreds (ibid).

And so, it is not through time-travel to a pre- or post-colonial world, but rather through the spectral and horizontal movements within many worlds and (con)texts, from one dwelling-place to another, through violent and nurturing relations of dependency care that Mrinal is inscribed as a moral person. In the dependency care of her in-laws, Mrinal as an expecting (m)other and as a spectral mother to Bindu was denied the material and perceptual conditions for the safe passage of her children into this world. Yet, the mark of her care for Bindu is survived through her movements, her pilgrimage within the horizons of a (con)text and in the way she inherits the work of Didi’s care for Bindu, by holding, phrasing together through the written word, multiple worlds to deliver the still-born grief of Bengali (m)others and daughters living under colonial rule. She houses their stories within hers. And through her pilgrimage, she is able to build for their stories a place to dwell in this world where we are able to love the (m)other, and pave way for her safe passage.
Chapter 3: In the Belly of the Whale

“...There are none worthy of worship besides You. Glorified are You. Surely I am from the wrongdoers.”
(Ayat al Kareema, Quran 21:87)

“The time for miracles and faith is over, the time to make a decision is now.” With these words, a white man in a white lab coat looked my grieving mother in the eyes and advised her to “pull the plug” on my father. My mother replied with, “we are in full code.” To this day, I still do not understand the meaning of this utterance, but I know it was what had to be said to keep my father alive. In the summer of August 2012, I began the final year of my undergraduate degree when my father suffered a severe double stroke and cardiac arrest. My father had gone to a place outside of time and for the doctors the only return destination from this zone of non-being was another zone of non-being: a “meaningless” life imprisoned within a severely disabled body dependent on others. Even if his body returned to its senses, his person would remain “out of this world” (Mbembé 2001, 173). That day, I also had to accept another bitter truth, that in the political theory and Islamic (con)texts I was falling in love with, in the career path I was carving as a scholar of Islamic political thought, there was no place for the worlds my family and I inhabited. As my professors praised the Arendtian subject and the miracle of natality, my father was a political subject that could not speak and therefore, did not meet the anthropological minimum for the miracle we needed (Mehta 1999).

On one hand, Islamic epistemologies and practices of care such as making dua (supplication), giving sadaqah (charity), and salat (prayer), were as inconsequential and irrational in the “waiting room of History” as they were in that hospital waiting room...
(Chakrabarty 2009, 65). The doctors *stared* at my mother’s lament with the same eyes that
colonialist writers perceived my ancestors as strange flecks at the edge of their maps. On the
other hand, fellow Muslims in our community and medical professionals both witnessed my
father’s story as one of great tragedy and pity. In reading his disabled body as a reminder of
human frailty and the inevitability of death, they marked him at the edge of their worlds, the
boundary, “God forbid”, they ever have to cross. What does it mean to be reminded of our deaths
in sight of a dis-abled body, or the Muslim Other, to transpose our fear of mortality onto the
body of a living person, or onto a “living religion?” (Chaudhry 2018) Just as there was no space
for us to dwell within (con)texts of political theory, there was no dwelling-place in the Muslim
ummah as we knew it for persons with severe disability like my father, young carers likes my
sisters and primary care-givers and providers like my mother.

In our darkest hour, my mother shared with us the story of Prophet Yunus who recited
*Ayat al Kareema* when he was swallowed by a whale. I remember tenderly how community
members from far and near visited us to join endless *Qul ka Khatama* and *Khatam Sharif* (prayer
circles) at our home and recite this *dua* for my father’s return. Though my mother taught me how
to read and recite Quran in Arabic, it was in inheriting this little piece of Revelation from within
the belly of the whale, I first claimed my interpretive authority as a Muslim woman and learned
to *read* disability differently through care-based epistemologies of knowing the Islamic. I began
by piecing together fragments of the story, from scattered mentions of Yunus in the Quran, to Ibn
Kathir’s *Qiṣṣa al-‘Anbiyā‘*, to (un)authenticated hadiths, to the relentless online Islamic forums to
try and make sense of my place in this context and the meaning of these texts for someone in my
place. What helped us make a decision was not the Islamic-medical discourses on disability and
dependency care, but the reception of Revelation through care-based modes of knowing Islam by
which we held in place a future for my father to live meaningfully. Following my mother’s example, I outline body-sense and radical relationality as constitutive features of a care-based mode of knowing Islam by which we can identify mis-fits in our knowledge relations and our complicity in authoring mis-fits with colonial world-building practices. Moving with my mother, I re-read dependency not as the darkness of the womb, but rather, as the belly of the whale where we must learn to read in the dark. The work of liberation requires tactile reading practices by which we can move through different layers of darkness, or zulm, in the Islamic sense.

3.1 Body-Sense, Radical Relationality and the Witness

The Islamic cannot be translated through disembodied words (Asad 2018, 141). What is often lost in translation, or cannot be translated through sign systems, is the “taste” of the truth, or what I identify as the narrative texture, of Islam as “a feeling-and-attitude” (141). This aesthetic dimension can only be interpreted from within the poetic situations nestled within authorship as a relation of (inter)dependency. Asad uses the metaphor of acting, that just because “the actor’s interpretation and performance of the script depends on a number co-agents past and present” such as the script-writer, the audience, other actors etc., does not mean she is “a passive, subordinated subject who has given up her own agency” (145). Similarly, Rudolph Ware (2014) explores how the study of the Quran in Western African societies is an embodied, interdependent and relational practice of reading, writing and recitation rooted in hubb (love), khidma (service) and hadiyya (gifts) and realized through yalwaan (alms-seeking), yar (bodily discipline) and yor (internal possession) (76). Building upon the existing tradition of embodied critical inquiry in classical Islamic modes of knowledge production, he argues that the “best place” to study the “Islamic” is not the text alone, but rather, the “the place where knowledge had truly to be written—by the children of Adam on the tablet of history” (ibid.).
Islamic epistemology accounts for the direct sense-contact history by which knowledge is transmitted; the materials by which it is inscribed (the ink, the tablet, the clay bowl etc.); the relationships and situated context within which meaning is co-authored (teacher/student, mother/daughter, land/khalifah); and the body which comes to be a keeper and enactor of the knowledge. And so, assessing the moral impact, or even the illocutionary force of the text, in the Islamic tradition obliges us to interrogate the moral character of the teacher, the legitimacy of disembodied and de-contextualized knowledge consumption, and individualized, isolated reading practices in which the only sense organ engaged is sight (71). Through a multi-sensorial and relational paradigm, I as a Muslim reader am empowered to make normative judgements about the moral character and colonial intentions of political theorists, teachers, and philosophers; and in doing so, I can unlearn disinherit, unlearn and disrupt the reach of their colonial impulses. Here, the reader has a choice on how and what to make of her inheritance and how to (re)enact tradition as an interpretive authority. The morally inscrutable “I” of the colonialist writer comes undone through the reader opening herself up for scrutiny and practicing accountability in her knowledge relations by de-linking, in Mignolo’s sense, from colonial models of inquiry.

However, this process of critically engaging with our inheritance does not take place in isolation. Because knowledge is inseparable from “the person of its possessor” (Ware 2014, 55), interpretive authority cannot exist solely in the relationship between a reader and a text and requires human connection in the form of companionship (ṣuḥba), physical proximity, and the infinite modes of affective sentience for it to blossom. Whether it is reading in company (Pui-lan 2008), or character training for teachers, or ritual innovation (Berner 2001), or corporeal knowledge practices such as drinking the Quran (Ware 2014, 57), or mnemonically mirroring our teachers’ gestures of care, chains of authority (isnad) by which Islamic knowledge is transmitted
are created and sustained by: 1) the inscription of knowledge into the written or spoken word and,
2) being held in place through our relations of care with our bodies, the lands we inhabit, and
sentient others. By framing knowledge production as a relation of dependency care, we can
understand how caring sensibilities in critical inquiry are embodied and shape the bodies of
relational subjects. Whereas Ware elaborates on the spatial dimension of ethical sensibilities, Sara
Ahmed expands upon the temporal and material dimensions of complicit scholarship. In the essay,
“Orientations Matter”, Ahmed (2010) creates a conversation across phenomenology and historical
materialism of the body to explore how orientations shape the “corporeal substance of bodies and
whatever occupies space” (251). If authorship takes shape through witnessing (response-ability
and address-ability), then we must account for how “subjects and objects materialize or come to
take shape in the way that they do” through the ways they give and receive care, care for and are
cared-for, care-about and are cared-about, and care-with (235).

In her book, The Politics of Piety, Saba Mahmood (2005) studies how Egyptian Muslim
women cultivate an ethical self through repeated bodily acts, gestures and practices. Speaking to
the “teachability of the body” Mahmood presents a challenge to Judith Butler’s interpretation of
J.L Austin’s theory of performativity that: “the possibility for disrupting the structural stability of
norms depends upon literally re-tutoring the body rather than on destabilizing the referential
structure of the sign” (Mahmood 2005, 166). Mahmood, like Ahmed, contends that “virtuous and
unvirtuous dispositions are learned” orientations (ibid.). By placing attention on the architecture
of the self, and its (un)intentional design, we can see and account for “the work that discursive
practices perform in making possible particular kinds of subjects” (188). I argue that critical
inquiry in political theory is an action, a doing, that engages both body-sense and body-learning to
cultivate inward dispositions and ethical orientations that impress upon and shape the materiality
of the thinking, speaking, writing subject that inhabits the role of a political theorist (158). More simply put, we are people, our words about others have material consequences and we are accountable for the harm we cause in our knowledge practices.

Acknowledging the connections between how the work of thinking engages the body, and how the body shapes the world, we as political theorists are complicit as co-authors of discursive and material colonial structures that displace and deny multiple others, histories and epistemologies a place in the world. And so, we must ask, how do our ethical sensibilities and orientations, which shape and are shaped by the body, permeate our world-building practices to shape the world in the directional light of our colonial inheritance? And if, “our bodies are always situated in and dependent upon environments through which they materialize as fitting or misfitting” (Garland-Thomson 2011, 592), then what role do (de)colonial environments, or companionships in the Dunya, play in shaping our stories and ethical sensibilities by which we practice Deen (Smith 2018)? This invites investigation into ways, beyond the vocality of speech, through which our ability to be addressed, and to respond to Others, is cultivated in and through our relations of dependency care. In what ways do labours of care intersect with labours of witnessing to constitute the relational subject?

3.2 Mapping Points of Arrival

Ahmed defines orientations as beginning with a starting point, the familiar world “from which the world unfolds: the “here” of the body and the “where of its dwelling” (Ahmed 2010, 236). Our point of arrival is placed within an inherited background, and a spatial, material and temporal horizon within which our bodies are situated. What conditions our arrival into this world is the work done by past generations which exists as sedimented histories that maintain the background. A spectral history, for example, that shapes our orientations is a mother’s care as the
repetition of care-work is what makes the signs of such work disappear. And so, Ahmed notes that “we are also orientating ourselves toward some objects more than others, including not only physical objects…but also objects of thought, feeling, and judgment, or objects in the sense of aims, aspirations, and objectives” (Ahmed 2010, 246). Through the horizon of our spatial location, and that which shapes and those who inform our orientations, we are (un)able to apprehend an object. She reveals the spectral histories, economies and attachments that shape who faces the writing table. Not only does the wood of the table contain a history of the “changing hands” of labour that fashioned it into furniture, but the male writer erases the mark of his dependency on his wife’s care-work to clear the table for him to have a surface to write on, and her care-care-for their children so he is able to face the writing table. Evoking Heidegger, Ahmed builds a relation between thinking, building and dwelling, in that the way we think and know of the (un)familiar orients us to cultivate worlds with deep boundaries to (dis)place some within the state, and dispose others as stateless.

In addition to the spatial and temporal dimensions of a de-colonial and Islamic cosmology of knowledge production, Humeira Iqtidar (2016) further investigates the sensibilities with which we demarcate ethical terrains to be “addressed” as problems for political theory. The enactment of interpretive authority within the Islamic tradition engages both method and sensibility in knowledge production and consumption (425). Whereas method is a “way of doing things” such as styles of textual interpretation, ritual innovations, critical inquiry and making argument, sensibility is “a philosophical approach” rooted in our particular subjectivities by which we identify which “ethical goals are of primary importance” (427). Building upon Alasdair Macintyre’s and Talal Asad’s critique of the thought/practice distinction in political theory, she argues that the dynamism between method and sensibility has been blurred in colonialist and
orientalist misreadings of the Islamic practices of *taqlid* (to follow Islam) as distinct from *ijtihad* (to carry out independent interpretation) (Asad 2003; Iqtidar 2016, 425–30).

Whereas colonial readings frame *taqlid* as a practice of governance, or in Iqtidar’s words “a blind following”, by which Muslims obey “established norms or tradition” through “imitation”, Iqtidar presents *taqlid* as a “conscious decision” by scholars, and everyday Muslims, about which “mujtahid (innovative or creative interpreter), or *mazhab* (philosophical school) to follow in defining what makes a good Muslim life” (Iqtidar 2016, 427). From the colonial difference, *taqlid* is read as “servile imitation”, ‘unquestioning acceptance’ or ‘intellectual timidity, and/or depletion of creative and interpretive energies’ (Iqtidar 2016, 427). Here, the Muslim reader is not an active participant in the knowledge production process and is instead a dependent, submissive and epistemically incapable follower within, and not the maker of, the Ummah. The problem here is two-fold, 1) the situation of dependency writes one off as ontologically and epistemically incapable of sensing and knowing the Islamic and in turn, 2) the work of interpretation, and cultivating Islamic sensibilities, is attributed to legal scholars, religious authorities, white and secular scholars. Looking more closely at the cognitive poetics of reading, I explore how the imperial attitude, or orientation in Ahmed’s sense, towards reading dependency as a limit on interpretive authority of Muslim subjects folds into our world-building practices in the way it shapes our capacity to respond to the needs of disabled and dependent Others.

Just as knowledge relations can be nurturing and rooted in an Islamic ethic of care, they can also be rooted in an Islamic, or colonial, non-ethics of care, and situated in the colonial master/slave relation in which dependency is a limit on our interpretive authority. Developing Ware’s notion of the walking Quran (2014) and Iqtidar’s notion of Islamic sensibilities, I explore
how inheriting colonial textual sensibilities not only de-limits the ethical sensibilities of Muslim and Non-Muslim political theorists studying the “Islamic” to care for the plight of the oppressed, but also, makes us complicit in presencing coloniality into our horizons and relations. The cultivation of colonial subjectivities through colonial models of governance, such as body discipline, surveillance, and appropriation, not only operate through the coloniality of being and a coloniality of knowledge but also, through the coloniality of sense and sensibility. As seen in the historical archives of colonial correspondence, travel writings and autoethnographies such world-sensing, in Mignolo’s sense, is a form of world-making, of inhabiting and cultivating a world through European sensibilities through the written and spoken word. Incorporating body-sense and world-sense into Islamic conceptions of witnessing requires adapting a phronetic and pragmatic conception of Muslim subjectivity within frameworks of decoloniality. Through the internal, reflexive process of engaging external Islam-beyond-the-individual to create herself as a Muslim, an individual negotiates her communal identity within the Ummah. Through the assembly of such local, contextualized acts of personal islam, individuals and communities contribute to the content and meaning of Islam.

3.3 Islam as a De-Colonial Theology of Liberation

From the Yaqeen Institute’s publications on race and coloniality, to the writings and activisms of Muslim scholars on addressing anti-Blackness and queerphobia within the Muslim community and Islamic (con)texts, to summer schools of de-colonial Islamic thought in Granada, Kerala and Cape Town, to emerging scholarship on making shar’ia law answerable to the struggles of Indigenous peoples for self-determination, Muslim scholars, leaders and community organizers are surfacing a framework of de-colonial thought and praxis from within the Islamic tradition. A defining feature of such global thought leadership is the notion of Islam
as a theology of liberation that centres and tends to the plight of the marginalized and the oppressed. The emancipatory turn in Quranic exegesis is led by public intellectuals, scholars, and activists such as Omar Suleiman, amina wadud, Farid Esack, Ayesha Chaudhry, Kecia Ali, Asma Lamarbet Linda Sarsour, Asma Barlas, Hatem Bazian, Shahab Ahmed, Omid Safi among various others. This Muslim network of de-colonial knowledge production is rooted in “a service to humanity, not to the service of the Islamic cause” (Esack 1997). Whether its recovering Muslim heritages from the transatlantic slave trade, or if its writing against Israeli occupation of Palestine through the lived experience of South African Apartheid, or if its carrying forward the legacy of Malcolm X in community organizing against xenophobic and racist policies in the US, a guiding conviction for Islamic scholars is to make room for others in Islamic thought and praxis by standing with them against their oppressors.

Through an Islamic theology of liberation, Farid Esack argues we can place ourselves with *al mustad’afun fi’l-ard* (the oppressed) and tutor our sense-abilities to respond to our complicity in authoring and authorizing mis-fits or *zulm* (oppression) within the Ummah and the nation-state (Demichelis 2014; Rahemtulla 2017, 24). His model of emancipatory hermeneutics introduces interpretive strategies that make an ethical demand of Muslims as readers to adopt practices of reading Revelation and Islamic (con)texts that enable us to attend to the care and access needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized. Such interpretive work requires opening up boundaries of colonial interpretations of Revelation and demanding moral accounting, historicity and emancipatory *itijhad* in our knowledge relations. For amina wadud who interprets Revelation from a non-binary perspective, such practices of reading must be anti-patriarchal and require the interpreter to pay attention to the “1) the context in which the text was written [seventh century arabia]…2) the grammatical composition of the text [the location of the Islamic
feminine]…and 3) the whole text, its Weltanschauung or world-view” (wadud 1999, 3). An example of de-colonial and emancipatory interpretive work is wadud’s use of the story of Hajar to speak to the intergenerational effects of the Transatlantic slave trade on single Black mothers in the US. Whereas wadud focuses on the philological and historically contingent dimensions of Quranic exegesis, the hermeneutic approaches of Farid Esack and Shahab Ahmed focus on the spatiality of Revelation, the (con)texts of Islam and the social location of its interpreters.

Beyond the work of historicity, and locating the Islamic within the multiplicity of Muslim self-understandings, unlike wadud, Esack prioritizes “contests over contexts” (Rahemtulla 2017). His hermeneutics of liberation requires “engaged interpreters” working within the horizon of a struggle and in relationship with marginalized communities to “open up” boundaries of tradition and authority in light of liberation, a commitment to justice and a critical engagement with histories of violence (Esack 1997, ch.3 p.7). Such interpretive activity requires practitioners to become mindful of the colonial textual sense-abilities they have inherited through histories of violence. The six core tenets, or hermeneutical keys, by which we can practice mindfulness in our knowledge relations are: 1) Taqwa, 2) Tawhid, 3) Al-Nas, 4) Al mustad’afun fi ’l-ard, 5) ‘adl and qist and 6) Jihad. The aim of Taqwa is to “protect” the interpreter from herself by creating an “aesthetic and spiritual balance in the life of the interpreter” while also ensuring that the interpretation “remains free from both theological obscurantism and political reaction” (Esack 1997, ch.3 p.5). The second key, Tawhid, meaning the unity of Allah, rejects binary oppositions such as secular/spiritual, nature/man, sacred/profane, Black/white etc. or the material division of society based on class, racial or religious difference such as South African Apartheid. This second feature emphasizes the unity and interrelatedness of all approaches to interpreting Islamic thought and praxis performed by al-nas (the people). Esack defines the oppressed through the

Drawing on various Quranic contexts in which there is a relationship of domination and exploitation between the powerful and the powerless, Esack calls upon the interpreter to “place herself among the marginalized and within their struggles as well as to interpret the text from the underside of history” (Esack 1997, ch.3 p.18). An engaged-interpreter “approaches the text with a conscious decision to search for meaning, which responds creatively to the suffering of the mustad’aﬁn and which holds out the most promise for liberation and justice” (ibid.). With this orientation, the interpreter is “called upon to bear witness to Allah” (ibid.). The fifth key, of balance and justice, connotes that it is not possible for the interpreter to adopt an “objective approach to the Qur’an while on is surrounded by oppression” without searching for how the Quran can be used to respond and resist to such relations of exploitation (Esack 1997, ch.3 p.21).

The final key, jihad, as struggle and praxis, entails experiencing and understanding truth through the praxis of struggle against injustice.

The contemporary focus of de-colonial scholarship and activism is to build from within Islamic (con)texts responses, critiques and remedies to develop conceptual and material tools for the Muslim community in the struggle against colonial structures such as racism, white supremacy, settler-colonialism and cisheteropatriarchy. Akin to Edward Said’s notion of ideological resistance, the intellectual undergird of the de-colonial turn in Islamic political thought is guided by three core labours of knowledge production: 1) the situatedness of translating Islamic knowledge 2) de-provincializing the epistemic, material and paraxial terrain of the Islamic and 3) revealing intersectional orders of relational responsibility in and through the
Islamic tradition. Fusing various traditions of Quranic exegesis, from *tajdidi* scholarship, to the Gadamerian circle of (con)textual interpretation, to a hermeneutics of liberation, to mapping the double histories of Revelation and of reading, a defining feature of de-colonial Islamic thinking is its humanistic, hermeneutic and historical impulse. In the many fragments of Islamic de-colonial thinking, the hermeneutical method has been applied through the frames of gender (Barlas 2006; Lamrabet and Salem-Murdoch 2018; Wadud 2006), race (Bouteldja, Valinsky, and West 2016; Morsi 2017), queerness (Ali 2016; Shaikh 2012) (Ali 2006, Shaikh 2012) and settler-colonialism and coloniality (Bazian 2018; Esack 1997; Grosfoguel 2012; Zine 2007).

3.4 To be a Maker of Islam

From Judith Butler’s conception of secular time (2008), to Rosa Braidotti’s notion of post-secular subjectivity (2008), to Saba Mahmood’s work on non-secular agency and embodiment (2005), the latest shift in feminism and modern political theory is theorizing how the secular agenda of the nation-state not only delimits the agency of Muslim women but also, discredits the forms of freedom and political autonomy embodied by the “Muslim Other.” In particular, literature on the “post-secular” inspired by the writings of Carl Schmit (1985), Charles Taylor (2007), Talal Asad (1997) and William Connolly (1999) pressure political theorists to move beyond assuming secularism as the static division between public institutions and religious institutions—a precondition for the modern nation-state. Instead, they invite us to consider secularism as both a category of analysis and imperial activity to consider how the modern project of secularization intersects with subject formation, meaning-making and defining religion. Though these are rich sources of insight into the genealogy of the “secular” and its implications for political theory, I will not be relying on the distinction between religion, secular and the post-secular to mark the “Islamic” and the political theory dimensions of my work.
The historical-critical interpretive demands of a de-colonial Islamic epistemology are met by Shahab Ahmed’s definition of Islam as an internal meaning-making activity that hermeneutically engages Revelation as Pre-Text, Text and Con-text, has three core elements: personal islam, the elaboration of the discursive and paraxial content of Islam, and the identification with the community of Islam” (2016, 103). Understanding Islam as a human and historical phenomenon, Ahmed empowers everyday Muslims as interpretive authorities of the Islamic who are hermeneutically engaged and embedded within a larger “ongoing multilateral conversation and negotiation of the different epistemologies generated in different Truth-projects undertaken by Muslims—a conversation and negotiation over norms that takes place both between Muslims in society and within individual Muslims in their own minds and beings” (ibid). As authors of the Islamic, Muslims bare a degree of complicity in authoring and authorizing oppressive interpretations of Islam and meanings of the Islamic that cause psychic, material or spiritual harm within and beyond the scope of our kin. Ahmed’s framework of interpreting Islam is not guided by a normative inclination of emancipatory interpretation and social justice; there are, however, de-colonial moments throughout his text in his refusal to use the European-Christian category of religion/secular to define the Islamic, in empowering everyday Muslims as having interpretive authorities of the Islamic, and in de-territorializing the point of origin of the Islamic to encompass Balkans-to-Bengal Islamic histories.

When engaging Islam as a theoretical category of analysis, Ahmad calls interlocutors to
1) move beyond the religious/secular, sacred/profane binaries towards Islam/islamic as an analytical point of reference, 2) frame islam as an internal meaning-making activity through which an individual human being engages with external Islam-beyond-the-individual to create herself as a Muslim and 3) conceptualize Islam as composed of three elements, “personal islam,
the elaboration of the discursive and paraxial content of Islam, and the identification with the community of Islam” (Ahmed 2016, 103). The heart of Ahmed’s political theory is that through the internal, reflexive practice of becoming a Muslim, an individual negotiates her communal identity, and, through the assembly of such local, contextualized acts of personal islam, individuals and communities transform the content and meaning of Islam. And so, the individual not only makes herself a Muslim, but in doing so, is also making and texturing the “Islamic”.

This is my primary source of turning away from the work of comparative political theorists such as Andrew March, Roxanne Euben, Fred Dalaymyr, who are fixated on defining Islamic political thought for the sake of coherence within the Western canon of political theory. Ahmed critiques such an intellectual practice by conceptualizing Islam, as “human and historical” (6), opening up unrivalled conceptual space to challenge how theorists use the label of “Islamic” to name and characterize certain practices and phenomena” and “normatively (de)legitimize boundaries of what is Islamic (107). He argues that the religious/secular category cannot particularly be applied to discourses on Islam, as the category itself is birthed through a western-modern, “Christian-European historical experience” of what is “secular” (178). The crux of his argument is:

To conceptualize Islam as “religion” is—as the above passage betrays—to look at Islam and Christianity as, for all primary constitutive purposes, mutually intelligible or mutually translatable. The two are regarded as primarily the same and only secondarily different. But when we posit Islam and Christianity as naturally explicable in terms of each other, what we really are doing is giving analytical priority to the category of “religion” as constituted by the European historical experience; we are saying that because Christianity and Islam are both “religions” there is a categorical equivalence between them that makes it meaningful to speak of Islam in paradigmatic terms of Christianity. We are thereby omitting to pay sufficient attention to whether there are inherent structural or substantive or processual qualities with regard to Islam that render it crucially different from Christianity—different in a manner and degree that so severely diminishes the utility of the analytical work that the category of “religion” does as to effectively invalidate the category of “religion” as a meaningful unit of analysis for Islam (189).
In addition to this, he argues that there is no central authority, such as the Church, that defines what is Islamic within the Muslim community. And so, the absence of such a central institutional source for interpreting what is religion/Islam, sacred or profane, not only results in productive contradictions, but also, empowers the Muslim individual, as above legal, social and political communities of interpretation, as the primary source of authority in determining what it means to be a Muslim. This also means that Islam as a theoretical object of analysis cannot be domesticated to fit into the Muslim/Western binary. And so, despite colonial attempts on restricting Islamic law and practices to the private domain of Muslim societies (R. Ahmed 2018), the production of truth in Islamic societies is “conceptually, discursively, socially and spatially” non-compartmentalized and diffused (ibid.).

Echoing Asad, through a genealogy of “religion” as a category, Ahmed illustrates that, Europeans first articulated religion, in the modern sense, as an instrumental category to liberate them from the “monopoly of totalizing truth-claims” asserted by the “social, political, intellectual and material institution of the Christian Church” (177). As the practices of religion became restricted to the institution of the Christian Church, and the private domain of personal belief, “the long-Enlightenment re-constitution and re-empplotment of the space and content of “religion” took place in relation to and in distinction from the constitution and emplotment of “secular” (178). The particular European history of the binary opposition between religion/secular, of assigning religious objects a universal semantic place, as either sacred or profane, delimits possibility for articulating “alternative local or universal arrangements of rights and meaning” (ibid.). This is because through these categories, we make the categorical assumption that “the “religious” is self-evidently distinguishable from the “non-religious” (ibid.).
In comparative political theory on Islam, for example, this boundary of what is Islamic or secular, political or non-political Islam, is problematically drawn around the multiplicity of Islamic practices. The analytical implications with the religious/secular binary are: 1) religion is seen as empirically unverifiable as supernatural, 2) religion is seen as associated with specialized institution with their respective texts and authorized interpreters, i.e. church, scripture, clergy, 3) religion becomes a grid to ascribe degrees of profanity and sacred, 4) religion is defined as only atomized acts of the self, a communal identification with a higher power as the definitive object of faith, and piety as the ritual of prayer (179). Restricting religion to the private sphere runs parallel to restricting the “political” to the public realm. In my dissertation, I hope to add this dimension to feminist ethics of care theorists’ critique of the myth of the atomized individual, and the public/private divide.

And so, by shifting our focus away from the category of religion to focusing in on meaning, or truth, we can move beyond conceptualizing Islam through the Western-Modern Christian-European historical experience of religion, towards the task of “where to locate religion/Islam” (192). The answer to this critical question is sidelined through secular/non-secular, public/private divide. Not only does this analytical shift help us avoid non-productive questions such as “is x religion, therefore, Islam? Or is x profane, therefore not Islam” (196), but it also empowers everyone from whirling dervishes, to lyrical ghazals, to building Aqidah (conviction) through Dhikr (meditation), to fatwas, to everyday actions and practices of Ibadat (worship) as legitimate modes of Islamic meaning-making. This right here is the heart of my approach, the act of identifying everyday Muslims, such as my Mother, as authors of “what is Islamic.”
Avoiding the religion/secular distinction paves fresh conceptual space not only to locate “the political” within the “Islamic”, but also, to deepen our understanding of the dynamism between Deen and Dunya. Islam is not a religion that is followed, rather it is reproduced and recreated through “Muslims acting as Muslims—that is, acting in self-conscious terms of Islam” (Ahmed 2016, 196). This analytical shift opens up incredible space to frame the bodies and practices of Muslim women in post-colonial nation-states as not simply matter over-coded and given a face by the machinery of religious nationalism or colonialism. Instead this shift pushes us towards creatively (re)imagining the ways Islamic practices animate and are animated by Deen and Dunya in the Muslim individual’s process of creating herself as a Muslim. And so, instead of the secular/religion category, I will use the categories of Islam and Islami...
Islamic norms in an “ongoing multilateral conversation and negotiation of the different epistemiologies generated in different Truth-projects undertaken by Muslims—a conversation and negotiation over norms that takes place both between Muslims in society and within individual Muslims in their own minds and beings” (408). Instead of locating the political dimension of Islam as created by non-secular political actors such as Islamic theocrats, jihadists, caliphs etc., I hope to re-introduce Islam to political theorists as it has been inherited and contextualized through care-based epistemiologies of knowing Islam.

3.5 The Narrative Textures of a Living Tradition

Just as the nightsoil that refuses to be sanitized, and the radio waves that evades surveillance, there are faces, or narrative textures, of Islam as based in care-based epistemiologies and situations of disability and dependency that cannot be translated through the aims and colonial impulses of world-travelling and empathy. Deleuze and Guattari (1989) define subjectivity as a process of creative becoming in which organisms are not only shaped by codes that form them into readable subjects, give them a face, but also in which organisms can de-territorialize, “Escape…dismantle the face and facializations” by becoming “imperceptible…clandestine…” (171). Having outlined colonial textual sense-abilities within both Islamic thought and praxis and political theory, and built a degree of trust with you as my reader, I attempt to juxtapose two readings of my father during his hospitalization. The first reading illustrates the complicity of both Muslim scholars, and political theorists, in co-creating a colonial intellectual culture (Nandy 1983, 2–3). Disabled Muslims and Muslim women, situated in relations of dependency care, are marked as “constitutive outsiders” (Bracke and Fadil 2008, 58–59) and rendered unfit as interpretive authorities. The ableist and patriarchal narratives which cast doubt upon and abject disabled Muslims and Muslim women, as well as underwrite their
interpretive authority as knowers of the “Islamic”, are rooted in imperial readings of dependency within which those situated within relations of dependency care are read as anthropologically incapable of intelligent embodiment. In colonial narratives of disability and dependency within Islamic and European-Christian contexts, dependency continues to be institutionalized as the master-slave relationship of domination in which the mastery of the Self is co-constituted through the subjection of an enslaved Other. The first reading of my father’s hospitalization is through the Foucauldian frame which offers little space for plot speculation beyond the medical narrativization and reads Islamic rendering of the situations as subversive acts of resistance (Bracke 2008). In the second reading, I read my father’s hospitalization through my mother’s loving eyes. In doing so, I share an Islamic and care-based ethic of witnessing that holds multiple possibilities for charting lines of flight from within the story of Prophet Yunus to return my father’s body to his personhood, resist and heal from the secular violence, as well as for ritual innovation (Haddad and Esposito 2001).

3.6 Islamic-Medical Model of Reading Disability and Dependency

In the case of emergent treatment where an individual is hospitalized due to a critical event of illness, individuals or their family members must declare a code status in case the patient’s heart or breathing stops. An individual’s body is literally coded and marked to be resuscitated or revived (or not). In cases where one has not previously declared DNR status, his moral (and legal) personhood, as well as narrative fate, are seized and displaced by medical imaging. In the state of code blue, one is thrown into a place outside of time, absolved of his place in the world, yet he continues to hold space with his body in the hospital and must rely on Others to hold space for his personhood, for his right to return and live a dignified life. What is sidelined in right-to-die discourses is the potency of ableist narratives in this critical window in
which disability and the potential of disability are read as tragic, undesirable and inconvenient outcomes for the individual and those charged with the person’s care. Both the medical model of disability, as well as Islamic legal scholarship on illness, empower medical professionals as the sole interpretive authorities of reading and translating the meaning of disability and dependency care. The same imperial attitude with which medical professionals located my father in a place outside of time, and a body without a being, also runs through Islamic scholarship on illness and disability.

My family and I searched tirelessly for Islamic knowledge on the Islamic ethics of “pulling the plug”, the conditions under which one could end another’s life due to statistically foreseeable disability from a severe brain injury and the responsibilities of the family under such circumstances. Interpretations of Islamic hadiths and fiqh online on disability were just as violent as the medical discourse in demarcating a distinction between a normal life and a non-life, comparing those categorized as the latter as incapable of input (awareness of oneself) and output (the purposeful manifestation of one’s will through action) (Sultan 2017, 11–12). Laden with ontological imperialism, Islamic fiqh does provide insight into the ethics of guardianship in contexts of “disorders of consciousness” (ibid.); yet, because of its reliance on the medical discourse it offers very little conceptual space to imagine the possibility of living a dignified, “normal” and intelligent life as a person with disability after such an event of illness. There is also very little information available on the distribution of care-work in Islamic networks of kin, possibilities for sentient and relational modes of agency after suffering from “disorders of consciousness” and the duty of building communities that support care-givers and relations of dependency. Beyond the social and medical models, theologies of disability include the moral and the limits models. In the former, various types of discourses from religious to literary theory
frame disability as good or bad and attach this value to the moral worth of disabled persons. The limits model unpacks the definition of impairment as abnormality by addressing the truth that we are inevitably moving towards or confronted by various types of impairment in the course of our lives (Creamer 2012).

In both Islamic and medical (con)texts, disability and dependency continue to be framed as a tragedy, as a burden, as a test to be overcome, and as a limit on the lives of those in relations of dependency care (Al-Aoufi, Al-Zyoud, and Shahminan 2012; Ghaly 2010; Larsson 2011). Mohammed Ghaly (2016), a leading scholar on disability and Islam, argues that in Islamic scholarship disabled peoples were seen as those who have been fated to suffer “muṣība (affliction/calamity) and sayyiʾa (misfortune)” as a test of their faith in Allah (154). Here disability is read not just as a physical ailment or abnormality but also as a lack, a void, that is divinely created in one’s life as a test of one’s moral character. In a study of the perspectives of Arab-Muslim mothers on raising children with autism, Pamela Olsen (2016) also argues that disability in the form of autism was not only read as a challenge and a blessing from Allah, but also, that their children’s disability were read as disruptive to collective prayer spaces and prevented mothers as carers from participating in key religious rituals such as hajj (78). Many mothers made reference to the Islamic concept of *Agir* (Allah’s recognition of good deeds) as a measure of one’s capacities and aptitude as a good mother (ibid.). In this context, failing such a test, by not practicing *sabr* (patience) places one among the *ahl al-balā* (the people of affliction), and not the *ahl al-ʾāfiya* (people of wellness) on the Day of Judgment (155). Conceived as a tragedy, Islamic scholars read disability as an opportunity to develop one’s capacities for sabr (patience) and shukr (gratitude) in addressing the difficult question of: how can the presence of blindness, deafness, and other types of disabilities in the world be compatible
with the belief in a perfectly good Allah who is compassionate, merciful, just and omnipotent (155)? In this paradigm, the Muslim afflicted with disability must practice “thinking of the good reward that lies ahead”, “hoping for a time of ease”, “thinking of Allah’s countless blessings” (57).

3.7 Re-Reading Code Blue

Through the CT scans of his brainstem, countless blood tests, and various diagnostics, the only future inscribed for my father through the medical discourse was death or a living death—both in which the story of my father’s life, his life’s work, had ended. Such a narrative foreclosure signified that for my father it was “simply too late to live meaningfully” (Freeman 2010, 125). All there was left for us to do was “play out the prescripted ending” (125-126) and reconcile ourselves with my father’s “narrative fate” (126). A critical feature, or turning point, within the chronology of tragedy is a sequence of medical events that disrupt one’s life trajectory and entrap one within a form of time where death may not be near but their narrative horizons, due to severe disability, are closed off or foreshortened (Antelius 2007, 333). The sequence of medical events that disrupts one’s life trajectory with disability, illness or trauma, not only foreclose one’s narrative horizons, but also, absence one from history itself.

Medical professionals are authorized as time-keepers and only their tools can hold hope for “a distant horizon of impressionable possibilities” or a “therapeutic plot” that is focused on preventing “deterioration”, cure or improvement for the patient (Antelius 325). The chronology of care in the medical discourse is aporetic in which the only intention and aim of caring for a person with severe disability is to delay the death of the body of a person. The lifespan, as well as the living body, of the disabled person’s is read as vulnerable and fragile. Such a frame of analysis not only de-limits the narrative possibilities available to a person but it also fixes the
meaning of care-work as a string of repetitive tasks with no specific end other than maintaining the upkeep of a body that has reached its half-life. In this chronology, the course of necrosis consumes with it not only the body of the disabled person, but also the bodies and labour of her care-givers, as well as the resources of the Canadian welfare state.

In reading my father’s body as dead, dying, or already gone, the doctors gestured to us a world in which our father as homebound would no longer be capable of intelligently and meaningfully inhabiting his body. Both the medical model of disability, as well as Islamic legal and academic scholarship on illness, empowered medical professionals as the sole interpretive authorities of reading and translating the meaning of disability and dependency care. The doctor framed dependency care as a narrative foreclosure, a future in which my father would no longer “have a world”, for without the capacities of hearing, speaking, eating, walking etc. he would cease to exist as a person. Framing severe disability as a death sentence, the doctor then asked us to speak in our father’s name, to ground our decision in rationality, not faith, to wonder if our father would desire for himself such a meaningless and miserable life of depending on others. What was placed on trial was not the statistical foreseeability of brain death (which for the most part remained uncertain) but rather, the intrinsic worth of life with disability and dependency (Titchkosky 2007, 91), of my father as a person with disability, and of Islamic sensibilities and modes of judging and knowing. The discursive violence of the medical model of disability is not just limited to narrative foreclosure but also what Sarah Bracke identifies as narrative encapsulation, when “the cultural story of one people” is “subordinated to and reframed by the terms of another” (Bracke and Fadil 2008, 53). In this scene, medical professionals assumed the dominant subject-position of the Eurocentric subject over my father’s body and my mother’s interpretive and decision-making authority as his next of kin (Braidotti, 2003). The
meaningfulness of my father’s life as a disabled person, as well as the Islamic epistemic terrain with which we read disability such as clairvoyant dreams of my father’s return, Quranic stories of miracle and the sheer strength of our *firasah* (intuition) were all homebound. Dependency and the domestic are not only weaponized against the person that inhabits the disabled body, and is bound to the Home, but also against informal caregivers charged with the labours of dependency.

In my father’s story, the coloniality of power is a complicated matrix of ableism, Islamophobic racism and the religious/secular binary that not only marks my father as an abnormal, dispensable body, but also writes off the authority of Islamic epistemologies of reading disability. The violation here is that the secular interpretive authority with which medical authorities marked my father’s body denied my family the ability to respond and address to this order of violence within such an imperial setting. In conversations in which my father’s life was at stake, the doctors attempted to sterilize our Islamic sensibilities (Asad 2018, 119). We could not speak and interpret in a “religious” manner because the hospital was a public space and my father’s body could only be read as a “secular body” (Asad 2011). Building upon the scholarship of Tanya Titchkosky (2017), if we understand disability as an interactive scene, or as an intertextual relationship, in which the shape and texture of individual and collective narratives are co-authored by various (un)original authors and (un)intended readers, then we are all accountable for how disability is read and written about. In reading disability a certain way, we not only gesture towards “the type of world that grounds the possibility of having the meaning that it does” (20) but also become complicit in building that world.

In response to the violence of colonial frames of disability in the medical discourse that rely on the colonial politics of recognition, as well as within Islamic (con)texts, a defining feature of scholarship in critical disability studies is auto-ethnographical and relational life
writing by which individuals critically engage with the medical narrativization of illness, disease, disability, trauma and death in their lives. What my family signified as the belly of the whale, Hillary Clark signifies as a “descent into hell”, a “hole” that her mother fell into when she was hospitalized for mental illness (Paterson et al. 2007, 46). In her memoir Petite, Genevieve Brisac speaks of her “descent” into illness: “this is a narrative, the interrupted narrative of what I call the time when I was crazy” (Qtd. in Paterson et al. 2007, 69). Through a Foucauldian frame of analysis, Lisa Deiddrich describes Paul Monette’s memoir and observes that due to the “ontological rupture of AIDS” (59), Monette is placed in between two deaths. In witnessing his partner die of the illness he is also witnessing how he will inevitably die in the very same way; and so, “the trauma of Roger’s [his partner] death is also always the trauma of his own survival, and the ethical imperative that is inherent to the survival” (56). Here, the lack of a cure for the virus, the immense reach of its fatal impact, and the inevitability of death that haunts those living with it constitutes the temporal structure of trauma, in which there is a closed horizon.

These carnal, vulnerable and intimate stories inscribed into the written word by multiple authors situated within relations of dependency care resist the “disembodied scholar’s tone and the traditional arc of event” (Milner 2011). A son writing in retrospect about his mother’s struggle with chronic depression as he grapples with depression himself. A scholar making sense of her MS diagnosis by writing about and reading the memoirs of other writers also living with MS (Stahl and Garland-Thomson 2018). A spouse writing about caring for their partner throughout the course of his degenerative or chronic illness. A daughter testifying to the violence and violation to her father’s personhood and body during his hospitalization from a severe brain injury. Forms of such collaborative authorship varying from auto-pathography (Couser 2016), to deliberative testimonios (Beverley 2008), to graphic auto-somatography and memoirs (Couser
2018), challenge the boundaries and shapes of narrativity. Symptoms of an illness such as lying, aphasia, short-term memory loss, myoclonic jerks transform the shape and texture of a story and make the actor dependent on others as storytellers in a way different than we all are dependent on others for our stories to be told. These texts introduce alternative chronologies of illness, contest how the body is represented in medical discourses through counter-discourses and disrupt forms of narrative containment by clinical texts. Couser, in particular, defines auto-somatography as “quality-of-life writing” to make an ethical demand of the “reading public” to commit to the sustenance of life for persons living with disability, illness or trauma (25). These narratives engage the reader as a witness to the writer’s lived testimony of illness and serve as personal therapy for the writer, but also as a source of support for readers facing similar struggles. The conceptual and material space, as well as the legitimacy, to share my father’s story of disability (with his consent), as well my family (with their consent) in the design of my argument has been paved by critical disability scholars. Through collaborative authorship, the multiple authors of these texts seek not to give voice to the voiceless or speak for the oppressed, but rather, to create narrative openings for a life with meaning for disabled persons and caregivers by re-defining how disability, trauma and illness have shaped and textured their storied lives.

What is worrying about academic studies on the perspectives of (Arab, Pakistani, Palestinian etc.)-Muslim mothers on disability is that the authors always argue that Islamic religious and cultural beliefs shape the mother’s perceptions of disability as a test, burden or punishment. The care-based epistemologies and stories of Muslim care-givers are captured, fixed and framed to tell the tragic story of unfit, incapable and burdened mothers who are stuck in a religious mode of reading disability. There is little space to consider the agency of individuals in
shaping, interpreting and (re)writing cultural dimensions of the Islamic or how the interlocking forces of US imperialism, settler-colonialism and colonialism threaten Muslims situated within relations of dependency care (Tungohan 2019, 237). For example, one study bears witness to the stories of Palestinian mothers’ experiences of having a child with spina bifida. Although there is some nuanced analysis on the stigma, shame, guilt and social isolation mothers face when raising a child with disability, the authors, and those they cite, rely on a homogenous and fixed interpretation of “Arabic-Muslim culture” as necessarily ableist (Nahal et al. 2017, 228). They reduce the settler-colonial occupation of Palestine as a conflict that is merely a setting where such stories of disability take place but are not shaped by. In addition, the mothers in the study speak of feeling as if having a child with disability is a result of negligence during pregnancy or personal moral failures (236). Such feelings are not signs of structural neglect or personal beliefs constitutive of a culture but rather impressions of heteropatriarchal and ableist readings of maternity by medical professionals onto the Muslim mothers’ body. Such medical professionals who claim authority as knowers of the Islamic, and guardians of women’s bodies, place the cause of miscarriage, disability and stillbirths “not in the hands of Allah, but deep within the maternal body” (Kueny 2013, 70):

To keep hazards at bay, medieval physicians assert knowledge of, or control over, every stage of the reproductive act by surveying and circumscribing the female body, and by working to cure any problem within it that might interfere with man’s desire to replicate himself. As a result of their efforts, physicians privilege the Qur’ān’s more traditional reproductive roles for men and women over and against its more ambiguous and open-ended treatment of sex and gender in the procreative act. Assuming the role of custodian and surveillant of women’s bodies, male medical scholars and physicians, like the Qur’ānic Allah, claim both the knowledge and power to generate life. By gaining access to what the Qur’ān holds to be the exclusive preserve (53).

In their discussion of culture, such studies ignore the possibility of dismantling the ableist undergird of settler-colonialism and heteropatriarchy through care-based modes of knowing of
the Islamic. The same mothers they speak of as being broken (Tuck 2014, 412), but hopeful, are living and re-writing anti-ableist modes of reading Islam through their experiences as care-givers and as interpretive authorities of knowing and making the Islamic.

In this second reading of my father’s hospitalization through the plight of Yunus, I illustrate the significant shift in narrative texture when disability is read through a care-based mode of knowing by a Muslim mother. Whereas scholars collate bibliographies or create a chain of authorities such as the isnād (which centre the voices of able-bodied men) to locate themselves within a tradition and claim a place as an authenticated knower and maker of the Islamic, what shapes my intimacy with this piece of Revelation, and Islam as a “living tradition”, is my reception of it as a gift from my mother, and grandmother.

3.8 Reading in the Dark with Yunus

What I share with you below is the untranslatable narrative texture of an Islamic (con)text and how my family used the story of Prophet Yunus to disrupt colonial structures of sense-ability that defined my father’s hospitalization. Similar to Wendy Brown’s notion of contrapuntal thinking and the textures of interpretive inquiry, Peter Stockwell (2009) defines narrative texture as “the experienced quality of textuality” that is co-authored by not only the linguistic and mechanical construction of the text by its original author, but also, by the dispositions and locatedness of the reader in her engagement with the text (191). My mother resisted the Doctor’s reading of my father’s fate by enacting the story of Prophet Yunus as a world-switch trigger (148). Through the power of metaphor, she opened up our capacity as readers to travel to this switched world, with its own “characters, objects, history, and location” (7) and project from there a place, a future, a body for my father in the here and now.
In mapping my father’s coma onto Yunus’ descent into the whale, my mother opened up another possible world in which man could re-emerge from the depths of darkness, in which his fate was in the hands of Allah, and not medical professionals. We rhythmically recited the *Ayat al Kareema* moving “back and forth between two states or places” (17) until the force of its vibrations carved safe passage for my father’s return from the “death-world”. It was through caring labours in the form of *dhikr*, and a relation of care through which Revelation was inherited, that we were able to address and respond to the mis-fit created by colonial sense-abilities and identify the systems that denied my father personhood. My family makes the intentional decision every day to take care of my father’s (non)nurturance access and care needs to sustain and hold in place a fit between his body and the world. And just as my mother held a place for my father in this world, she held a place for Islam in the face of hyper-secular violence. This interpretive movement is not a fixed object of analysis but a “textured prolonged feeling” that “can be revivified periodically” and re-emerge with “varying intensities and depths” (17–19).

What was once an act of resistant reading has become a ritualized practice of piety by which I perform a daily pilgrimage to that place my mother held for us. This is not a place outside of time, or at the edges of this world, it exists within a parallel cosmology not bound by the logic of modernity. In addition, Stockwell argues that, “the verifiability of aspects of each world level is an ontological matter either of character accessibility or participant accessibility” (7). What is at stake in the epistemic and ontological dimensions of care-based epistemologies of knowing the “Islamic.”

Similar to the distinction Fatima Mernissi (1991) draws between the texture of her grandmother’s Islam, and of the Islam she learned in Quran school (1991, 62), more than the
linguistic composition and *tafsir* of Ayat al Kareema, what made sense of the story of Yunus for me was its narrative texture as it was inherited through my mother. Various translations of Yunus’ story focus on the historical context in which it was revealed, its mentions in hadith collections and the linguistic composition and historical context of the Quranic verses in which Yunus is mentioned. Conversely, the reading practices of de-colonial scholars of religious (con)texts aim to expand the boundaries of the “contact zone” (Pratt 2008, 6–7) to account for: 1) the imperial setting of scriptural plots, as well as the imperial settings of their reception in Ancient Judaism (Latvus 2008) and Early Christianity (Pui-Lan and Donaldson 2015), sixth and seventh century Arabia (wadud 2006), 2) the moral inscrutability of western and European theologians in refusing to identify imperialism as “a distinct form of exploitation that denies “women and men of foreign lands their political, cultural, and economic autonomy by imposing its systems of power for its own benefit” (Dube 1997, 28), 3) the social location and colonial agendas of “flesh-and-blood” readers as “variously positioned” in interpretive communities that extend across time and space (Segovia 2005) 4) the colonial literary strategies of readers situated in the West and the subaltern critiques by Two-Thirds world scholars (Dube 2012) and 5) colonial imaginaries and representations of the past (Martínez-Vázquez 2005).

Decolonizing readers, according to Dube (1997), must “demonstrate awareness of imperialism’s pervasive exploitative forces and its literary strategies of domination by adapting de-colonial and feminist strategies of reading and search for “liberating ways of interdependence between nations, races, ethnicities, classes, genders, and sexual and religious orientations” (42). And so, I focus on *that* of the text which was revealed for me as a Muslim reader in a specific contextual and relational horizon by my mother to make sense of my father’s coma. As a creative and embodied practice of *tafsir* (exegesis), I interpret the story of Yunus and the Whale through
a care-based mode of knowing the Islamic that is situated in the material and relational situation of dependency care. It is through poetic dimensions of Yunus’ story, as understood from my family’s contextual horizon, that I seek to surface textures of the Islamic with which we can re-imagine disability and dependency care.

Yunus is known as the prophet that fled and abandoned his mission to warn a community that their practices of violence and evil towards one another would bring upon them a great punishment from Allah. In patriarchal readings of the story, what drives Yunus to flee in anger and seclude himself to a life of solitude is frustration with his failure to make others submit to his will, or Allah’s will, that is. In this frame, the problem to be addressed is his arrogance, impatience or rashness because he is read to have believed that Allah has “no power over him” (Quran 21:87). The didactic impression is then to “be not like the companion of the fish, who cried out while choking with anguish” (Quran 68:48). What drives Yunus towards his humbling, to acknowledge himself as a wrong-doer, is a rupture in his sense of self which is induced after he endures and overcomes incredible pain within the belly of the whale. He witnesses his re-birth from within the womb of darkness to be returned to the shores of the earth as a rehabilitated man that now fits into the new epistemological horizon and location in which the community had turned towards Allah on their own terms. The tale is of a self-made man who is forgiven for his shortcomings (by Allah) and is then rewarded for his productive labour of repentance (by his return to the world as a recognizable person among the community).

In reciting the Ayat al Kareema, through this patriarchal frame, what we come to embody is an attitude towards forgiveness as owed or due by Allah to the believer who self-identifies himself as a wrong-doer in the form of reward—in this case the miraculous release from the Belly’s whale and the people’s turn towards faith. This interpretation then orients how
Muslims come to enact its meaning. For example, maybe if we mirror Yunus and recite the Ayat al Kareema X amount of times during a hardship, which we perceive as a punishment by Allah, he -will- deliver us from our pain as a reward for our repentance just as he delivered Yunus from the belly of the whale and the community from the impending climate disaster. The reader transposes onto the story of Yunus an entitlement to forgiveness, to miracle, to those who believe and choose to move from the darkness into the light.

I identify such renderings as patriarchal and colonial because just like his community members assume inscrutability, what remains inscrutable within these interpretations is why such interpretive efforts have entirely de-centered the themes of natality, (inter)dependency and care within this story. In various interpretations of this story, in tafsir, to hadiths, to Qisas Al-Anbiya, what remains ambivalent is the exact reason why Yunus fled, whether Yunus chose to jump into the sea, and at which point of the narrative arc (before Yunus’ exile or prior to his return) the community accepted Allah. What ultimately remains unclear and contested, and perhaps divinely so, is what Yunus was responding to in his decision to flee, whether he chose such a calamity for himself, and his response to witnessing a community accept Allah’s message without the messenger. This ambivalence folds into the deeper existential struggle for Muslim readers who assume a patriarchal subjectivity to locate within the (con)text a semblance of a subject that gives birth to himself by absolving himself of his remorse for abandoning his lot. In this interpretation, readers are complicit in doing that which leads Yunus to be punished in the first place: wishing to be absolved of relations with others we have been thrown into (by fate) and made to depend on for our placement in this world and the Hereafter. It is the desire to be freed from our relations in determining our lot in life, how we are judged (by Creator and the created), and occupy a situation where we are detached from the stories of others in the eyes of the Judge.
In mapping Yunus’ plight onto my family’s medical trauma, what continues to stick to me of this story are the visceral images of a hardened and ridiculed heart with which one desires to be released from this world and her relations; of being plunged into the multitudes of darkness to face yourself; to be returned from the depths of the abyss and face those who you abandoned; and finally, of a gourd plant sprouting from the earth to offer Yunus respite from the sun. What I read as the pre-cursor to Yunus’ self-imposed exile is not the refusal of the people to believe, but rather, the locus of inscrutability the community assumes in their skepticism. Through the social imaginary of his community, Yunus is cast as a madman, as if only someone who is insane and out of their mind could articulate such claims. In doubting Yunus’ sanity and creating an ontological difference between “us” and Yunus, his community not only discredits the epistemological worth of his truth-claims as infantile, but also enforces the normative boundaries of the self-same.

And just like those who yelled and laughed at the madman and Yunus, medical professionals jeered at our family for holding space for my father’s personhood. All sentient responses from my father were coded as symptoms of his brain damage and not his person. I wondered, who gave them the sponge to “wipe away the entire horizon?” From within the belly of the whale, my father, and Yunus, could still feel, and before feeling their limbs, they felt their hearts and tongues move in the remembrance of Allah. Not knowing when, if ever, he would escape from the belly of the whale, and if our father would ever return, we moved with Yunus in the belly of the whale and continuously recited, “La ilaha illa Anta Subhanaka Inni Kuntu Minazalimeen” (Quran 21:87-88). Just as Allah heard Yunus’ cries and ordered the creature to deliver Yunus back to the shore, our father was returned to us. Yunus’ flesh had been marked by
open wounds from the whale’s stomach acid. With Allah’s command, a gourd plant sprouted to create a canopy to offer him shelter from the sun.

3.9 Zulumāt as Radical Subjectivity: The Land and Body as Witness

what might happen to political possibility when land is understood like bodies, not a thing to be used at all but held in true relation and valued as life itself? (Byrd 2018, 342)

In designing a de-colonial Islamic ethic of care, what is of interest for me in the story of Yunus are the notions of navigating in the dark, as well as, the notion of return. The Spanish word, Tantear, means “exploring someone’s inclinations about an issue…” by sense of “putting one’s hands in front of oneself as one is walking in the dark” and “tactically feeling one’s way” (Lugones 2003, 31). Tantear as a practice entails engaging body-sense to move through different levels of darkness in the interdependent and relational work of liberation (Mignolo 2011). It is a way by which we can “hear the meaning in the enclosures and openings of our praxis” (Lugones 2003, 31). The closest word Lugones identifies as capturing the “mood” of this expression in English is “tentative” (707). Lugones maps this tactile sense of moving through a place onto the work of liberation to show that moving through the different layers of darkness, levels of intimacy, is a sort of pilgrimage one embarks upon in relation with others. The darkness, I am referring to, in this case, is zulm (oppression).

Ibn Kathir speaks of the many layers of this darkness, the darkness of a moonless night, the darkness of the belly’s whale, and the darkness of the bottom of the sea, all of which seized Yunus’ auditory and visual capacity to make sense of his situation and his fate (Kathir 2014; 5:16 Nasr 2015, 1354) (Quran, 27:87-88 translated by Nasr 2015, 3708) (Quran, 27:87-88 translated by Nasr et al. 2015, 3708) (Quran, 27:87-88 Nasr et al. 2015, 3708) (Quran, 27:87-88 translated by Nasr et al. 2015, 3708). The term žulumāt, in reference to the darkness within the
whale’s belly, signifies the multiplicity of darkness, or darknesses in plural, in that there can be multiple “kinds of darkness…of falsehood” (6:1 Nasr 2015, 1559). Like Nietzsche’s madman and his lantern, or Prophet Yunus’ and his divination, I watched my mother run into many meetings with doctors and health care staff, begging them to keep holding on to my father as he had held her. Recalling the words of Trinh Minh-Ha (1989),

in trying to tell something a woman is told, shredding herself into opaque words while her voice dissolves on the walls of silence… You who understand the dehumanization of forced removal-relocation-reeducation-redefinition, the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality, your voice—you know. And often cannot say it. You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don’t, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said” (146).

The term *zulm* (injustice) is closely and intimately associated with *zulumat* (multiple darknesses on the Day of Judgement). In his interpretation of the story of Yunus, Seyyed Hossein Nasr weaves multiple Quranic references to offer an inter-textual and intra-textual exegesis of *ẓulumāt*. Following Ibn Kathir’s tafsir, some interpret the darkness of the belly’s whale as the multiple darknesses of *ẓulumāt* (the sea, the night, the belly of the whale) (Quran 5:16, 6:1, 21:87, 24:40). The multiplicity of darkness, and of this world, is contrasted with the singularity and unicity of light and judgement, “just as there are multiple kinds of falsehood, but Truth is ultimately one…even if there are degrees of light, and on the level of the created order there can be said to be multiple truths” (Nasr 2015, 1693, 1434).

What casts one into darkness is not the state of abjection, or exclusion from society, but rather the moral impact of our deeds, causing harm, that inhibits our sense-ability. The metaphor of darkness is used as a narrative prosthesis to signify blindness as a “mere function of vision” and its lack as an “individual impairment”, a “state of epistemological ignorance” or moral deficiency (Mitchell 2000; Schillmeier 2006). Similar to the notion of moral blindness in
political theory (Button 2011), interpretations of ẓulumāt (darknesses) are drenched in ableist metaphors of the deaf, the mute and the blind as signifiers of those who have faulty faculties of moral judgement and fail to account for their wrong-doing in this world (Gallagher 2006). This can be observed in this verse from Surah An-Nur (The Light), “Or like the darkness of a fathomless sea, covered by waves with waves above them and clouds above them—darknesses, one above the other. When one puts out one’s hand, one can hardly see it. He for whom Allah has not appointed any light has no light” (21:40). The darknesses of the sea, the waves, and the clouds, here represents the “darkness of one’s heart, one’s sight and one’s hearing” thereby sealing or veiling one’s spiritual faculties of judgment (Quran 2:7) (Nasr 2015, 4431). It is not the ontological embodiment of deafness, blindness or muteness, that makes one incapable of performing sound judgement or knowing the “Islamic”, but rather, the work of zulm (injustice). Building upon this notion of zulm as political injustice, Esack defines zulm as an antonym of ‘adl and qist (balance and justice) and expands its definition to account for zulm-al-nafs (injustice of the ego) (Esack 1997, 21). This invites investigation into a relational moral phenomenology of the ego conquiro and his transformation into a qalbi, a heart-centered existence, that accounts for the process by which one comes into and inhabits her body as a bearer of right or wrong.

Naming zulm as coloniality means that complicity in doing the work of coloniality disablers our ethical sensibilities and faculties of moral judgement by making us unable to bear witness to our stench, our selves as complicit in such wrong-doing. On the Day of Judgement, however, parts of our bodies, such as our feet, our hands, our tongues, which are “incapable of speech” in this world will speak and “bear witness” to our actions and wrong-doings (Surah An-Nur 21:23). On this Day, with our mouths sealed our hands and feet will speak on our behalf and “will bear witness to that which they used to earn” and the intentions of their travels; and so, our
body will be made to speak against itself (36:65). Our efforts at making excuses and hiding our sins “with lies and duplicity” will come undone (ibid.). Although those who do the work of zulm may deny or choose to remain ignorant of their complicity in this life, they will be surrounded, “struck by the terror from below (sea), the terror from around (waves), and the terror from above (clouds)” (21:49) (Nasr 2015, 4431). Ubbay ibn Ka’ab, a companion of the Prophet, elaborated on the five darknesses a person can be cast unto: speech, action, entrance (into the grave at death), exit (from the grave at the Resurrection), and return (in this case, to the Fire rather than to the Garden) (Nasr 2015, 4430). Whereas violence is theorized as a limit on speech and the survivor’s capacity to testify, here violence is seen as that which darkens the heart of the oppressor to (dis)orient his speech and actions to compromise his capacities as a witness in our knowledge relations. Yet it does not consume him totally: he can “hardly” see his hand in the darkness but has not lost sight of it completely.

In addressing our complicity through de-colonial intentions and ethical sense-abilities, we discipline our hearts to be fit for the work of witnessing. This notion is echoed by Al-Ghazali’s re-reading of the Plato’s just society in which he places the Heart where Socrates’ places the philosopher-king. In order to embody and be a keeper of knowledge, or truth-bearer, one must continuously polish one’s heart, as a mirror, in order to be a witness to truth. Darkness, that delimits the political theorists’ capacity to see her own hand, dwells not within the bodies, histories or epistemological horizons of the Other, but rather within the darkness of her heart. It is her loss of witnessing capacities, that comes with the work of coloniality, that dis-able her from truly knowing and embracing the Other. Until such darkness is addressed by her, she will not be able to care for others through consensual, preservative and receptive love.
Developing the notion of receptivity in Islamic-feminist hermeneutics, in his essay, “Veil of Islam”, psychoanalyst Fethi Benslama interprets the scenescape between Prophet Muhammad and Khadijah in Surah Al-‘Alaq (The Blood Clot) to centre the receptive faculties of Khadijah as the first witness, hearer, of Revelation. After nights of clairvoyant dreams, one night the Archangel Gabriel visited Muhammad in the cave of Mount Hira and said, “Recite!” Carrying in his heart the first of the Quranic verses to be revealed in his heart, he ran in fear to Khadijah and asked, “What is wrong with me?...I fear for my soul” (Quran 96:1-5). In an intimate and vulnerable state, unsure if he could trust his sensorial capacities, Muhammad turns to Khadijah in doubt of himself and asks for her to cover him with a blanket. I read in this scene that truth in Islam began with the Prophet doubting his bodily capacities, as someone who is illiterate and in a meditative state, as a truth-bearer only to be affirmed through the loving ear- and eye-witness of Khadijah.

In another scene, while Muhammad is sitting with Khadijah he sees another creature and lets Khadijah know of its presence (Adil 2012). As a test, she uncovers her hair and asks Muhammad if the creature has left the room to confirm it was an angel from Heaven and not an evil entity; at the sight of her uncovered hair, the creature left. Khadijah brings her husband to meet with her cousin, Waraqah ibn Nawfal, a blind elder and knowledge keeper who confirms the revealed verses as Nāmūs (nomos, divinely revealed law) (Nasr 2015, 7224). In walking-with the Prophet in his disorientation, through her caring labours Khadijah paves way not only for Islam’s entry to the world, but also for Muhammad’s entry into the world as a truth-bearer, as a Prophet by becoming the first Muslim. However, Benslama’s reading has similar patriarchal undertones as seen in Lacan’s reading of miracle, through such caring labours “man enters the
certitude of his Allah” and “that (through) which he believes becomes that which believes in him” (Benslama 2015). He observes:

Woman is thus the origin twice over: the origin of belief and belief in the origin. She is on the side of the origin and of its result. Woman turns. Veiled, unveiled, reveiled: these are the three sequences of theology’s feminine operation. Veiled originally, unveiled for the demonstration of the originary truth, then re-veiled by the order of belief in this truth of origin… (Benslama 2015).

I argue that the Prophet, or even Islam, is not dependent on Khadijah for its certitude, but rather he is dependent on her care to deliver his body from the intense effects of receiving Revelation. Revelation was not just shaped by abstracted divine-sensorial experiences, or embodied practices of the Prophet, it was relationally delivered through caring labours and his relations. Trembling, cold and afraid, in this scene we are provided access to Muhammad as a human, and not as the Prophet, who becomes a prophet through the nurturance of a woman. Not only is Muhammad dependent on Khadijah as the first witness of Revelation, the surah within which this scene takes place is titled the blood-clot in reference to the process of gestation and the creation of life. Revelation is the divine truth that is awaiting delivery through the body of the Prophet and it is Khadijah who must play the role of the mid-wife. And as a midwife of Islam, man must “pass through her in order to believe” (Benslama 2015). Building upon this metaphor of birth, in his translation of Farīd ud-Dīn and ʿAṭṭār’s poem, “Muhammad the Maternal prophet” (Safi 2018, 45) in which the poet asks to the Prophet to suckle him with compassion and mercy, Omid Safi reinterprets an honorific, Ummi (which translates into the Unlettered Prophet) to shift attention to the root of the word Umm, which means mother, to signify the Prophet as he “who loves the community the way a mother does” (Safi 2018, 267).

Similar to Quranic contexts within which the materiality of our bodies, sentient life such as animals, and the earth, have agency as witnesses on the Day of Judgement, material histories
of violence are sense-able as seen in the stones that speak: a “history that goes on speaking and being spoken about” (Jurkevics 2017, 47), the stench of the nightsoil in British-occupied Shanghai and the stench of the dead body in the Master’s chambers. In the next chapter, I explore the witnessing capacities of the dead and the unburied within post-colonial South-Asian feminist poetry. The notion of the witness I introduce through these Islamic contexts entails that until the day the oppressor’s hands bear witness and speak of his crimes, it is the moral responsibility of humans to bear witness and cultivate receptivity. We must remain vigilant not to those who are rendered incapable of speaking but to the poetics of violence, its spectral histories, and the spectral others that remain uncared for, unmourned and unburied within the human artifice. For example, in Musa Dube’s story of Utentelezandlane, the murdered princess refuses “to die for the crimes of patriarchy” and sings a song from her grave that tells the story of her murder; heard by a local farmer, the girls who killed her are punished and the crimes of patriarchy are accounted for (M. Dube 2003, 61–63). The word Kolobetsa, which is repeated throughout the story’s performance, teaches the listeners of the story to cultivate sensibilities to receive the songs of the unburied and unmourned bodies hidden beneath the human artifice as the farmer did.
Chapter 4: In Hajar’s Footsteps

In an Aristotelian sense, story involves metabolê, the replacement of something by something else. Story spreads out through time the behaviors or bodies -- the shapes -- a self has been or will be, each replacing the one before. Hence story has before and after, gain and loss. It goes somewhere. Even if it is the story of repetition, or of salvation or destruction by a return whence it began, story has sequence. Moreover, shape or body is crucial, not incidental, to story. It carries story; it makes story visible; in a sense it is story. Shape (or visible body) is in space what story is in time... For what shape carries is story, and story is change; "before" must be (mostly) lost in order for there to be an "after." We are living beings, shapes with stories, always changing but also always carrying traces of what we were before (Bynum 1991).

I carry in my heart’s womb a twin birth: of an impossible mourning and of an unspeakable gratitude for my mother. Nearing my 28th birthday, I am haunted by specters of the woman, who at my age, was uprooted like the flower of Maryam from Lahore and blown by the winds to Toronto. My mother worked night-shifts building car parts in factories and raised three kids and a newborn in the daylight. She made us lunches every day, took us to public libraries in the summer, and had an impressive side hustle as a babysitter caring for the neighborhoods’ children. Twenty years later, my mother is now the primary care-giver for my father, the sole breadwinner in our household and a small-business owner. While struggling to attend to her own chronic illness, she spends her nights awake on aspiration watch for my father, her days fielding appointments, and her evenings doing speech and occupational therapy with my father. As she cares for all of us, I wonder who will care for my mother and who cares about my mother? Who is the mother behind these words that has labored tirelessly so I can be able to sit here, write and advocate for my father? Can you read the love she has poured into me within these words? The force of maternity compels me to continue fighting to appear to you as a Muslim in my practice of political theory. The signature of love’s labour may be faceless to the reader, but I can clearly remember my mother’s face the day she gave birth to my father.
It is this face that watches over my writing. As my father slipped into a coma, and the doctors advised us to pull the plug, my mother said, “we are Muslim, we will not give up on our loved ones, we will take care of him; he will have a meaningful life.” She was indefatigable and refused the world its end. The world has ended for my mother many times and still she wakes in the morning to continue holding a place on earth for my family to dwell. In and through her relentless care for us, she has taught us how to care for others. Yet, the labour (of teaching and writing) with which I am finally able to care for my mother estranges me from her as I must live and work in Vancouver in order to support my family in Toronto. As I work multiple jobs, while writing a doctoral dissertation, for the first time, I am claiming my mother’s tired feet as my own. In laboring for her, as she labored for me, I find myself unable to let go of a haunting lament: the impossibility to give birth to oneself. As a child I was unable to care for my parents, unable to give birth to myself, unable to save my father from his stroke. And as an adult, I find it impossible to articulate or ever return my mother’s love. Such preservative and maternal love transgresses the capitalist logic of transaction and indebtedness. Yet, this guilt of not being able to do more for my family breathes through this dissertation and feels like a stone pressed to my heart.

As a Muslim and Pakistani child raised in the suburbs of Ontario, this guilt paired with the pain of racial micro-aggressions at school, pushed me out of my body, and turned me away from my Mother, my Mother tongue, and my Motherland. In my heart I still feel as if I have abandoned my family in a time of need and struggle to reconcile the work of academia with caring responsibilities. I remember in the summer in which my father was hospitalized, I had a major political theory paper due. I fit in reading the phenomenology in between care shifts, work and classes. As neuro-diverse, I deeply struggle to focus on reading and on one particular day in
a state of hyper-focus during a care shift, I remember nurses rushing to help my father. He had aspirated during his sleep while I was reading Hegel and I had failed to call the nurses. This was traumatic, to say the least, and continues to impact how I read and turn towards political theory. For a long time, I mistranslated these feelings as a disidentification and a disconnect between my mother and I, as well as, a bitterness in my relationship with Islam. If, “Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear…” (2:286), then why did He have to choose my mother to be the testament of strength for us all. Why is my family’s plight a sign of his miracle and rahma (mercy) and not a demand for others to assume responsibilities to care for my mother and father?

Our bodies are not signs, or signifiers, but ever-changing shapes that carry stories. As our bodies have changed shapes with age, illness, or disability, the shape of my family’s story, how we fit together in a care web, has also transformed. In our narrative sequencing of events, my father’s stroke no longer represents a rupture or interruption but an experience that has ontologically, materially, relationally and affectively transformed our sense of place, embodiment and connectedness with one another. Yet, how we inhabit and live our shared story, and the shapes it takes, runs up against how our story is told—how we are told. Islamic approaches of reading disability and care defer to the authority of the medical model (Arneil and Hirschmann 2016; Ghaly 2010). A religious-medical model of disability renders my father’s disability and our situatedness in a relation of dependency care as a test for our moral character (Schuelka 2013); a burden to bear in this life to advance to Paradise in the Hereafter; as a tragedy or a punishment intended by Allah; or interpreted as noble pain that makes us more proximate to Allah (Olsen 2016). In this paradigm, our relationship with the Divine is read to be rooted in non-consensual care in which Allah as carer can choose to inflict harm in the form of illness or disability for our well-being (Ghaly 2010, 30).
Although the Quran calls for empowering the disabled, and marginalized members of society, as full and equal participants of society, the social and cultural textures that shape what disability and care mean in Muslim communities and legal scholarship remain deeply ableist and disempowering (Rahemtulla 2017). Such narratives of pity, tragedy and fear not only undermine my father’s agency as a moral person, but also discredit my mother’s moral choices and unique struggles as a dependency worker (Kittay 1999). Through this ableist lens, her story is also written as the tragedy of a young wife doomed to be a care-giver for her sick husband. The emotional plots that underpin the religious-medical model serve to “engage the listener’s attention” by appropriating the sick and disabled body to stir feelings of sympathy and evoke fears about the reader’s “own potential fate” as temporarily able-bodied. In tandem, the care-giver’s body is made to signify self-sacrifice, promise and moral triumph (Bauer 2017, 17). The “arc of feelings” evoked by this plot function as a “straightening device” for the believer who bears witness to return to a state of fearing Allah and return to face the prayer mat (ibid). In the trajectory of this emotional plot, illness and disability are sequenced in the narrative as a premature departure from this world. Such plots also are driven by a matricidal impulse because they uphold subject formation as predicated upon the death of the mother. Here, one’s life trajectory from birth to death is a linear ascent from within the darkness of the womb into the world as an independent and self-sustaining subject. Dependency, in any sense, is marked as a disruptive or decaying force that returns one to the state of darkness and chains them to the Home/domestic sphere.

3 It is hard to write down these ableist representations that we know others think/and perceive and to inscribe them into the written word (even as an act of clarification) because it feels like doing violence, objectifying my father into a signification.
In this chapter, I invite investigation into how economies of attention and affect shape how we read disability, dependency and care in Islamic thought and praxis; and in turn, I explore how such readings give shape to the communities of care that arise, and how spaces are made to take shape (materialize), around an individual’s care and access needs. In Urdu, the words for care and attention are connected. Similar to Tronto’s concept of attentiveness, in Urdu, attention is not something we pay, lend, or make but rather, it is something we do as a mode of caring about someone or something. The words for care (parwa, tawaja, khayal) and attention are entwined and entail watchfulness, vigilance and focus. Whereas the force of maternity compels me to vigilantly place and presence my mother in my scholarship, the force of matricide seeks to displace my mother and her care-work in the shape of this story. The same matricidal force that makes legible my father’s stroke as a cause for concern but remain not-knowing of my mother’s needs as a dependency worker compels us to focus on the event of birth and not the birth-work with which we are delivered into the world. Birth and death are marked as sites for gathering to witness liberation from dependency.

However, just as birth is made to signify a child’s separation from her mother, my father’s stroke as an event of illness is also visible in the subject formation process as a site for gathering; like birth, the stroke and cardiac arrest were highly legible as events of illness that could be witnessed, seen, heard, and spoken about as something to gather around through medical and Islamic ethics of visiting the sick. However, whereas birth is rendered and celebrated as a breaking-free, acquired disability is read as an imprisonment, a return to the darkness of the womb, a living death. During my father’s stay in intensive care, many family and community members came to visit from near and far.
Yet, the emergency-response care web that gathered around my father for the most part had dissipated by the end of hospitalization (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018, 98). Similar to gravesites, all that remains now are tales of the event remembered and held in place in the witness of those who visited and continue to visit my father. And when family friends do visit, they come anticipating my father’s return to able-bodiedness, a return to familiar ways of relating to and identifying with him as an able-bodied Muslim man. They ask him questions like: are you walking yet? Eating? Talking? Or worse, they address my mother with these questions about my father while he is in the room. Invites to social gatherings, especially dinners, and the phone calls have stopped as my father’s ability to eat and speak remains impacted. Friends and family have realized that there are no more miraculous health updates or stories of recovery or “return” of the man they once held close as their own. And just as my mother remains beyond the reader’s reach in this text, the daily pilgrimage she makes to meet my father’s care and access needs also remains illegible and unattended to by the Canadian welfare state and within Islamic kin-based networks of care. As long as the scene in the intensive care unit is signified as a descent into the netherworld of dependency, the banality of homecare, the multiple hospitalizations for aspiration, the loss of relationships and the enduring medical trauma we have experienced together as a family will remain de-centered in the narrative sequencing of events.

The demand for my father, and our family, to return or be restored of his able-bodiedness ignores the work of (inter)dependency that not only once held us in place, but continues to hold us in place every day. Although its material and social arrangements have changed, we continue to depend on one another in order to appear, and fit, in the world, just in a different way than before. My family dwells at a uniquely precarious, and radically deviant, intersection: a situation of (inter)dependency in which Muslim women are the sole income providers, as well as, the
primary informal care-givers. This estranges us from Pakistani-Muslim communities in which men are culturally rendered the patriarchal heads of households (Self 2014; Siraj 2010), as well as, the Canadian welfare state in which the brunt of informal care-work is unpaid, undervalued and performed by racialized women and migrants (Baines, Evans, and Neysmith 1998; Tronto 2013). Furthermore, although the event was indeed traumatic and shattering, it no longer makes sense to describe it as a singular event, or moment in time, by which my family was transformed into a care web. Rather, the cosmology of our care web has always been shaped by various chronic illnesses, types of neurodiversity and disabilities that my siblings, parents and I live with. There are multiple chronologies of this event of illness from multiple perspectives. Just like my sisters, my mother too was a young carer for her father. And, after my father witnessed his father die from a lack of access to affordable care in Pakistan, he made the difficult decision to migrate with us to Canada so his children would not have to face a similar struggle. Another layer within the ableist undergird of the religious-medical model of disability is composed of the intergenerational and global barriers to accessible, consensual and affordable care caused by the impact of colonial violence on the Global South, as well as, settler-colonial violence against Indigenous peoples.

The form of such narratives is shaped by the moral primacy and authority that Islamic jurists assign to the medical discourse in defining disability and trauma as ruptures, points of no return. Medical frames of disability direct our attention to the event of illness as the defining feature of my father’s entire biography inscribing onto his body a chronology of illness that takes the shape of a tragedy. In doing so, my father’s body is designated as wounded, damaged, or almost gone and my mother’s body as invisible and invincible. Relatedly, my mother’s miracle spin on the story of Yunus made sense in the context of the hospitalization as a counter-discourse
to the medical model but with the physical world-switch from hospital to homecare, the texture of this interpretation took an ableist turn. As our bodyminds have changed in the past seven years, and the story of my father’s illness has shifted, transposing the miracle spin onto our current situation feels as if what we are praying for is the cure to disability, a return to how things were before the event of illness. Instead, the darkness we must navigate through is the ableist violence that endangers my family’s survival. As political theorists abstract what it means to be existentially homeless and the phenomenological impossibility of ever finding a true home in this world, my family, along with others forced to choose between shelter or care, live everyday with the anxiety of losing our home, of being forced to relocate to a home that will not meet my father’s access needs and the grief of no longer “being able” to return home to our motherland.

Interdependency brings with it both the possibility for our sustenance, but also, our destruction, and at the root of this lot is the weaponization of dependency and care against those who are cared for. The force of maternity that guides my scholarship and flows from the situation of dependency care not only holds us and holds for us a place in the world but can also displace us, and chase us to the shores (“Home” Shire 2014). And so, whereas ethics of care theorists centre the mother-child relationship (Fernandes, Robertson, and Robertson 2018; Hollway 2007; Kittay 1998) and the event of birth as points of departure for understanding dependency care and the neglect of motherwork and other mothers (Collins 1995, 117; Okano 2016, 88; Ruddick 1995), I begin with the transition of becoming my parents’ care-giver as a young carer. My point of departure is not the transition from the womb into the world, but rather, exile from the world into the desert with Maryam and Hajar and my family’s abjection to the edges of the “Muslim Ummah” and the Canadian state.
The politics of recognition paradigm that runs through ethics of care literature assumes that a child must dis-identify with her Mother just as a slave must break free from the Master to become an independent moral self. Birth and becoming a political subject are then read as ruptures in mutual identification between a mother and child. Here, birth as a metaphor marks one’s entry into the world as a moral person, as well as, one’s epistemic authority in knowledge production and ontological capacities as a knower. However, pain, trauma, disability, and illness may mean that identification between the mother and child waxes and wanes, or has been disrupted, or has been (un)intentionally dissolved. Whether it’s estrangement from one’s role as a child that comes with being a young carer, or the carceral state’s policing of affection between mothers and children held in detention camps or residential schools, narratives that naturalize how we relate to our mothers as a linear dis-identification, from the womb into the world, ignore that how we identify with our mothers not only changes but can also be disrupted and interrupted by colonial machinery.

At the crux of this chapter is an interrogation of the relationship between knowledge production and the work of (dis)placing the maternal. Speaking against Anna Jurkevics (2017), who naturalizes world-building as a necessarily “conflictual process of making a home in the world”, I argue that the desire to have a home in the world, a place for your family to dwell in dignity, is not conflict-prone. Instead, I re-imagine the relationship between thinking, building and dwelling as care-based by which we hold place for (m)others in the ecology of Islamic knowledges. Here, I draw a parallel between how we attend to maternity in knowledge production and how we attend to the care-work of mothers in our worlds. What remains invisible in both these realms is the care that enables me to appear to you as a writer or as a person. Such interpretive and epistemological work is embodied, intergenerational and care-based. It requires
us to care for that which enables (m)others to have a dwelling place, in our worlds, in our relations and in our praxis as Muslims and as political theorists.

Just as the work of writing estranges me from my mother and my motherland, as you the reader sift through these words in search of where the personal splits from the political, the argument from my personal narrative, you estrange yourself from the face of my mother. Reading, attending to, this chapter, requires the work of b/ordering. What orients us to attend to the argument, and the scholarly contributions, and not my mother’s care and access needs?

Whether it’s the material distance between the diaspora and the motherland, or the emotional distance between my mother and I, or the textual distance between the reader and the writer, maternity as a cosmological structure, and relationship, is more complex and circuitous than a linear trajectory in which the subject is expelled from its source. In this chapter, I visualize the ecology of Islamic knowledges not as a chain but as a multi-dimensional and multi-directional care web that is nested within relational interdependencies and sustained by the spectral force of maternity. In addition, tradition defined as a singular and linear trajectory of inherited knowledge within Islamic thought and praxis, as well as in political theory, relies on a matricidal conception of citizenship and interpretive authority as birthrights. In this paradigm, the event of birth as a metaphor is used as a boundary-marker to signify one’s entry into the world as a moral person, as well as, one’s ontological capacities to be a knower and embody epistemic authority.

Although care is essential for authorship, if it is rendered as insignificant to knowledge production and world-building processes, it is absenced through the work of inscription and disappeared in the text’s content. Disregarding the spectral care webs within which epistemology takes place serves to sustain the myth of man as an “epistemological figure, the sovereign (self-present and self-transparent) subject and ultimate object of knowledge…” who is charged with
the work of “unearth[ing] the natural, universal laws governing sensible phenomena” (Da Silva 2001, 428). In this paradigm, place-making” requires b/ordering the home from the world, the nation from the empire, the Master from the slave. Through the exploitation and appropriation of caring labours, homo faber becomes “man as master and creator of his own destiny” and is liberated from “the subjugation of natural and transcendent forces” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 30). Here, the subjectivity of man as an epistemic authority is b/ordered by and sustained through the appropriation and exploitation of caring labours and care-based modes of knowing. Knowledge translation and subject formation require one to expunge all marks of dependency—including our dependency on our mother to be born.

In place of this paradigm, guided by the stories of Hajar and Maryam, I offer an Islamic-feminist ethic of witnessing by which we can re-imagine the tradition of political theory, and Islam, as care-based epistemologies that require birthwork and depend on the spectral histories, and invisible hands, of dependency care. Mecca (referred to as umm al-qurā or mother of cities in Sūra 42:7) as a sanctuary for Muslims, a place to turn to for the global ummah, “emerged from the footsteps of a Black Muslim mother, Hajar” (Kueny 2013, 40; Mohajir 2017). The story of Hajar in the Islamic tradition tells the story of a racialized, abandoned single mother who is left alone in the desert to provide for her newborn. And so, in Hajar’s footsteps, I uproot the matricidal orientations of knowledge production and subject formation (as captured in maternalist conceptions of citizenship as birthright within the motherland and the colonial metropole) that seek to kill and displace the (m)other through knowledge translation and subject formation. In the historical materialist paradigm, our knowledge relations are predicated upon the appropriation of caring labours, denigration of care-work and erasure of disability and dependency in our relations. Instead, from within the horizon of my family’s current situation,
the miracle I read in Yunus’ story is no longer my dad’s recovery, return or rescue, but rather, the power and presence of witnessing within care relations. Whether it is in the witness of land, Creator or creation, the plight of those cast to the netherworld of dependency is perceptible and will be accounted for.

Witnessing, in knowledge keeping in the Islamic tradition, is visualized and inscribed in the form of a chain. Hadith, for example, is composed of two main parts: the Isnad (a chain of reporters) and the Matn (the text or substance) (Böwering, Crone, and Mirza 2013). The authenticity of the hadith relies on various factors including, but not limited to, the interpretive authority of the reporters, their proximity to the Prophet and the strength of the bonds between them. The hermeneutic task of inquiry requires: 1) verifying the degree to which a text can be matched through an eye- or ear-witness to its original form as embodied by the Prophet and 2) judging whether the witness meets the anthropological minimum to qualify as an interpretive authority. Although the methods of knowledge keeping in Islamic thought and praxis are inherently connection-based, embodied and interdependent, the human and historical dimensions of knowledge production and consumption by which we learn Islamic sensibilities and orientations are dismissed as insignificant. More particularly, how Muslims come to embody and emulate sunnah, hadith and Revelation through care-based modes of knowing is segregated from the work of knowledge transmission. Here, the work of making Islam is attributed solely to Islamic jurists and theologians. The spectral (m)others the sustain such knowledge-keeping can only ever be followers of Islam (Shahab Ahmed 2016; wadud 2006). What remains unaccounted for is how sense as a differentially allocated ability, the distribution of care-work in our care webs and patrilineal models of kinship affect the ways we come to inherit and embody Islam.

Patrilineal conceptions of Islam as a tradition that can only be inherited and interpreted by men
rely on epistemic gatekeeping and a conception of citizenship as a birthright that is predicated upon the death of the mother. Before offering an Islamic-feminist ontology of maternity, I outline matricide as an epistemological orientation within Islamic knowledge practices and political theory. Through a comparative analysis of Hannah Arendt’s and Jacques Derrida’s conception of maternity⁴, I pave conceptual space within the Islamic tradition to consider the phenomenology of the ethical dispositions and intentions with which we receive unfamiliar traditions, texts and subjugated epistemologies of (m)others.

I argue that responding to subjugated maternal knowledges, histories and subjectivities in Islamic knowledge production charges the reader, and the writer, with the work of mourning and the responsibility of bearing witness. Such a conception of authorship as relational and tied to the mother is a way of holding a place for (m)others in our knowledge relations and requires scholars of Islamic thought to inhabit multiple roles, as writers, readers, listeners, and as witnesses. It is through the poetics of authorship, of witnessing, that (m)others of Hajar’s plight are delivered safe passage into sanctuary. The ways in which dependency care has been and continues to be institutionalized to displace, disrobe and dispossess the (M)other requires of us, as Muslims and as political theorists, to think-with care by placing ourselves in an ethical relation with the (m)others we write about and live-with in this world. In thinking-with-care, we build our capacities to respond to and be addressable for the moral injuries of (m)others, and in

⁴ Here, in my practice of comparative political theory, I do not offer new ways of conceiving a concept through a non-Western tradition, or re-articulating a problem through my family’s self-understanding as Muslims situated within a relation of dependency care; but rather, I attempt the more difficult task of thinking as a Muslim political theorist in which Islam is not present as a theoretical object of analysis, but is the spectral force that shapes my knowledge production and consumption. From this place, although Islam remains unreadable, it shapes my reading of Arendt’s and Derrida’s conception of maternity; it is my care for the plight of Hajar, and my mother, that makes me care about the matricidal impulses of political theory and Islamic knowledge systems.
doing so, we move towards building more caring worlds in which the (m)other is supported throughout her maternity from the point of conception, to gestation, to the pangs of labour, to the event of birth, to post-partum and throughout all birth outcomes including abortion and miscarriage.

An Islamic-feminist and care-based epistemology re-imagines tradition as an inherited cosmology of relations, peopled histories of sense-contact and ethical orientations. If we understand tradition as an intergenerational and cosmological web of relationships spread out across a vast contact zone, we can account for how our body-sense is engaged within the work of knowledge consumption and production. Within this contact zone, boundaries are marked not only through epistemic racism, but also, through material hierarchies of care that cast spectral others into the netherworld of dependency. How we consume knowledge through affective registers of inquiry provides insight into the boundaries we inherit that distance us from the mothers we write about, the mother that gave birth to us, and the ghosts of mothers that haunt us.

4.1 Tradition as Birth-Work not Birthright

After abandonment/ After the blow/that brings the head to the ground/ and breaks the teeth,/ after the Allah who requires blood and obedience,/ how do you find water/? It has no content/ It cools the lips/ and moves without words/ It is almost not visible/ between thorn and rock/ Where on this earth/is the water of Hajar,/ the water that came/ up from the ground,/ from the ground of Hajar/ given/freely, freely/ by the Allah of Hajar.

Mohja Kahf

From Arendtian natality, to social contract theory and birthright, to the Lacanian image of symbolic order as a womb, to the womb of Kantian Ur-Mother to Eva Kittay’s aphorism of “some mother’s child”, the event of birth as witnessed is archetypal in signifying the material mark of both authorship and of maternity. Within and beyond the canon of western political

5 Thank you to my dear friend Zehra Naqvi for gifting me the Hagar poems to help me develop this chapter.
theory, the dawn of freedom is likened by, the revolutionaries, the “born-free”, the colonialists and the nationalist storytellers alike, to the movement of birth, of rupturing through the darkness of the womb, of lifting the night’s veil to see a new day on the horizon. The idea of birth as a substitute for progress, equality or origin has travelled across many historical and ideological contexts from the birth of a nation, to the birth of civilization, to the birth of democracy, to the birth of the individual as equal, and to the birth of Reason. If we imagine birth as a temporally and spatially linear movement that marks and inscribes transition, we not only impose on maternity an unnatural rhythm, but we also orient our attention to the event of birth by de-centering and displacing the labouring (m)other from maternity. This displacement is echoed in our imagination of authorship as contained within a single individual, despite the process through which the writer’s ideas are received by others beyond her control in worlds and by readerships unknown to her. The event of birth, as an idea, has no gestation period, no doulas or mid-wives, no pangs of labour and no risk of maternal death; it is an imagined metaphor. Yet, this metaphor carries great analytical leverage for political theorists in that the miracle of birth can be seen through the human eye as a testament of our collective capacity to create.

Beyond its analogical leverage as a mark of beginning, the fiction of natality runs parallel with narratives of death, mutation and ecological destruction as necessary pre-conditions for political transitions in the “slaughter-bench of history”. This metaphorical, linear relation between birth and authorship rests in the impossible: just as a man cannot give birth to himself, or grieve his own death, a writer cannot be the sole author of the meaning(s) of her ideas; just as a woman cannot give birth alone, standing upside down in a linear fashion, the historicity of political ideas cannot assume a traceable and transparent authorial origin contained within the intentions of a single author. What of maternity, of the text, remains beyond the event of birth,
beyond the horizons of the world in which, and the intended audience for whom, the writer writes? What of the gravesite remains when we cease to visit the dead? In secular time, birth is understood as a point at which life begins, through which we become equal, moral persons after our time in the darkness of the womb, after the mother’s pangs of labour, and after the safe passage of the mother and her newborn into the world. But what of the mother who gives birth to a stillborn child, or a newborn whose mother dies in childbirth? Which (m)others, maternal relations and newborns have been denied safe passage into this world? Which truths of (m)others remain stillborn or unburied? Of the wretched of the earth are a mother without a child, a child without a mother, and a single mother in the twilight of freedom’s dawn. Of their plight include:

In Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1869, upon the wake of the Emancipation Proclamation, a women freed from slavery, exiled from her city by the Union Forces, dies at roadside leaving the infant she was carrying, uncared-for (Cowling et al. 2017, 223–24).

In Kasur, Pakistan in 2018, a little girl, Zaynab’s dead body is found raped and discarded on a pile of garbage (Ansari, Riaz, and Guramani 2018).

In 2017, Sara Rus, an Auschwitz survivor, gathers with the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires to grieve for her son killed by Argentinian police in 1977, “I don’t even have his bones to bury,” she laments (Goñi 2017).

In Taubaté, Southeastern Brazil, in 1886, Ambrosina, an enslaved woman, is forced to move from her home to care-for and breastfeed the child of her owner, when the child dies of suffocation, “she is prosecuted for his murder” (Cowling et al. 2017, 224).

In 2018, the body of a 15 year old Anishinaabe girl, Tina Fontaine, and member of the Sagkeeng First Nation, is found discarded in the Red River in Winnipeg, the Canadian media puts her worth on trial (Paling 2018).

In the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, countless and nameless pregnant women are “cleansed”, forced to abort their children, to kill themselves; Basant Kaur, “six children born of her womb died in that well, but she survived. She jumped in four times, but the well had filled up... she would jump in, then come out, then jump in again... she would look at her children, at herself... till today, she is alive.” (Butalia 2000, 127).
In June 2019, the body of a 7 year old Indian migrant, Gurupreet Kaur, is found dead in the Arizona desert near the US-Mexico border after her mother journeyed to find her water (Shoichet 2019).

Rick Gilbert, one of thousands of Indigenous children forcefully sent to residential school by the Canadian state, speaks of the deep neglect and abuse he endured at Williams Lake School, “You hear children crying at bedtime, you know. But all that time, you know, you know we had to weep silently. You were not allowed to cry, and we were in fear that we, as nobody to hear us, you know…when…you started crying, nobody comforted you. You just sat in the corner and cried and cried till you got tired of crying then you got up and carried on with life” (The Survivor’s Speak: A Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015, 24).

In December 2017, a 7 year old girl, Razia, tells a journalist her “mother’s head was split open…she was thrown aside...they [the Myanmar Army] struck me and threw me aside” (Wright 2017).

How do we remember a past with no future, a beginning with no past, a point of origin absenced by our historical orientations (Ahmed 2010)? Where do we place love’s labour, a mother’s love, a labour that leaves no material trace yet sustains the dwelling place of history itself? What of the birth-work of doulas, the mother’s family, her ancestors, the nurses, and the advocates for accessible childcare and healthcare that enabled the mother’s and child’s safe passage through the event of birth? And finally, what of the mother whose children, through her womb, were born enslaved? Or the enslaved mother who was forced to produce breastmilk for her Master’s newborn, instead of her own? Whereas critical race and de-colonial scholars focus on condemn the signification of the invisible Other as racially and epistemically inferior, I argue that this imagined and epistemic disconnection of the (m)other from the event of birth in our knowledge production and consumption has a serious material consequence: it enables others to alienate (and erase) the (m)other from her labours of care and appropriate her labours to fuel and sustain the economies of slavery, (settler)colonial rule and the nation-state at the expense of her own well-being, safety and place in the world as a moral person.
Here, I dare to re-conceive tradition in Islamic thought and praxis in the image of the expanding *Panja-e Maryam*\(^6\) that when immersed in water not only moves with the pace of birthing mothers in labour but also serves as a medicine that the doula or midwife offers to the birthing mother to ease her pain. Imagining tradition as birth-work paves way for political theorists, and Muslims, to transform our knowledge practices, as well as our pedagogies, to account for the force of maternity in knowledge production and consumption. For political theorists, this requires us to interrogate: where we mark the beginning of political theory, what we inscribe as the universal point of origin for political order, which forms of knowledge we uphold as legitimate, which activities we categorize as political, and most importantly, where we locate ourselves as writers, not only within the horizon of our temporal and spatial situatedness, but also within the ethical orientations that shape the sensibilities of the field as a set of inherited practices. In doing so, I wonder if the work of politicalness, in Wolin’s sense, can be grounded in an ethics of inheritance, or hospitality, through which we learn to care for and love the (m)other. Both the mother, and the other, as embodied in the plight of Hajar, a racialized single mother, are marginalized and de-centered through a non-ethics of care that is inherited through colonial models of knowledge relations within the field of political theory.

What political theorists need right now more than ever is to revisit how we read, how we teach, and how we care-for the (m)other in our reception, and in the conception, of political ideas. For Muslims, instead of valorizing stories of Muslim women as pious, obedient and sacrificial care-givers, we must denaturalize care in an Islamic ontology of maternity and invite

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\(^6\) Thank you to Dr. Joan Tronto for her feedback and commentary on this chapter at the Western Political Science Association mini-conference on care in 2018 and for making the connection between the image of the flower and the roots of political theory as a tradition. Thank you also to Seemi Ghazi for writing her beautiful essay on giving birth to her daughter and sharing the story of the *Panja-e-Maryam* with me.
investigation into the differential allocation of precarity and precariousness within our care webs and its consequences for the ecology of Islamic knowledges. The deliverance, reception and textures of a text are shaped by systems of ability and ableism which aim to domesticate care-based epistemologies and subjectivities as women’s work and Islamic knowledge reproduction as able-bodied man’s work. And so, through a materialist conception of history, I draw a parallel between the unequal and unjust division of care-work within Muslim kinship networks and the refusal to recognize the epistemic and interpretive authority of Muslim women and disabled Muslims. Instead of relegating care to the netherworld of dependency, I offer an alternative care-based conception of knowledge keeping that invites scholars of Islamic thought and praxis to re-visit the centrality of spectral histories of care and interdependency in knowledge production. The spectral web of care that houses our knowledge relations is constituted by multi-generational attachments, radical relationality, complex emotions, caring labours, economies of attention and historical orientations.

4.1.1 Matricide as an Epistemological Orientation

“Writing is a killer; one is never done with it”. With these words, in his essay and eulogy “The Night Watch” Jacques Derrida grieves the death of his friend, and secret sharer, Jacques Trilling. Similar to the life of “toil and trouble” lived by Arendt’s *Animal Laborans*, a writer’s life for Derrida is tied to the cycle of life, a force that depletes the writer, wears her down, makes her disappear, until eventually as her ideas are inscribed into textual matter she becomes dead matter (Arendt 1998, 4). Conversely, for Derrida, by death or by the labour of writing the author is not thrown into an eternal recurrence “where all natural things swing in changeless, deathless repetition” (Arendt 1998, 96); but rather *that* which compels one to write, and eventually the one who writes, are both fated to return to the source of it all: maternity. For Derrida, all that remains
of the written word, and our account of our selves, is its impression in the witness’ sensorial capacities; similarly, for Arendt, what remains of our stories is how they are remembered by those who witnessed our deeds and words. History, for Derrida, then becomes the impossible task of mourning: to continuously act upon this inheritance, an ethical obligation to care for the worlds left behind and for the world we will entrust to others with our departure. In writing, we die caring about this world, and in dying we are released from the forces of life that compelled us to write and entrust our inheritors with, in Sheldon Wolin’s words, the birth-work of caring for and improving “our common and collective life” (Wolin 1986, 181).

For Arendt, however, what we inherit is the upkeep of the human artifice, or the world-on-earth—which is the material pre-condition for historicality and collective identity. The “great storybook of humankind” is a sort of “in-between” world that infuses matter with the web of human relations, as something that is material and intangible; this web is always moving and being moved by the influx of newcomers (Arendt 1998, 52). However, as observed by James Baldwin (1953), in his essay “Stranger in the Village”, “people are trapped in history, and history is trapped in them”, in inheriting the upkeep of the human artifice, such newcomers also inherit (un)willed histories which inhabit our bodies, orientations and objects. Just as Baldwin cannot control or (un)intend how he is perceived as Black man in the tiny Swiss village, our stories are lived in the flesh by us but co-authored by those who are witness to our speech and deeds. Although action is disclosed by the spoken word, by which we announce our intentions, the narrativization of our doings and actions is relational, intergenerational and retroactively performed by multiple authors through the sense-capacity of witnessing and by storytellers who “make” the story.
Through the work of narrativity which moves in tandem with the fleshy rhythms of humankind, for Derrida, we are returned to maternity, and for Arendt we must return to the Earth, “the Mother of all living creatures under the sky” (Arendt 1998, 2). In another sense of return, for Arendt, we are returned to the world among men, through the remembrance of our words and deeds, in being seen and witnessed, by others (human plurality). In the Arendtian sense, natality, the capacity to begin anew, is phenomenologically rooted in the event of birth as perceptible through the sense-abilities of the witness. Acts of natality have a face, and actors appear through the capacity of publicity (to see and be seen) and the capacity of speech, (to hear and be heard) among others. Storytelling, the work of authorship, has a division of labour: those who make the story are different than those who build a place for stories to be lived and remembered. Yet, histories of world-making, of care, the stories of human hands, are faceless and trapped in the materiality of the human artifice. Stories of the spoken word, and of deeds, add to the texture of the grand web of human relationships.

Despite her commentary on the whoness of political subjectivity, in the discussion on natality and authorship, Arendt misses a critical question: who is the mother? This question is central for Derrida’s conception of natality and for amina wadud’s Hajar paradigm. In his essay, “The Night Watch”, also translated as “The Waking Woman”, unlike Arendt for whom natality is a point of origin, Derrida frames maternity as rooted in life and in death by framing the event of birth as an aporia. He likens the violence of writing to matricidal desire in which the author is driven to write by the desire to kill his mother as an attempt to erase the mark of his birth, of his being-born. Whereas, Arendt speaks of natality as a second-birth (Arendt 1998, 176), the ability to be born again, Derrida argues that it is impossible to give birth to oneself. In attempting to denegate her being-born, her origins, the writer is driven by a matricidal desire to kill her birth-
mother, by “killing [her]self by killing [her] birth, in other words, the maternity of one’s mother” (Derrida 2013, 102). And so, the birth of the political subject, of the political theorist, begins with the death of the (m)other.

The language of doing violence to the (m)other is also echoed in Arendt in two senses: in one sense, in her famous prologue in which she speaks of thoughtless men doing violence to the earth, the only thing that sustains men to become dwellers of the universe; and in the second sense in her conceptualization of reification. To measure himself against the earth, to become a master of the earth, *homo faber* participates in the violence and violation of appropriation. It is by “killing a life process”, by tearing resources from “the womb of the earth” (Arendt 1998, 89), through the work of tilling, that *homo faber* is able to prepare “the earth for the building of the world” (Arendt 1998, 138). Cultivated land requires consistent attention and care to remain cultivated, as place for humans to dwell and settle. The violence of fabrication, of world-making, for Arendt, is necessary to create a place on earth for humans to dwell that reflects back to us a sense of rootedness. Yet, this work of making a place through cultivating the land is intimately tied to work of displacement.

Taking a step back to connects the dots, here is a possible interpretation of Arendt’s thoughts on thinking, building and dwelling in the *Human Condition* that highlights the colonial implications of theorizing natality as a disembodied and ahistorical event. It is through violence to the land that we are able to build a world-on-Earth in which our stories can unfold, be remembered, be materialized into the written word and held in place in our relations. *Homo faber* is responsible for building our shared material world and creating the material conditions through which we author and remember our histories, including how we relate to the land as Mother. *Homo faber* is oriented by an idea/blueprint that animates him to intergenerationally build,
sustain and care for our home in this world-on-earth through violence and violation to the earth, while creating the material conditions for remembrance—history and witnessing. The process of fabrication becomes a spectral history written by invisible hands because its traces are made invisible in the creation and use of the product. Eventually, with death the individual actors and makers too become dead matter and must abandon their creations as the snail must abandon his shell.

But the blueprint of the product remains in the design of the object, and in our collective memory, as a guide for its inheritors to continue the work of fabrication, of caring for the world on earth. This violence and violation to the land, as mother, antedates the political, in that it is only through violence we can craft from earth a polis, a space of appearance, our place in the cosmos. It is with the violence of reification that men are able to inscribe their thought processes into material, tangible things such as books, paintings etc. with the “instrument of human hands” (Arendt 1998, 169). What is missed in feminist critiques of Arendt’s public/private distinction, is that there are two senses of history for Arendt, the collective memory as it is curated, cultivated and contested by its inheritors through audible and visible speech acts and the unspoken, unseen, and imperceptible histories trapped within the materiality of the human artifice, within stones that cannot speak for themselves (Jurkevics 2017, 46). These are histories of invisible hands—hands that till the land for you to build a home, hands that feed and clothe you, hands that hold you—so you are able to continue appearing in the world among men day after day as a self-fashioned political subject. Placed within this second order, or spectral dimension of the historical, are histories of sense-contact lodged in our bodies as ethical sensibilities and orientations.
4.1.2 The Spectral Histories of Dependency Care

As the durability of objects wears with use, and objects are returned to the earth with time, the histories of human hands that used them, created them, maintained them are buried as well. In this sense, the care work of *homo faber* and *animal laborans* that makes appearance, natality, possible is erased through its expenditure with the emergence of the political subject. Arendt not only places these spectral histories of labour, and interdependency, within the apolitical realm of the intimate, but also traps these histories beneath the edifice of the human artifice. Giving birth to oneself in the Arendtian sense not only makes invisible the birth work of our mothers, of maternity, but it also erases the traces of various types of labour and care-work which sustain us and provide for us a place to inhabit. Because the care-work of maternity, which predates the moment of Arendtian natality, is never complete, the political subject perpetually moves between two worlds: the netherworld of dependency (a world of spectral others and spectral histories trapped in the mute and static matter of the human artifice) and the world among men (of the polis, of unique individuals, of histories written, spoken and heard). It is in this latter world that the work of textual interpretation takes place, as a theoretical activity “concerned with reflection upon the meaning of past experience and of possible experiences” (Wolin 1986, 182). It is here where we interpret our birthrights, contest and create interpretations of our inheritance, our origins and the territorial, cultivated borders of the human artifice. What remains inscrutable outside the scope of discursive contestation are our ethical sensibilities and orientations that shape our sensorial capacities for critical inquiry.

And so, for Arendt, we are dependent in two critical ways: first, we rely on others for our stories to be told, to see and be seen as political subjects, to co-author the conditions of our collective life, its histories and possibilities; and second, we will inescapably be returned to the
pangs of hunger and bodily necessity and eventually, to the earth. Yet, we remain uniquely individual, and autonomous in the practice of moral judgement as political subjects capable of representing themselves through the spoken word, of becoming immortal. Prioritizing the spoken word over the written word as a mirror of our whoness, Arendt worries about the violence that comes with textual interpretation, when the reader takes the written word as a mirror of the writer as a living person’s whoness. Though the written word is an act of authorship rooted in the “source spring” of who they are, the source remains “outside the actual work process as well as independent of what they may achieve” (Arendt 1998, p.211). This is similar to the Quentin Skinner’s historicist dismissal of textual interpretation that seeks to identify the intentions of the writer as hermeneutic keys to the meaning of the text. What is interesting for our analysis is the notion of muteness, imprisonment within the self, as overcome by the process of reification (Arendt 1998, 68).

Arendt refers to muteness in many contexts: the violence of sheer strength as mute, the mute robots and tools of homo faber that have helped ease the pains of giving birth, the writer as a person is unintelligible, mute, to the reader and emotions and pain as mute. Muteness, for Arendt, is a veil of darkness that prevents one from witnessing that which is not articulated through speech, those who are located in the netherworld of the human artifice, and the fleshy layers of the written word that are inaccessible to the reader. From this point of no return, the individual is no “longer recognizable to the outer world of life” such as the experience of pain that removes one “from the world of things and men” as it “cannot assume an appearance at all” (Arendt 1998, 51). And so, an undercurrent within Arendt’s theory of authorship is a notion of radical subjectivity, of spectral others, histories, and non-verbal forms of appearance that escape
not only sensibility by the witness but also the reification process. There is no bridge between the world among men and this other place on earth.

Returning to Derrida’s take on natality and authorship, one cannot fashion herself as an independent political subject free of dependencies, free of a past, free of a mother, as it is impossible to give birth to oneself (Derrida 2013, 98). The writer can only attempt this murder as even in killing some particular mother figure, he finds that she reappears in maternity; and as such maternity will always escape death, it is impossible to give birth to yourself, to undo the role of your mother as the birth-giver in your story, as the creator of your coming into the world on earth (Derrida 2013, 94). Whereas Arendt sees human plurality and the capacity to speak and hear as the conditions for witnessing, for Derrida, maternity itself watches over us as a phantasm, as that which can never be substituted, erased, expunged by the work of world-building or authorship. The writer cannot expunge herself from the marks of her dependency, from maternity itself; it is this maternity that continues to watch over, to wake, to be vigilant, and to offer witness to those cast into the netherworld of the human artifice. Derrida distinguishes between two logics of maternity, the first in which we equate maternity with the mother’s womb, “the place of conception and birth” (Derrida 2013, 100) and the second is the determination of maternity, the day the birth has “undeniably” taken place. The latter notion of maternity refers to “the ineluctability of birth, of the marked hour, always already inscribed” (Van Boheemen-Saaf 2013, 197). In the former, the mother is a legal fiction created in and through “substitution, rational inference, phantasmatic or symbolic construction, speculation etc.” (Derrida 2013, 99). The latter resists substitution, it is irreversible. And so, in the Arendtian sense, with every newcomer there is possibility for beginning anew and for opening up our collective future and the web of human relationships. Yet, the irreversibility of action, of birth itself, is what Derrida
focuses in on as maternity. He concludes that one can try to get rid of, or kill, “some particular mother, though one will never be done with the maternity of the mother” (Derrida 2013, 88). Unlike the figure of some mother, maternity is a phantasm which survives, “she watches, the night watcher …vigil light…She—or it—survives [survit] and surveys [surveille]. Funeral vigil [veillée funèbre]. Wake” (Derrida 2013, 101).

In clearer words, what is the miracle for Derrida is not our capacity to begin anew or our shared fate (Williams 2001), but how little control we have over the conditions of our birth, and the lack of choice to be born—our dependency on the Mother and the labours of birth-workers to be born, and to be recognizeable. Unlike Arendt, in the notion of Derridean natality, the writer’s signature, her oeuvre of works that we inherit, cannot “be separated from the process of writing, from the singular, dated act or gesture” (Derrida 2013, 98); what this means is that authorship does not begin with the articulation of the spoken or written word, of appearing among men, but rather, our stories begin with our birth, and the birth-work of maternity that delivers our mother from the event of labour, and delivers the writer’s living body as “some mother’s child” through the process of witnessing (writing and reading for Derrida; speaking and hearing for Arendt). Similarly, the shape of the text cannot be divorced from the writer; and the writer cannot be separated from the person that inhabits the body that writes. And as much as humankind attempts to free itself from its imprisonment to the earth, to our mothers, to our dependencies, we will always be haunted by the facticity of our interdependency, of our nakedness, of that which calls us to account. If authorship entails violence and violation to the mother, to write the mother out of maternity, Derrida asks “what do we make of a maternity that would not be the maternity of a mother” (Derrida 2013, 100)?
4.1.3 Maternity as an Aporia

Maternity as an aporetic movement, as opposed to a second birth, or a chosen point of origin, adds a spatial and temporal depth to the delivery room; we can see the face of the Mother, smell the scent of her breath, feel the hands of the mid-wives, hear her ancestors whispering into her ears, feel the softness of the newborn’s skin. Perhaps this is what Derrida means at the end of his essay, when he asks if there can be “a life without matricide”, whether the writer can “take a breath beyond writing” (Derrida 2013, 102)? Such a model of authorship would require the writer to abandon the death drive and “to begin to learn to love the mother—and maternity” (ibid.). Can there be creation in death, movement in paralysis, travel though where one has been denied passage? And so, subverting Derrida’s thesis, I wonder if the etymological origins of the Greek word *aporia* are, *a* (without) and *poros* (impassable), which translate to “without passage”, and the event of birth is aporetic, then how do we deliver the (M)other from the impasse of radical subjectivity?

The laboring woman is “dependent upon others for safe passage for herself and her child” (Mozingo et al. 2002, 343). When a birthing woman’s expectations of trust, power, control and being kept informed are not met by those charged with her care and her delivery, she is left with a feeling of incredible anger and violation. The process of birth, for the laboring woman, is an unpredictable and vulnerable experience in which she has little control over “the physiological process of labor but also the right to control what is done to her, when, and by whom” (ibid.). When others fail to address us, to respond to us with care when we are in pain, or when there is a breakdown of trust in a relation of responsibility, we feel violated, let down, and enraged. The disempowered status of the patient in hospital spaces impacts a woman’s right to a dignified delivery. To be denied passage does not only mean maternal death or a stillborn child, it also...
means to be denied the conditions of a safe, healthy and dignified maternity in which one’s demands for quality care are heard from the point of conception throughout all spectrums of pregnancy outcomes including abortion and miscarriage.

Focusing on the birth-work of maternity, and not just the swollen belly, enables us to direct our energies to creating a world in which our right to live, our right to create is not violated. What I want to give to my daughter is not just a safe world, or a world of her own, but also a safe womb, a healthy, happy mother whose body is not tired and crushed by the world in which she was conceived. The act of birth substitutes its point of origin by becoming a point of origin itself; it entails a displacement of one for the sake of another. What remains radically in place and cannot be expunged, the mark of one’s birth, one’s dependency on the Mother to be born, on maternity, on care-work. What I mean by this is that the historical orientations that centre in on the disembodied womb, the faceless birth, write out from history “the invisible and changing hands” through which both the new born and the mother are delivered safely through the event of birth (Exel et al. 2008).

Derrida teaches us an ethics of inheritance, of witnessing, to reveal the historicity of maternity, its phantasms, its specters, as circulating around an impossible and lingering mourning for our (m)others inherited through the mark of our dependency, the irreversibility of our birth. Just as one cannot give birth to himself, or grieve his death, the work of mourning is shared and realized through our receptivity to our backgrounds, to what we have inherited from our mothers through our birth (Ahmed 2010). Interestingly, the care and love with which Derrida reads and interprets the texts he has inherited teaches us a way to love the (m)other and maternity. He folds into this notion of matricide two projects, one in which he inherits from Jacques Trilling the impossible task of negating the mother from maternity, and the other in
which he transforms this denegation of origin into a poetics of mourning *those* who were, and *that* which was, denied passage. As he writes this text, Derrida is mourning the death of his friend, Trilling, who at the time of writing his essay on Joyce was mourning the death of his mother, and in *Ulysses* Joyce was also in a “deep mourning” for his motherland and his mother tongue (Van Boheemen-Saaf 2013, 183). As one cannot give birth to oneself, one can also not grieve his own death and perform his burial rites of passage; the work of mourning is inherited and delivered by others within and beyond the horizon of our bodies.

The writers, through the written word, are processing a grief for *that* which was denied passage: Trilling’s mother, the Irish culture and language, and Trilling himself. All three writers are left with a sense of unspeakable grief: Joyce is left to piece together Irish identity only to realize that the legacy of British colonialism has committed an irreversible violence to his mother tongue and to his motherland; Trilling struggles with an existential crisis: how can the mark of his birth survive without its point of origin, his mother, and whether it is possible to continue in this world without her; Derrida grieves Trilling by inheriting his grief, by taking responsibility for delivering his friend from his mourning, watching over his wake. In doing so, he passes down to his reader an ethic of care which calls upon us to be vigilant, to watch over the past(s) we inherit through engaging with texts, to take responsibility for their mourning by both caring-about and caring-for the histories which have been denied passage. Such an ethic of witnessing is a way of holding in place, and holding close, our (m)others in our knowledge relations.

With this ethic of witnessing, I invite you to reconsider tradition not as a birthright, in Wolin’s sense, but rather as birth-work that is inherited and shared by many across time and space. The movements and rhythms of maternity are shared by many (m)others, within and beyond the womb, and are multi-directional, aporetic, downwards, sideways, intergenerational,
dizzying, radically heterogeneous and (inter)subjective. When we expand maternity beyond the womb, I wonder about the (m)others who we have been left behind to die alone in the Master’s care. As the world moves on, their grief remains still-born, their desertion is written as collateral damage in the long march of progress. Their names have been absenced from the archives, fragments of their stories sit awkwardly on the shelves of historians as their unburied grief remains lodged beneath the edifice of the modern nation-state. What role can we as Muslims, and political theorists, play in translating and in witnessing the radical subjectivities of spectral (m)others? Instead of journeying to Other shores, such an ethic requires us to first look inwards and assess the historical orientations that shape our dispositions to read, write and think about the mother as “other.”

4.2 The Womb and the World: An Islamic-Feminist Ontology of the Maternal Body

An Islamic-feminist ontology of the maternal must account for the plight of (m)others who differentially carry the weight of care-work in Islamic knowledge (re)production. Having re-conceptualized tradition as birth-work, I begin by opening up how the womb, motherwork, care and birth are conceptualized in the stories of Hajar and Maryam. I offer a model of citizenship not as birthright but as the work of maternity that requires us to practice presence and proximity (both of which require sense-contact) in our knowledge relations through care-based modes of witnessing. Harnessing maternity as an epistemological force requires embracing connection-based modes of knowing. And so, I re-work Eva Kittay’s question to ask:

What are my responsibilities to [m]others and what are the responsibilities of [m]others to me, so that I am well cared for and have my needs addressed even as I care for and respond to the needs of those who depend on me (Kittay 1998, 66)?

The triple entendre in (m)other holds together connected projects from which I build a decolonial and Islamic conception of maternity. The first is a critique of maternalist conceptions of
citizenship in which the child must detach herself from the mother and her dependency by giving birth to herself as an individual, autonomous political subject. The second observes an individual’s right to consensual and responsive care from mothers who she depends upon, and the mother’s right to be cared for as she cares for others. And finally, such a care-based mode of knowing requires us to be sensitive to the differential distribution of care-work and the precarious situation and lived experiences of the most vulnerable (m)others in our care relations.

In Eva Kittay’s connection-based model of doulia, the dependency worker has a right to relationships that “sustain her as she sustains herself and her charge” (43). In a “socially supported situation,” one can care for another without “the caregiving becoming a liability to one’s own well-being” (66). Within such a connection-based vision of equal and reciprocal care relations, what binds us to one another are our (inter)dependencies and the responsibilities we have to take care of one another and attend to the secondary dependency of the care-giver. In my family’s small care web, there are a lot of breakdowns and burnouts, and feelings of bitterness that threaten our bond to one another. Whether its barriers in communication, a lack of boundaries, a lack of cross-disability solidarity or just severe exhaustion from care-giving, every day brings new and unique struggles. No matter how we split the (non)nurturant care-work to meet my father’s access needs, there are just not enough resources, bodies or hours between us to evenly distribute and share the labour without violating our personal boundaries, depleting our material resources or compromising our health. Here the problem for all of us is not that care work is dirty, burdensome or unevenly distributed between us. Rather none of our social and structural situations, from work to school to extended kin-based networks, make way for our condition of secondary dependency or contribute to the distribution of care-work. Such institutional and social neglect manifests as interpersonal conflict, feelings of moral failure as a
daughter, wife or mother, and social isolation. As much as we value and love caring for our father, in whatever capacity, our love is not enough for us to survive as long as such abandonment exists within our kin-based networks of care, social circles, the Canadian state, in our relations with our employers, the Muslim ummah etc.

Kittay also defines care as the annihilation of the self that requires a transparent self that must identify the needs of the dependent before rendering her own. Under such conditions, narratives of the sacrificial mother such as in the heteropatriarchal readings of Fatima, Zaynab and Maryam in Islamic (con)texts not only breed resentment, disempowerment and bitterness (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018, 124) but are also weaponized against Muslim women to judge their competency and moral worth as mothers and daughters. One avenue for observing how spectral and “local genealogies of care” shape acts of knowledge production and consumption are the complex forms of “emotional harm”, “feelings of abandonment and alienation” and “estrangement” that arise at the fissures of such boundaries (Tungohan 2019, 230). Care is not a selfless act; it is the relational negotiation of responsibility and meeting the access needs of multiple selves with a limited amount of resources (which includes the political economy of attention). For example, as I turn away from the dirty dishes in the kitchen sink to write this chapter, my partner must turn away from his work and towards the dishes. Relatedly, Islamic acts of knowledge consumption such as attending Jummah prayer at the Masjid require someone, usually Muslim women, to stay at home and attend to childcare; or in Ramadan, as men fit in a few extra hours of Tarawih prayers or sleep before sehri, Muslim women differentially carry the work of meal-prep and cleaning in these hours. In turn, such community spaces then begin to take shape around the congregation of men and not women or families as seen in Islamic-feminist critiques of curtains that divide prayer spaces, or literally relegating
women into the basements of Masjids where you can hear the khutbah through a livestream. In my family’s situation, the “care deficit” means we are unable to turn away from our care responsibilities to face the prayer mat, especially my mother and sister as they differentially carry the brunt of non-nurturant care-work. Moreover, my father’s care and access needs are more complex than what the provincially mandated wheelchair ramp at our local Masjid offers. His embodiment of prayer requires my sisters and my mother to be present as carers and this simply is not possible with the way Masjid spaces are b/orderd. The time and space that are required to attend to reading the Quran, or writing an essay on Islamic ethics, for example, are b/orderd by the material distribution of un/paid caring labour and economies of attention. This means that the cosmology, and the cartography, of authorship goes beyond the singular and linear orientation of “turning away” and is shaped by multi-directional routes of migration and networks of emotion (R. H. Brown 2016; Nadasen 2017).

Yes, care responsibilities differentially demand the attention of women in academia and the guilt of turning away to face the writing table, or reading a book, is deeply gendered (Ahmed 2010). However, what I am drawing attention to is the epistemic violence with which knowledge-production has been naturalized and reduced to a turning away, a withdrawal, from the world and our relations. Reading and writing require the individual to turn away from the world and, momentarily, abandon our attachments and responsibilities. As we withdraw into the text, the world does not disappear, or cease to exist, but rather is held in place for our return through caring labours and relations. This does not mean, however, that knowledge is produced

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7 The “care deficit” I am referring to is different than the one articulated by scholars of global care chains. Not only is there little to no support for informal care-givers and homecare in Ontario, as first-generation immigrants we have no extended family members to rely on. And so, our network of kinship and care, as well as resources, are very limited.
in isolation by a disembodied and independent self because caring labour authorizes, and paves way for, the author to write or for us to attend *Jummah* prayer. In addition, there are multiple modes of reading in company or connective writing that contest such b/ordering in our knowledge systems. Opening up the boundaries of authorship requires valorizing the contributions of caring labour to knowledge production, accounting for the complexities of interdependence, affective economies and the subjugation of maternal subjectivities and epistemologies.

4.3 The Hajar Paradigm: Historicizing Maternity as a Category of Analysis

> Neither here nor there
> Yet now and here
> *Nazali āwa (I am here), Ozali āwa (You are here), Tozali āwa (We are here)*
> The ancestors whisper
> *And they cry out – reminding*
> *And they nudge, prompt, provoke*
> *And they ground, stoke*
> *Settle in common and comfort-in-between*
> *This is your (un)belonging, they say*
> *Take hold, go places*
> *Be in the world, be*
> *As the re-searching never dies*
> *In this here and now*
> *Neither here nor there*
> *The re-searching survives*
> *In (dis)placed bodies*
> *By (dis)placed bodies*
> *For (dis)placed bodies*

- Jen Katshunga (2019)

Like in any negotiation, power differentials shape who cares, how we care, why we care and for whom we care for. In witness of my mother’s extremely precarious position as a dependency worker, in the daily pilgrimage she makes to keep a roof over our heads, as well as for my father to “have a world” (Solomon and Lawlor 2018), she is differentially forced to make many compromises in order for others to survive. Whereas Kittay’s paradigm of doula is grounded in
the notion that care-givers are also “some mother’s child”, I find more resonance in amina wadud’s Islamic-feminist paradigm of maternity that centres the plight of Hajar. For wadud, the issue is not a lack of empathy or identification with the mother but rather that motherhood “has never been purely natural, it has always been shaped by religious systems, power relationships and material structures” (wadud 2006, 129). Reflecting on her experiences as a single, Black, Muslim mother in the US, amina wadud calls to open up maternity as a category of analysis within feminist and Islamic (con)texts (Abugideiri 2001; Rahemtulla 2017; wadud 2006). She asks:

How does a saying about “paradise at the feet of the mother” fit the struggles of poor and single mothers? or “women with disabled or un-able fathers, husbands brothers in a Muslim community that pretends such an expression is a statement of fact and therefore ignores the agony of these women, making them invisible (wadud 2006, 126)?

Reading this quote was the first time I ever felt that my family’s situation in a relation of dependency care was attended to in an Islamic (con)text. Such inquiry into maternity, and concern for (m)others, stems from wadud’s intimate reading of Hajar in the Islamic tradition in which a poor and enslaved single mother is “rejected on the grounds of race, sex and class, yet at the same time is the recipient of divine revelation” (Rahemtulla 2017, 152). Hajar, “an Egyptian slave woman, is given to Abraham as a concubine spouse” (wadud 2006, 122). Differing from Judeo-Christian interpretations, in the Islamic reading Hajar “becomes heir of a household ruled by Abraham and Sarah” because in the case of “any offspring resulting from the liaison of the master with the slave woman…” the “descendants of a slave were full and legitimate heirs to the inheritance legacy of their father-master” (wadud 2006, 124). The point here is not that it is proximity or relation to the Master that entitles Hajar to an inheritance. Rather, although the lifeworld that spit Hajar out and refused to observe her set of rights and entitlements, her
interpretive authority remains unquestioned and her unmet needs remain visible in the witness of the Creator. Modelling intersectional analysis, wadud extends the story of Hajar to wonder about the rights and reparations owed to enslaved Muslim (m)others who were forced to care for the Master and his children through the institution of slavery, as well as, what is owed to Muslim women who differentially carry the brunt of care-work in our kin-based networks:

\[
\text{lil-rijjali nasiban min-maa-ktasabu wa lil-nisaa’ nasibum min-maa- ktasabna}, \text{ for men shall have a share of what they earn and women shall have a share of what they earn . . . truly Allah has knowledge of all things” (wadud 2006, 141, 161).}
\]

However, wadud struggles to reconcile Hajar’s narrative with the contemporary place of the Mother in Islamic networks of extended family, as well as, with her own experiences as a single, Black-Muslim mother with no such network to rely on. There is no doubt an Islamic principle of doula and framework of maternal rights. Yet, why is it that we only care about the mother in so far as it concerns our position in the afterlife and disregard our complicity in the oppression of other mothers and the denigration of motherwork and maternal subjectivities in Islamic knowledge (re)production? Within my kin relations, I have observed: men usurp or withhold inheritance from my mother, grandmothers and aunties; friends abandon mothers going through a divorce and give their abusive ex-husbands platforms of leadership within the community; and gatekeepers and Muslim thought leaders remain silent about their complicity in supporting and funding regimes that terrorize Muslim mothers across the world in the name of Islam.

Like wadud, I too have a “painful response” to the saying “Paradise lies at the feet of the mother” as if “unconditional honor belongs to the one whose biology was created with the capacity to hold life under her breast and then in due time release it” (wadud 2006, 125). Just as I struggle to be both a care-giver and attend to this dissertation, wadud too finds her role as a Mother that must “maintain care and nurturance” for her children in competition with her duties

224
as a scholar who must advocate for the dignity of Muslim women. The story of Hajar teaches us that the ideal of the Muslim mother makes an impossible demand of Muslim women to be both the “bearer of the child” and also, to “make a way for that child to survive in a harsh world—like our beloved Hajar in the desert” and how she “was forced to make a way where there was none, for herself and her son” (wadud 2006, 147). I read in Hajar’s movements between Safa and Marwah how the material precarity (of the desert) that compels her to run in search of water shapes her relationship with her son as she is forced to turn away and estrange herself from him in order to find sustenance for him to survive. I wonder about how she feels in having to turn away from her baby. Or how do such stretches of separation shape how the baby relates to his mother? This also reminds me of the precarious secondary dependency of Black, Indigenous and racialized scholars who must not only be advocates for their communities in their thought and praxis but also remain present for the many who depend on them within their kin-based networks while receiving differential material support from the academy. Whereas, white scholars build careers in theorizing white supremacist violence, colonialism and race do not only have more access to resources to support their thinking, but also, have the option to not bring their work home, or be displaced or estranged from their homes through the very act of advocating for their communities. Black, Indigenous and racialized scholars are given no option but to think and write about such issues for their survival as their communities and selves are on the frontlines of such violence. Jen Katshunga (2019) in her essay “Too Black for Canada, too white for Congo: re-searching in a (dis)placed body”, bears witness to such epistemic violence in the academy:

Two years of my master’s was spent striving for lucidity – struggling to name what was happening to me and to others I care for – a form of violence in and of itself. By engaging in this praxis and survival of re-searching, I am making sense of my (dis)placed and colonised positionalities and inserting my experiences within research and academia (para.4).
As wadud reads the story of Hajar to care for the plight of racialized mothers, Katshunga also notes that “being out of place” in the academy as a Black scholar influences how she “moves”, the question she asks and the methods and praxis she uses in her scholarship. Knowledge production and consumption requires her to “deeply care” for the people she works with and writes about; such care-work, for her, is “unacademic” (ibid.).

Economies of attention not only shape how we care about others in our knowledge relations but also what we study. Critical disability scholar Hillary Clark, who bears witness to her mother’s psychiatric hospitalization as a scholar and as a care-giver, argues that “we do not fully choose our research” (Paterson et al. 2007, 45). What must be accounted for in our knowledge practices are our backgrounds—the historical orientations that turn us towards a certain subject as a matter of study or research interest—and how we relate to, and feel about, these orientations. The work of opening up the boundaries of political theory, and of Islamic thought and praxis, and holding them accountable for their matricidal impulses is differentially carried by Muslim, racialized, Black and Indigenous women.

4.4 In the Master’s Care: (De)Veiling the (M)Other

Here, I draw a parallel between the alienating and difficult work of opening up a tradition and birth as an opening of the mother’s body in labour. It is not fatedness, or a breakdown in our relational ecologies, that casts (m)others to suffer but rather a collective refusal to pave safe passage for (m)others. amina wadud likens this to an abandonment,

I opened my body again in surrender to Allah’s call. It yielded up the fruit that was planted between my legs, not in pain but in labor … The fathers meanwhile were present at both moments of opening. They also cry out in both, but for each a different manner of abandonment: the one, abandonment of their ego self into my body; the other, an acknowledgment of my body-self as it opens to bring forth the fruit of the seed, a new life, in the act of delivery. But, no matter what, on both occasions, and in no time at all,
they wipe away the sweat from their brow and walk away... Sometimes they never come back. And I am alone, the mother... No one celebrates the altar at my feet, for like Sojourner, I must plow the dusty fields and draw the carts upon my back. Even as my breasts harden and weep with the fullness of milk, the whip draws blood. Both flow freely in my awakening: there is nothing romantic about the one who works like a man to save her young from the mighty grips of death and despair. She grows hard in the task. Little thought is given to her: in opening to receive the seed, she also opened to be the one who was loved and cared for. But no one is there for her (wadud 2006, 126).

When induced by violation, grief and anger, affective and care-based modes of knowing, too unveil, open up our horizons and force us into “relationships of fate” with not only the aggressor but also the worlds and histories that enabled him to enact violence to our kin, bodies and lands. Instead of birth and natality, I build upon Black-feminist and post-colonial scholarship on mourning and death in which the image of the veil (instead of the womb) serves not only as a boundary-marker between the colonizer and the (m)other within the contact zone but also as a horizon through which one inherits intergenerational trauma and sensibilities of care. Whether it’s the French colonizer who deems the colonized subject as a legible moral person through unveiling, or the purdah system that contains Muslim women within the Home during independence movements, or if it’s W. E. B. Du Bois’ firstborn who through his death escapes the shadow of the veil, and remains untouched by its darkness, the veil as metaphor, and as a material and affective site, is made to signify the condition of colonial dependency as tied to the birth of the free political subject. Du Bois (1902), in his essay “The Passing of the First-Born” repurposes the metaphor of the Veil to signify a boundary that marks the legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and the possibility of discontinuity, of breaking free from its violent origins. The veil also marks the division between “Black consciousness and a White world” (Kanneh 2002, 157). Dubois likens the legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade as the shadow of the veil that haunts the birth of his son, to the colour of his son’s hair, to the death of his son at
two years old, “for where, O God! beneath thy broad blue sky shall my dark baby rest in peace,--
where Reverence dwells, and Goodness, and a Freedom that is free” (143)? As his son’s life is
dislodged from this place on earth, he struggles to find for his son a dwelling-place, a place to be
buried in dignity within the horizon of the Veil.

From within the Veil, enslaved women were forced to abandon their own children to care-for the Master’s children; many women bore children “who would live out their entire lives under slavery”, inheriting their enslavement “through the maternal line” (Collins 1995, 224). In the context of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the legal doctrine, *partus sequitur ventrem* (Rollo 2018, 309), “status follows the womb”, entails that within the veil the status of enslavement was inherited through the mother’s enslavement in British-American colonies (Cowling et al. 2017, 224; Morgan 2004). Still today, the Veil hangs over the lives of African-American mothers who are differentially at risk of maternal death and injury in the US and are “243 percent more likely to die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes” (Villarosa 2018). Through an analysis of colonial travel writings, Morgan observes that,

Those who would capture African women to exploit their labors in the Americas would have to grapple with, and harness, those women’s dual identity as workers and parents; once having done so they would inaugurate a language of race and racial hierarchy in which that dualism was reduced to denigration and mobilized as evidence of European distinction (Morgan 2004, 25).

Through the institution of slavery, childbirth was transformed by slave-owners into an “inconsequential and painless act in between tilling rows of soil, into evidence of Black people’s connection to animals” by eradicating the humanity of the enslaved woman and connecting her bodily capacity to reproduce to the capitalist needs of the slave-owner who “foresaw their own future in the bellies of enslaved workers” (Morgan 2004, 105). Morgan argues that “any discussion of women’s lives must tread carefully through the maze of cultural meaning ascribed
to reproductive experience” and that “childbirth itself is situational and demands historicity.” (9–10) Through a non-ethics of care, the caring labours of Black women’s bodies were exploited and appropriated to not only sustain the Master’s status as a free political subject but also sustain the colonial economy of settlement and the plantations that enslaved them. The netherworld of dependency care upon which the Master’s subjectivity is predicated in this context of coloniality is the legacy of forced labours of care by which America was founded.

And so, again, the notion of being *thrown* into a relation of fate, in Melissa Williams’ sense, is problematic because it erases the colonial histories of dependency care upon which the western institutions of individual freedom, the nation-state and political subjectivity are founded. Whether its exploiting or appropriating our mothers’ labours, or forcefully removing children from their maternal homes and relations, matricide is a defining feature of white supremacist logic. We are not thrown, or born, into asymmetric relations by the whim of fate as slaves, or as the oppressed, through our maternal lineage or lands, but rather it is the on-going, intentional and inherited maintenance of colonial architecture and subjectivities that oppress. By focusing on the event of birth, we blame our mothers for our birth as colonized and not the colonizer as he who enslaves, oppresses and erases. In turn we subjugate histories of care within which the caring labours and bodies of other mothers were alienated and instrumentalized to serve the Master’s interests in spite of their selves. In addition to caring labours, care-based epistemologies rooted in affective and affectionate knowing were also appropriated. How do such histories of care shape how we care, who we care for, and which modes of care-knowing are legitimized and valued today? If we inherit epistemologies and practices of care, then in what ways does this inheritance shape how we relate to other mothers, or even our own mothers and motherlands?
4.5 Staring, the White Gaze and the Intimacy of Wake-Work

While the mother-child paradigm within ethics of care literature relies on the politics of recognition, post-colonial scholar Kadiatu Kanneh explores the “place of the body” in white supremacist discourses and critiques its obsession with appearances (Kanneh 2002, 155; Morgan 2004, 13). Through an analysis of Frantz Fanon’s essay, “Algeria Unveiled” she interrogates how the Muslim-Algerian woman’s body was emptied of personhood and displaced/disembodied to form a surface upon which French colonizers and Algerian men negotiated colonial and national boundaries. By objectifying the body of the Algerian woman and placing her in an “in between space”, through a “metonymic process…both veil and woman become interchangeable, scopic signifiers of colonized Algeria itself—as oppressed, inscrutable and dispossessed” (Kanneh 155). The French colonizer aims to “first conquer the women…to find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where their men keep them out of sight” (156). This violence of “unveiling” entails forcing an Other to self-disclose through “revealing…baring…breaking her resistance…making her available,” (ibid.). Such acts of “rending veils” and “exposing bodies” are driven by the desire to transgress “forbidden horizons piece by piece” (ibid.). The white gaze of the “European Traveller” or “the detached gaze of an investor” is orientated by “wonder” and is never “satisfied” (Morgan 2004, 19). Here, to be “exposed to the gaze of others” entails that “endangerment of life” is a natural “precondition for the political” (Lorey 2015, 79). As argued by Rosemarie Garland Thomson (2009), such “dominance staring” can be a form of “non-verbal behavior that can be used to enforce social hierarchies and regulate access to resources” and the “colonizing look marks its bearer as legitimate and its object as outsider” (42). It is with this gaze that political theorists desire to
journey to other shores in search of undiscovered and untranslated knowledge systems and in hopes of opening, and accessing by force, such epistemic potential.

In the words of Fanon, “The European faced with an Algerian woman wants to see”; and so, “to the colonialist offensive against the veil, the colonized opposes the cult of the veil” (qtd. in Kanneh 2002, 155). In response to colonialist unveiling, and nationalist veiling, and the simultaneous, re-veiling of Algerian women through the civilizational care-work of Christian missionaries, the colonized subject is formed through a “network of European knowledge systems” composed of “written accounts…photographic records…motion pictures, and the gaze of the tourist and the foreigner” (Kanneh 2002, 158). Through this violent process of (un)veiling, the body of the colonial subject is not only “metaphorically invaded, analyzed and represented by liberal, paternalistic [or maternalistic] principles” but it is also accounted-for, cared-about and cared-for in a violent way (Kanneh 2002, 167). Margaret Urban Walker would read the Algerian woman’s body as a body made to speak in spite of itself; through such a reading, a remedy would require restoring her moral personhood through witnessing her violation in and through her own words, her own terms and her own voice, as well as making an ethical demand of the colonizer to account-for his actions, and to care-about her moral injuries.

But, the work of addressing the aggressor, translating, embodying and healing from the moral injury, and advocating is differentially distributed and carried in our knowledge relations. In addition, while the “the colonized” and their descendants know intimately and collectively through body-sense and world-sense the harms caused by coloniality, the white political theorist desires to know to add nuance to her descriptions of colonial violence. As the former does the work of translating moral injuries through their lived experience and situatedness, the latter
publishes, and profits, in her career from the appropriation of such pain and the translation
labours of such communities as a way of giving a voice to an oppressed other.

To uproot matricide as an epistemological orientation, we must understand that
knowledge translation is a form of breathwork that engages the body and is situated within
relational ecologies. In defining anti-Blackness as a climate that shapes the air we breathe
(Sharpe 2016, 76), Christina Sharpe asks,

What does it mean to defend the dead? To tend to the Black dead and dying: to tend to
the Black person, to Black people, always living in the push toward our death? It means
work. It is work: hard, emotional, physical, and intellectual work that demands vigilant
attendance to the needs of the dying to ease their way, and also to the needs of the living.
Vigilance, too, because any- and everywhere we are, medical and other professionals
treat Black patients differently: often they don’t listen to the concerns of patients and
their families; they rational palliative medicine, or deny them access to it altogether...
(Sharpe 2016, 16).

It is through the affective and care-based domain of knowledge consumption that we tend to the
“afterlife” of slavery and colonialism. Such “wake work” is differentially carried by Black
scholars and requires us to address and respond to violence in our knowledge relations (18).

Sharpe argues that teaching, writing and thinking about slavery as a Black scholar engages not
only “academic” knowledge but also “everyday” knowledge that “Dionne Brand calls ‘sitting in
the room with history’” (17). However, colonial modes of knowledge production gaslight Black
scholars by forcing them to produce knowledge counter to what they know:

we are expected to discard, discount, disregard, jettison, abandon, and measure those
ways of knowing and to enact epistemic violence that we know to be violence against
others and ourselves…for Black academics to produce legible work in the academy often
means adhering to research methods that are ‘drafted into the service of a larger
destructive force…thereby doing violence to our own capacities to read, think and
imagine otherwise” (ibid.).
And so, “living in/the wake of slavery is living ‘the afterlife of property’ and living the afterlife of partus sequitur ventrem…in which the Black child inherits the non/status, the non/being of the mother” (19). Sharpe offers wake work as knowledge consumption that engages modes of “inhabiting and rupturing the episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives” (ibid.). If we learn from Derrida, Sharpe and wadud’s models of receptivity that teach us to love the (m)other, how can witnessing, as knowledge keeping, take place through the work of mourning?

The translation of moral injuries, of making sense out of the senselessness of pain, is co-authored and delivered through relationships of care. However, when matricidal and white supremacist orientations and textual sense-abilities distort the witnessing capacities of political theorists and scholars of Islamic thought, then knowledge translation becomes a part of the colonial apparatus. Mucina et al. argue that “narratives of care, healing and relational practice…are constantly appropriated by carceral state systems—without the self-determination of the nations who protected these knowledges from hundreds of years of colonial genocide” (Mucina, Finney, and Palacios 2018, 33). The authors quote residential school survivor, Elder Willa Charlie, to illustrate how the settler-colonial state appropriates Indigenous care-based modes of knowing:

They beat civilization into me, telling me I was dirty for living on the land, forcing me to study indoors and live indoors. Be a civilized Indian. What I see now is I am invited to these outdoor classes to teach these kids about our lands and our plants and our teachings because these kids are stressed out and anxious and our teachings now it’s almost lost. (as cited in Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services & de Finney) (Ibid).

Building upon Sherene Razack’s critique of the “politics of rescue” (Razack, 2017) and Sara Ahmed’s work on pain, Mucina et al. pave incredible conceptual space to understand the phenomenon of “giving as violence” within western knowledge production. Here, “the West
takes and gives and in the moment of giving repeats as well as conceals the taking” (Mucina, Finney, and Palacios 2018, 34). Through such appropriation of caring labours and care-based epistemologies, knowledge translation becomes the work of “stealing the pain of others…as another way of binding pain to create tropes of settler benevolence” in order to represent Indigenous peoples as “inherently broken, in need of fixing and rehabilitation” (ibid.).

4.6 Translating Anger as a Shared Labour of Care

In addition to the differential distribution of responsibility for knowledge translation, the colonialist desire for the (m)other to tame, discipline and civilize her grief and anger in order to appear recognizeable imposes upon the (m)other a standard of respectability. Such an orientation to contain and domesticate (or in Sharpe’s sense the violence of Black redaction and annotation) affective and poetic dimensions of political critique can be observed in Martha Nussbaum’s dismissal of anger as a resource for revolutionary politics. She argues that “the target of anger is typically a person, the one who is seen as having inflicted damage—and as having done so wrongfully. ‘I am angry at so-and-so’ (Nussbaum 2015, 43). And the focus of anger is an act imputed to the target, which is taken to be a wrongful damage” (Nussbaum 2015, 42). For Nussbaum, whether an ethic of anger calls for retribution or for reparations, the transactional terms of political claims rooted in anger not only foreclose the possibility of forgiveness but also inhibit our ability to demand justice for those beyond the scope of our kin. Working off of Aristotle’s definition of anger, she argues that: 1) anger has a cognitive/intentional content, 2) beliefs inspired by anger are eudemonistic and centered on the agent’s own view of what matters, and, 3) anger is experienced subjectively in inconsistent and contradictory ways (Nussbaum 2015, 42). Therefore, for Nussbaum, anger has little to offer coalition politics; the experience of anger is too uncontrollable, threatening and individualized for it to be a sustainable resource in
revolutionary politics. She reads anger as a disruption to our capacity to love, our capacity to forgive. Reading Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, she argues that a very rare type of anger, transition-anger, when “managed by such a skillful entrepreneur” can be both useful and serve as a “source of motivation” (Nussbaum 2015, 55). However, in her reading, anger cannot thrive as a revolutionary tool when paired with imaginative fantasies of payback—of African-Americans inflicting torture on white Americans; and so, as long as it is productive, and not targeted towards the destruction of white supremacy, the anger of Black-Americans for Nussbaum can be allowed. She concludes that though anger may deter others from infringing upon our rights, this deference only nurtures aggression in both parties. Here, she presents anger as a behavior we perform to prevent others from violating our moral and physical personhood and as an opportunity for transforming narratives of past injury into hopeful visions of the future. For Nussbaum, the experience of anger does not contribute to restoring the moral personhood and dignity of marginalized members of society. It cannot “bring dead people back to life, heal a broken limb, or undo a sexual violation” (Nussbaum 2015, 45). In celebrating, and of course typecasting, Dr. King as the productive angry Black man, who does Nussbaum fear and read as a the threatening and angry Black man? Frantz Fanon—whose work on anger is rooted in an ethic of love.

In his text, Black Skin, White Masks, Frantz Fanon argues that the colonized under occupation develop an inferiority complex which sits in their bodies as ressentiment. This bitter, lasting aggression nourishes in the colonized a desire to destroy the colonizer, an envy for his possessions, and an anger towards his own community and himself. For Fanon, colonial rule thrives by planting in the hearts of the colonized the seed of anger, in all of its self-destructive potential. However, through body-sense, our desires and imagination, we can tap into the
transformative potential of anger by harnessing this aggression through violent civil
disobedience and overthrow colonial rule. For Fanon, violence is an ethical obligation, a
cleansing force, fueled by collective anger. In the words of Holocaust survivor, Jean Amery,
“revolutionary violence on the other hand transforms not only today's revolutionary, but
yesterday's oppressor, into human beings” (Brudholm 2008, 16). Would Kittay argue that both
Jean Amery and Fanon, due to their refusal to respond, to forgive, are absolved from the relation
with the colonizer? This question is similar to whether the Master, in becoming cognizant of his
status, would absolve the relation of domination? From critical race theorists, to intersectional
feminists, to decolonial community organizers, many rely on Fanon’s story of anger as

catharsis—as crucial to developing an epistemology of resistance. How do we reconcile Fanon’s
story of releasing anger, as if it is a sickness, contained in our body like fever, with stories of
anger as medicine, as a shared and collective experience and energy that heals as a carrier of
knowledge?

To answer this question, we must first look at the uses of anger in revolutionary politics--a
conversation that begins with Audre Lorde and the intellectual and emotional labours of Black
feminists. In her essay “The Uses of Anger,” Lorde writes of her anger as her body’s way of
protecting and healing itself. Like Fanon, she also argues for anger to be released, but instead of
choosing violence as its carrier, Lorde speaks of the body as a host of anger, and of anger as a
visiting ancestor who has brought a gift of knowledge (Lorde 1997). Her anger enables her to
respond to racism, name it and envision a future without it. She frames anger as a site for
translating pain and moral injury into knowledge. What is key to note here is that anger is a
critical site for practicing imaginative resistance. Aggression here fuels our capacity for thought,
of imagining an elsewhere and otherwise in which we find ourselves worthy enough to make
ethical demands of others and to demand justice for racist violence. However, without translation, the aggression of anger sits in our bodies as a stench, comes to silence us, and eat away at our moral personhood. For both Lorde and Fanon, denying anger sensibility delimits our capacity to make ethical and political claims.

Sara Ahmed, in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, picks up where Lorde leaves off by framing the work of translating anger as a collective moral responsibility. She begins with a critique of Wendy Brown’s and Martha Nussbaum’s respective anxieties of grounding normative projects in the reactionary politics of anger. Echoing Lorde, Ahmed argues that “transforming and translating pain into political action requires anger: an interpretation that this pain is wrong, that it is an outrage, and that something must be done about it” (Ahmed 2004b, 172–78). Building upon her work on body politics and emotions as surfaces upon which collectives emerge, Ahmed notes that “if anger pricks our skin, if it makes us shudder, sweat and tremble, then it might just shudder us into new ways of being; it might just enable us to inhabit a different kind of skin, even if that skin remains marked or scarred by that which we are against” (Ahmed 2015). Like Fanonian catharsis, Ahmed centers in on anger’s potential to release to new ways of being-with, of being free, of emerging as a political subject and as a collective movement. The labour of translating our anger, my anger, requires transforming the ways we hear, see, and receive the anger of others. How do we make space for the anger of others in our knowledge relations without blocking out the information that makes us uncomfortable? Although, anger is a creative force that helps us find the words to name that which we are against, in the words of Marilyn Frye, it is only as potent as it is received. For Fanon and Lorde anger frees the individual from her pain, however, this aggression cannot be left alone, uncared for and contained within our bodies. For its transformative potential to be released, it must be
shared and communicated if not to creation than to Creator. The burden and relational responsibility of translating is a shared labour that requires us to, in Butler’s words, “hearing beyond what we are able to hear” (Butler 2009a, 25).

What Nussbaum sees as anger’s weakness, Judith Butler sees as its greatest strength. Butler has high hopes for anger’s imaginative dimension because it is centered in the first-person point of view, the dwelling-place of the I. She tells a more nuanced story of emotions as uniquely isolating and solitary experiences, as sensations, as fields in which communities gather, and as political resources for coalition politics. She argues that “to be injured means that one has the chance to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession and fear” (Carver and Chambers 2008). Stories lived in anger, stories told in anger, “have to be told, and they are being told, despite the extraordinary trauma that delimits narrative capacity” (Butler 2004, 7). The transformative potential of anger rests in how it is harnessed through democratic structures of storytelling to facilitate caring encounters between individuals:

I tell a story about the relations I chose, only to expose somewhere along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations…my narrative falters….were undone by each other and if we’re not were missing something…one is undone by another, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent by the feel by the prospect of touch, by the memory of the feel (Butler 2004, 14).

Ahmed, like Butler, argues that we need to become critical of how we read anger, how we “hear and receive anger.” (Ahmed 2004b) Grief and rage, in particular, “tear us from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us implicate us in lives that are not our own irreversibly if not fatally” (Butler 2004, 25). By listening to the stories of others, and allowing our sense of self to come undone, to be de-centered, we can not only open up space for forgiveness but also reveal new orders of moral responsibility. Similarly, Margaret Walker argues that:
The “aim” of resentment is, ideally, to activate protective, reassuring, or defensive responses in some individuals, or in a community that can affirm that the victim is within the scope of that community’s protective responsibilities, or that the resenter is in fact competent in grasping and applying the community’s shared norms. The transgressor can reassure the wronged party, and also the community by “getting the message”: she might respond with acceptance of rebuke, with evidence of remorse or shame, and might offer apology or amends (Walker 2006b:135).

Such stories re-orient our senses and enable us to hear beyond what we are able to hear and to challenge the moral justifications for the use of violence against the Other. Unlike Nussbaum who focuses on the anger of the oppressed, Butler focuses on the global dimension of anger in which anger is a response to universal suffering and not simply an individualized reaction located in the Manichean stronghold between us vs. them.

4.7 The Abuse of Witness: Unveiling as Violation

What is rarely discussed in affect theory is an abuse of witness where such re-orientation of senses is orientated by colonial sense-histories of contact in which the desire to know and make sense of the other is driven by the colonizer’s desire to domesticate and contain otherness within the netherworld of the self-same. How do political theorists appropriate the caring labours of colonized peoples and the sensory scenescapes of violence within which their struggles for resistance are situated? Such scholarship in the politics of affect falls short in addressing the sense-histories of colonial contact by which our capacities of sight and hearing have been orientated to invade the Other. The task of undoing, unauthorizing, colonialist and nationalist codes of inscription, of (un)veiling through the eyes, in particular, cannot be done by disembodied and self-enclosed modes of witnessing.

For example, French colonization forced Algerian women into a relationship of dependency, and through this relation care was militarized as a civilizational and colonial
apparatus by which the French colonizer forced himself into delivery rooms, to see the face of the Algerian (m)other, unveiled and within the confines of his care. In this scenario, colonialism shaped his access to see the face of the Other and this faculty of sight, as orientated by coloniality, continues to do harm to others as French state officials disrobe Muslim women and police acts of veiling. Demanding others to make their selves visible to our senses, to make their anger and grief sensible, inscribes onto the Other’s body the boundaries of belonging. Those who are designated as not dwelling and inhabiting this place with me must meet my epistemic and ontological criteria of appearance. This ethical demand we make of the Other to reveal herself in order to gain equal moral standing underpins xenophobic politics: from Muslim Niqabis in Quebec forced to unveil to disclose eligibility for public services; to prospective migrants to the Netherlands instructed by “Naar Nederland” to keep their curtains open; to demanding a Sikh-Canadian politician to publicly denounce his religious affinities to express allegiance to the Canadian state. And so, just as one must make herself visible, sensible, to be recognized as a political subject, as a moral person, she is also forced to open herself up to the subjectification process if she wishes to be cared-about, and cared-for, as a political subject and moral person.

In the case of grief, what is desired is the (m)other to perform for the white gaze a productive mourning that makes the white observer feel good about herself through witnessing the pain of an Other. The Black, racialized and Indigenous (m)other is asked to mould from her grief a birth, a future for us all. This echoes the linear, emancipatory narrative of the French Colonizer who demands the (m)other to bare herself; for the world to be moved to care about her, to claim her as a moral person, she must lay bare her grief for the world to see, forcing to be-for another, or in Butler’s terms, “by virtue of another.” Butler argues that the work of mourning can begin to grieve the “unreal”, those whose lives history has written as ungrievable, who could
not be mourned as they were seen as “already lost, or rather never were”; such individuals invite to be “killed since they seem to live on stubbornly in this state of deadness” (Butler 2004, 33). However, as I have argued above, the violence of sight is not limited to dehumanizing representations, rather, sometimes our capacity to see, to bear witness, is a violation in and of itself. I remember in that hospital quiet room, I felt deeply disturbed by the doctor’s access to my mother’s tears; in his gaze, she was an irrational, mourning Muslim mother in hysteria whose husband was in his care. And so, in addition to how we see, it is important to interrogate the worlds, (con)texts and histories that condition how and what we can see that give our eyes access to metaphorically and literally invade the bodies of (m)others.

By relying too heavily on the empathic boundaries of moral imagination as a compass that orients us to care-for others, Butler’s notion of ungrievable lives, of lives never lived, cares-for the grieving (m)other in the same way that the French colonizer cares-for her: through unveiling. Both see her, and inscribe her, as a life not lived, as a corpse dispossessed, “unburiable”, and denied a dwelling-place in her own land (Butler 2004, 34). Through the emancipatory politics of recognition, for Butler, Kittay and Walker the (m)other appears in and through the senses of those charged with her care. And so, it is not that the (m)other’s body is inscribed or represented in such a way that it is made to speak in spite of itself. But rather, the (m)other is coerced into a relation of dependency with her oppressor for her stillborn truths to be delivered, and is left in the charge of, to be cared-for, by the Master in his house, with his tools. The limit on authorship here is not the inability to speak, or the problem of being spoken-for, but rather the deep violation of being made to be cared-for, of having one’s body bared to receive care that is not at all attentive to one’s needs or consensual, by a care-provider and relation of dependency that cares only in spite of the person that inhabits the body.
Just as the slaveowner cares for the reproductive value and potential of bodies, and not
the persons that inhabit them, white-orientated political theorists see in discarded bodies and
(con)texts potential for adding to the texture of colonial violence to their writings—the sense-
experience of which does not inhabit their body, and upon which their moral personhood is built
upon. Through Derrida’s image of a maternity that wakes, that watches, I argue that Butler’s
notion of grievability can only be sensible through the contemporary horizon of the living body.
By dissolving the boundary of the living/dead, the spectrality of a dead (m)other’s grief compels
others to respond to her, to address her beyond the domain of speech. Or as we will read in the
poem in the next section, the stench of the dead body in the Master’s chambers has a witnessing
capacity of its own. It is from her positionality, and her situatedness as a Black scholar “living
in/the wake of slavery” that Christina Sharpe asks,

But even if those Africans who were in the holds, who left something of their prior selves
in those rooms as a trace to be discovered, and who passed through the doors of no return
did not survive the holding and the sea, they, like us are alive in the hydrogen, in oxygen;
in carbon, in phosphorous and iron; in sodium and chlorine. This is what we know about
those Africans thrown, jumped, dumped overboard in Middle Passage; they are still with
us, in the time of the wake, known as residence time…How can we think (and rethink
and rethink) care laterally, in the register of the intramural, in a different relation than that
of the violence of the state? In what ways do we remember the dead, those lost in the
Middle Passage, those who arrived reluctantly and those still arriving” (22)?

Learning to bear witness to their stories requires seeing our selves as complicit, co-constituted
and situated within the scenescape of colonial violence within which they were enslaved and our
complicity in the afterlife, and in the wake/of slavery. Whether it’s in rage, or in love, or through
the work of mourning ,or of maternity, we inherit and re-enact the boundaries that divide and
attach us to others. Although “loss has a tenuous we out of us all” (Butler 2004, 20), our bodies
still carry within them their “unwritten creativities”, possibilities for connection and attachment,
to mould our shared loss and vulnerability into dwelling-places for the unconsoleable and stateless.

Butler envisions grief-work as a political resource which can harness labours of mourning to induce collective re-alignment and (re)signification. Similar to Walker and Kittay’s notions of the disclosure potential of connection and attachment, Butler too argues that:

> When we undergo loss, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are… compose us… Who am I without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted we do not know who we are or what we do… I think I have lost you only to discover I have gone missing as well (Butler 2004, 22).

However, instead of “Who am I without you?” in the case of (post)coloniality, the question is: who would or could I, and we, have been outside of coloniality? It was not fate, or the happenstance of travel, that gave whiteness entry into the Two-Thirds world; it was the genocidal impulse to occupy, destroy and erase. The origin of relations of shared fate is violence, not consent. Both of these questions are performative utterances of a mourning, of how grief reveals our (inter)dependencies. However, in the former, there is a sentiment of preservative love for the (m)other in which we affirm our origins as constitutive of us and in the latter, there is a stillborn melancholy for the (m)other who we are unable to trace our return to, and reclaim our origins to an “authentic” mother, or a pre- and post-colonial future in which our (m)others are returned to us. And so, I ask Butler a question, how does it feel to be forced to feel that the very thing that is constitutive of your marginal identity is also charged with the destruction of your (m)other and motherland? There is a limit to our empathic abilities, to grieve for the (m)other, to understand the moral injuries of the (m)other. However, our failure to grieve-for the (m)other is not a fatalist sign that traps the (m)other in her state of deadness, denying her passage into moral personhood, but rather it is the (re)surfacing of a boundary with which we have sanctioned as outside scope of the self-same.
Instead of expanding our moral imagination to claim the (m)other’s grief as our own, or to claim the (m)other as “some mother’s child”, we must bear witness to our role in presencing the affective boundaries of white supremacy in our knowledge relations. The boundary-marker is not the body of an Other but rather our complicity in refusing to respond to or be addressed by the (m)other in our knowledge relations. In doing so, we also play a role in denying the mother a dwelling-place within this world. By speaking-of this boundary, instead of speaking-for or speaking about the (m)other, we make ourselves witness the ways in which it has denied us the ability to receive the mother’s moral and material injuries, and in doing so, we can see ourselves as complicit in her violation. It is through this mourning, of grieving the ways we have been implicated in violence through the histories and worlds we presence and inherit in knowledge production, that our sense of “we” comes undone to make us morally accountable to (m)others. In birthing a boundary, we are not moving from darkness into light, from object into moral person, or dead to living, but rather we are beginning to surface those parts of us which have been complicit in authoring the conditions that threaten and deny the birthing (m)other safe passage through her delivery. This critical activity is not a stretch of moral imagination to widen the circle of our kin to care-for the (m)other, but rather, it is learning to be response-able to structures of white supremacy. We do this not by journeying to other shores, or indulging in the (m)other’s grief to “continue our conversations” but rather thinking with care requires us to think-from where we are situated, in our bodies, in our relations, with the land, and in our shared histories (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017).

4.8 **To be Estranged from our Mother(land)s**

The work of witnessing, whether preservative or melancholic, interrupts “the self-conscious account of ourselves” (Butler 2004). Grief-work, for the colonizer and his descendants
and collaborators, requires of them to recognize their inheritance, not the Other, as conceived through violence. The Master must mourn how the colonialist and nationalist impulse to inscribe and enclose the origins of authorship within his Self has disrupted his ability to hear and tend to the (m)other’s wounds. The (m)other and daughter, who have been harmed by him, however, have very different points of arrival into the sensescape of grieving colonial violence which results different orders of accountability. The (m)other and daughter must grieve the ways in which histories of violence continue to be (re)presented as a boundary that disrupts their ability to care-for one another by denying them mutual identification. Kadiatu Kanneh (1994) explores this through the feelings of displacement and dislodging of the Black mother from her white-passing daughter or the Black daughter’s alienation from her white adoptive mother. She asks, “how do we re-mother ourselves through re-reading our mothers?” and “how do we reconnect the ‘true’ histories, the forgotten origins” (28)?

(Post)colonial musings of a “pre-colonial spring” that rely on narratives of migrating across time-spaces rely on the fiction of an elsewhere and otherwise where we can return to, a “landscape of racial histories…other motherlands” where we can ground our story’s origins, “or against which to place a new one, politically and culturally connected.” (29) As seen in the writings of Alice Walker, “understanding one’s mother, learning her story, becomes an act of racial and historical reassertion and self-understanding…a personal history denied recorded literary heritage…[or] artistic heritages [that can be] traced through oral memories and unwritten creativities” (ibid.).

While the one who’s capacity to grieve-for the (m)other is disrupted must begin from where he is at, this narrative pilgrimage of “Black self-expression...begins at home” (ibid.). Building upon the narratives of mixed-race writers, Kanneh asks what happens “when the racial
story suffers a radical break between one’s mother and oneself”, when “color and culture do not coincide” (ibid.). This is where we can “explore metaphors of landscape, narrative and origins” that territorialize regimes of belonging within and beyond feminist cultures. Those who dwell within this margin, who cross the boundary, are “seen as proof of the unhinging of static differences,” who challenge myths of authenticity, of biological essentialism (the notion that “Blackness or womanness can always be born into, inherited and metaphysically inevitable”), and of political essentialism (the notion that Black consciousness or feminism, or belonging, is dependent on certain cultural criteria)” (ibid.). These boundaries within “the sign’s field of play, but also beyond it, regulate who is in, who is out, and “what being in entails” (31) For example, the formation of “Black women’s or Black feminist cultural traditions have largely relied on notions of community or heritage; on oral communications between mother and daughter; or on mourning and imaginatively reconnecting links broken through historical violence” (ibid.). Connection-based modes of knowing surface complex emotions within our relationships which means that sometimes there are breakdowns in the relation between mother and the child, as well as the child and the mother(land). As articulated anecdotally by Shyama Perera, the reach of the contact zone extends to the mother-daughter relationship in which the veil is inherited as a boundary-marker:

I knew I was Sri Lankan, but I didn’t feel that it made me difference. Whereas my mother dressed in a sari, and if she walked across a group of skinheads they’d shout out Paki, if I walked past they would whistle at me—the opposite reaction (qtd in Kanneh 1994, 31).

Kanneh notes that this racist encounter intrudes the “dialogue between mother and daughter” interrupts “the normal dimensions of motherhood” (Kanneh 1994, 33) and the mother’s ability to nurture and love her child. Framing love as a “form of natural communication between mother and child” Kanneh explores how the capacity to love, and the practice of loving is “perverted”
when one is denied the ability to identify with her (m)other, her authorial origins, or her child, when the world that she has birthed is dis-identified from her, or when you have been dis-identified from your mother (land) (33–34). The impossibility of seeing yourself in your mother as a mixed-race child, or as an adopted child, as a way of “reading the self in reference to the mother’s history” results in a sense of self that is “fraught with contradictions” (ibid.). The child is left with an impossible mourning, a “night-longing for the real mother, based on body, flesh and appearance” (ibid.) which throws her into the activity of “blood-tracing of Black cultural inheritance”, to claim “a Black political mother of a different nationality from Black, white or adoptive parents” (35) Kanneh likens this longing to the desire to be written a letter by the birth mother, “the desire for written communication…for reading of her mother’s identity physically, through her own inscription” (ibid.). And so, Kanneh concludes that “Black cultures of resistance or self-recognitions are not always or even simply inherited” and “to gain a valid political voice have repeatedly and contextually to reinvented themselves in dialogue and in conflict with racism” (35–36).

Instead of romanticizing the event of birth, naturalizing identification as a static feature of the mother-child relation, or glorifying stories of the mother, or the racialized, Indigenous or Black scholar, as a saint that sacrifices her body to care-for others, we should instead explore the “historicity of motherhood” (wadud 2006, 129) as “an unnatural and socially constructed institution” experienced in different ways. To connect these two arguments about motherhood and feminist epistemology, as Muslims and as political theorists we must assume responsibility “for the character of its reconstruction…to incorporate critically the paradigmatic implications in the life of Hajar as relieved in various ways by Muslim mothers today” (ibid.). How, and who, do we silence, erase and harm in interpretations of Fatima and Zaynab as loyal, obedient and
caring daughters, or Maryam’s womb as a vessel for Allah’s plan, or Khadija as a generous and
giving maternal figure to the prophet, or Asiyah as a sacrificial and devoted surrogate mother to
Moses? The maternal body in all of these interpretations is read only as a vessel, an instrument,
or resource meant to nourish the formation of man as prophet or a site upon which the signs of
Allah are marked.

In contrast, the womb also is used as a signifier that marks the political boundaries of the
ummah, or as an invocation of beginnings, in “bi smi Allah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim” as “In the
name of Allah the Compassionate Caring.” More literally, there is a tie between Ar-Rahman
(Allah as the compassionate, as the merciful carer) and rahm (which means the womb in Arabic,
Urdu, Farsi and Pashtun). What is ignored is Muslim women’s pivotal role as witnesses, judges,
and receivers of Revelation within Islamic (con)texts and the persecution they have faced in their
societies for laying claim to interpretive authority. As argued by Aisha Geissinger (2008), the
“Mothers of the Believers”, the wives of the Prophet, played a pivotal role as witnesses of his
reception of Revelation. Their homes were not only loci for “exegetical debates” but also
“place[s] where Revelation descended” (59). And so, because the Mothers of all Believers
carried “intimate knowledge of Muhammad’s personality, along with the possibility of an
affective bond with him”, they were direct eye- and ear- witnesses to the reception of Revelation,
as well as the embodiment of sunnah (158). Their homes were not only a “locus for exegetical
debates” but was also a “place where Revelation descended”; it is through such proximity, that
their emulation and description of sunnah and hadith bears interpretive leverage (157). As the
contributions of Islamic-feminism demonstrate, there are vast histories of Muslim women
actively engaged in Islamic knowledge production as jurists, poets, interlocutors, knowledge-
keepers, receivers of Revelation, witnesses, and scholars. Yet, Muslim women continue to be
seen as “intellectually deficient and unfit” to embody interpretive authority and if they do intervene through the written word, they are perceived as inciting social unrest (*fitna*) and are marked as a sign of the apocalypse (Geissinger 2008, 35, 210; Saleh 1999, 136). Suspicions about women’s epistemic and ontological capacity as knowers of Revelation fold into either the absence or erasure of tafsir and hadiths by women or a blighted location within the isnad. It is through such b/ordering of interpretive authority that “the Home” is territorialized as a place for care-work and not epistemic or political activity (Geissinger 2008, 61). And so, just as the patrilineal b/ordering of kinship excludes women as inheritors of property, heteropatriarchal and ableist conceptions of personhood deny Muslim women from inheriting interpretive authority as a Muslim.

In addition, taking for granted “the sanctity of motherhood” makes us ignore “the burdens of care-work for all mothers” and constrains us from mapping how this myth has “failed to protect those who gave birth and raised children in urban poverty or rural slavery (wadud 2006, 129). What wadud invites investigation into is the multiple ways in which Hajar’s plight are (re)produced:

Such women were assaulted by their status and still expected to be paragons of the virtues of selflessness and sacrifice useless for their and their children’s plight – survival in a contemptible margin of invisibility” (ibid.).

What I value in the way wadud reads her pain as a single Black-Muslim (m)other onto the story of Hajar is that she shows how the work of authoring and authorizing heteropatriarchal interpretations of Islamic (con)texts in which the mother is silenced, erased and abandoned is not Revelation-based but rather an earthly inheritance of world-building practices that endanger the mother. She asks,

How many Muslims who run seven times between Safa and Marwah actually reflect on
the realities of a woman who entered into a customary practice of her cultural heritage and bore a child for a man soon to be recognized as the father of monotheist, scriptural religious traditions. Hajar was raised in a context with certain customary codes that promised she would never have to worry about her or her child’s livelihood or protection. What did she feel when such an unprecedented responsibility fell upon her shoulders – to say nothing of life in the desert! Once isolated from a network that had carried the promise of provision, protection, and care, nowhere in the exegetical literature of Christianity, Judaism, or Islam is the reality that this woman faced juxtaposed to the understanding of normative family at that time or in the present. Her status as single head of household is never commented upon, no one was held accountable for its resolution, and later legal codifications in Islam would still overlook it. Such patriarchal practices and texts do not elaborate on her plight (wadud 2006, 161).

Both wadud, and Derrida, show this conceptual contiguity between the (m)other’s womb and regimes of birthright citizenship that demarcate the boundaries of belonging within a political community. Whereas Derrida explores the boundaries of the “nation” within the state, as individuals become “brothers in the sharing” of a dismembered body” (Derrida 2005, 19), wadud explores the boundaries of the ummah and the notion of the extended family in Islamic (con)texts. wadud notes that the political community of the ummah is rooted in the word for mother because in the Quran blood relations are “discussed in terms of relations to the womb (4:1)” (wadud 2006, 131). By detaching mother from narratives of sanctity, wadud unpacks how the family is understood in Islamic (con)texts to: 1) advocate for more egalitarian notions of family in Islamic societies, 2) illustrate how such an ideal is rooted in Quranic social and moral texts, and that 3) such a reconceptualization of kin-based networks of care is instrumental to the survival of the ummah (ibid.). In the Islamic text, the two features of family are: conjugal relations and the construction of extended relationships for child upbringing. The form of the relation results in “procreation”, however, as wadud argues, such “systems for the protection of and care for those procreated” can also result from “uncaring situations” such as rape, camps of Bosnian Muslim women in Croatia, or after the transatlantic slave trade” (wadud 2006, 151).
Micro-banishments exist within Islamic personal law. In Islamic law, due to networks of extended family and the father’s duty to protect and provide for the child, a woman has no responsibility in “nafaqah the material maintenance of the family, the household or even herself” (Wadud 2006, 37). And so:

Women like Hajar can only be considered deviant, with no practical steps proposed, either for the individual or the community, to construct other models of family and motherhood to assist these women at addressing both their internal struggle of identity as Muslim agents and their external struggle to retain the honor of human dignity stolen in patriarchal presumptions of marriage as the subjugation of women” (145).

Through the Hajar paradigm, Wadud invites investigation into the netherworld of dependency care within which there are uncaring situations of care, and caring labour is appropriated, non-consensual, and undervalued. In the zone of non-being, as in slavery, settler-colonialism or colonial occupation, the written word is inscribed onto the lands, bodies and relations of (m)others through ableist juridical-discursive institutions. Within this normative regime, the caring practices and epistemologies of other mothers are read as marks of cultural and racial inferiority and the bodies, lands and relations of (m)others are read as material resources to build the empire. The immateriality and invisibility of such labours of care leave no mark, no trace, of such a violation, yet their mark is irreversible. Just as the runaway slave cannot erase the tattoo that continues to enslave him, the enslaved and the colonized (m)other cannot undo the ways her caring labours have been used to build such an uncaring world for her and her children. Instead of demanding to see the face of the laboring (m)other, to witness the event of birth as a testament of the (re)productive capital she signifies for the nation, or the Empire, we should instead interrogate our sense-abilities to respond and address the moral needs of the (m)other by interrogating the sense-histories of how we hear, how we see, and how we touch and are touched by the (m)other.
Hajar and Maryam were both single mothers exiled to the desert, the former left alone to find sustenance for her child, and the latter left alone to deliver her child into the world. It is here in the desert with Hajar and Maryam where I locate my mother and sisters as primary care-givers for my father. The connective tissue through which the plight of these three women is tied is the spatio-temporal state of exile, of statelessness. At his wife Sarah’s request, Hajar and her son, Ishmael, were abandoned in the desert by Ibrahim. Instead of inheriting the colonialist habit of embodying distance as a political theorist, I place myself and my family in the same “distant place” where Maryam and Hajar were cast to by their communities (Quran 19:22). In the Quran, the pangs of labour and the fear of persecution lead Maryam to withdraw from society. Being charged with the labour of birthing of Isa, excruciating pain drove Maryam to a palm tree where she said, “I wish I had died and were forgotten!” (Quran, 19:16-27) The voice of Ar-Rahman called to her from below, “Grieve not. Your Sustainer has placed a stream below you. Sway the trunk of the tree toward you; ripe dates will shower down. Eat and drink and be comforted.”

There are three critical movements here, a voice from below, Maryam shaking the tree to make the dates fall from above, and Maryam labouring in the birth of Isa. The motions of maternity in the story of Maryam also symbolize the spatiality of Islamic time, as nourished and expanded by care and sustenance. Through pain, Maryam is pulled into withdrawal, where her quality of life (as seen in dates falling and the voice from below) is centred and what is decentred is the beginning (conception without consent), middle (told by Allah to perform a fast of silence) and the end (shamed by her society) of her story. The violations and injustices suffered by Maryam embody the life-cycle of chronic illness, disability and grief, in which the individual must prioritize pain-management and moral repair over finding a cure or seeking the reason why she was chosen by fate to suffer. Before I see an argument for justice, or a sign of Allah’s miracle, I
see in Maryam’s and Hajar’s story the human need to be cared-for through difficult moments and the human, all too human, surrender with which we have no choice but to submit to our body’s mortality and dependency on others.

4.9 Learning to Love our Mothers

From the isolating and intimate nature of care-work to the lack of institutional support for dependency workers, my mother also lives on the margins of the Canadian state as an informal care-giver and of the Muslim community as the sole income-earner of a household and provider with no support from extended family networks. Each of these women are located in a state of exile, of statelessness and are denied the right to be cared-for by their social relations and networks. What marks Hajar and Maryam’s exile is not the act of physical departure, but rather their expulsion from society which results in a “loss of particular exclusive rights and protections” (Nath 2019; Sassen 2018, 229) Through “multiple little banishments”, or micro-banishments, those situated within relations of dependency care are cast to “systemic invisibility” in which “the loss of rights” is “an event that produces its own partial or specialized erasure” (Sassen 2018, 230). Just as the Masjid is made to take shape around the congregation of men and the Home as the loci of women’s caring labours, racialized, Indigenous and Black care-givers are made to constitute “geographies of disadvantage” that are “internal to a country” (231). Yet, every year millions of Muslims travel to perform Hajj in Mecca, Saudi Arabia which includes “running between two foothills, Safa and Marwah, seven times, symbolically re-enacting the plight of Hajar” (Wadud 2006, 147).

What I cannot take as a given, however, is the Muslim mother’s doomed fate to suffer in the condition of secondary dependency as the sacrificial, passive or dependent carer. Within ableist white supremacist order, there are various degrees and types of colonial and hierarchical
(inter)dependency, such as the patriarchal project of making women dependent on men, or the settler-colonial project of making Indigenous peoples dependent on the colonial state, or the racialist metaphor of the “child as an object without status or legitimate claims to state” as the underpinning of “the practice of racial slavery in America” (Rollo 2018).

I read Maryam’s and Hajar’s suffering as the flesh and bone appearance of the injustice of banishment, or statelessness, as a structural condition and disposition. Whether it’s through US imperialism, third world nationalism, or heteropatriarchal readings of Islamic law, such micro-banishments not only displace (m)others but also entomb them within a state of statelessness to deny them a sense of dwelling and belonging in this world and in the Hereafter. Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak (2007) explore how statelessness, manifests as an affective and behavioral disposition or state of being. In their essay, “Who Sings the Nation-State?” they create a conceptual contiguity between the juridical-discursive structure of the State that delimits a territory and the dispositional states “we find ourselves in” (3). Here I build a tension within Anna Jurkevics’ phenomenological definition of place as a “socio-political construct in that “geographical loci” that can be transformed “through social labor and modes of production…captured and claimed…made meaningful and claimed by cultural imagination” as opposed to “a state of being” (36). In this sense, dwelling is a “regulative ideal” that is negotiated through “contested praxis” and is always “in flux” (37). Jurkevics argues that in order for such “world-building” to “correspond to freedom rather than domination”, 1) “the process of world-building must be democratic and open to contestation” and, 2) ”the shape of the world/place must not prevent the people who live in it from engaging in and making a difference in, politics” (47).

The mental, emotional and physical disposition of statelessness and modes of (non)belonging
are territorialized and (re)produced within the boundaries of the state. Butler argues that statelessness is not singularly produced by the movements and the narrative line of exile, in which the refugee both departs and arrives from somewhere. Nor is it a linear movement from darkness to light, or a descent from moral personhood into the state of nature. Rather, movements which create the disposition of statelessness are complex and include those who are “contained and dispossessed in the very territory from which one both departs and arrives” (Butler and Spivak 2007, 18). Like Maryam and Hajar in the desert, a contemporary example of the juridical and dispositional dimension of statelessness is that of the Palestinian woman’s birthing body. Through the oral testimonies of Palestinian women, in her essay “Terrorism and the Birthing Body in Jerusalem” Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2014) explores how birthing Palestinian women resist and process the psychic trauma of military and colonial occupation and its inscription on the pregnant body. She shares the stories of Aida, Hannan and Ghaida, who all were forced to make the (im)possible journey to Jerusalem to give birth, while enduring the pangs of labour:

I was giving birth, but living death at the same time…and I stopped myself from giving birth…I promised myself to give birth in Jerusalem…I could not them [my kids] inherit suffering” – Aida, 38  (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014, 39).

My daughter was born seventeen months ago, and I still dream that I lost her while at the checkpoint. I still wake up crying, wondering whether I was denied entry to the hospital, and I still await my mother, who was not able to join me when I was giving birth. I live the trauma of childbirth everytime I see a pregnant woman and tell myself that I do not want to have more kids, I do not want to go through that same feeling and experience again. – Hannan  (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014, 42).

I actually had two miscarriages, because I am always worried about being caught by the soldiers while visiting my family in Eizareyyeh…I [feel] choked…totally choked…tired from livening in this khan’aa [suffocation]…They do not want us… – Haya, three months after the birth of her son  (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014, 48).
I was carrying him inside me, as if holding him in my arms, when they were talking to me in Hebrew, telling me that I couldn’t pass the checkpoint… I even called the female soldier over to put her hand on my belly in order to prove that I am carrying a baby, not an animal; a baby, not a terrorist; a baby, not a bomb. I thought that, as a woman she would feel with me, and would at least read the medical report I showed her and so allow me to cross, but she refused. She was filled with disgust from even looking at me, let alone touching me, and they both the male and the female soldiers, screamed “Rohi rohi min hon” [go, go from here]. At that point, I felt totally shocked…and stopped talking, crying, thinking, or responding…I went into a deep, very deep silence…then I started talking to myself…and Allah..in a loud voice, “Mish adri ya Rabbi” [I can’t take it, Allah]. –Ghaida (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014, 56–57).

The colonial apparatus of the Israeli state, its practices and its forms of knowledge production not only (re)produce “a state of institutionalized fear” within the bodies of the pregnant mother and her child, but in tandem, it also (re)produces the mother and her newborn in the state of non-belonging, of otherness, in which their bodies are rendered as “terrorists, criminals and unwanted entities” (41). By placing the Palestinian woman in a “space of non-existence”, and inscribing “power over her birthing body”, the Israeli soldiers “not only trap” her body, life and feelings, but also turn “her voice into an unheard one and her experience into an unseen, unwanted and non-existent one” (55). Answering Butler and Spivak’s question, this is the state that Palestinian women are in when they begin to think, write and talk about the State. The Israeli settler-colonial state produces “non-belonging as a quasi-permanent state” in which birthing Palestinian mothers, “enraged and destitute” (Butler and Spivak 2007, 4), must pass “through a border” and arrive in “another state” both literally, and dispositionally. Despite making it to Jerusalem to give birth, the Palestinian woman and her child still cannot escape their spatial “condition on the margins” and their temporal situation of chronic fear and survival (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014, 55). Despite arriving somewhere, the Palestinian mother remains unsure where she has arrived, such as in a “dystopic kind of travel narrative” (Butler and Spivak 2007, 7).
And so, Butler and Spivak argue that “we cannot presume a movement from an established state to a state of metaphysical abandonment” and that this movement is not primarily defined by the act of sovereignty and the withdrawal of constitutional protections (or denial of such rights to begin with). Instead, these movements of populations from the state to statelessness within the parameters of a delimited territory happen in complex ways. Where do the stateless dwell, which spaces do they inhabit, which movements dispossess them, or hold them in place? Butler gives the example of the dark private domain within the Greek city-state in which “slaves, children and the disenfranchised foreigners took care of the reproduction of material life” (Butler and Spivak 2007, 15). Instead of being “shorn of the political” and “returned to a state of nature” without a recognizable location, Butler locates the stateless within the state within the “domain of disenfranchisement, unpaid labor, and the barely legible or illegible human” (ibid.). Such “spectral humans” (17) are “deprived of ontological weight and failing the tests of social intelligibility required for minimal recognition include those whose age, gender, race, nationality, and labor status not only disqualify them for citizenship but actively ”qualify" them for statelessness (15). Moving beyond the refugee as the stateless, Butler introduces the stateless as also those who are “contained and dispossessed in the very territory from which one both departs and arrives” (18).

The notion of a bounded territory requires a “narrative line in which arrival follows departure and where the dominant themes are assimilation and estrangement” (ibid.). Both Butler and Spivak wonder how individuals can re-align as a nation to (re)territorialize non-state modes of belonging in hopes of creating a dwelling place for the stateless and the unconsolated. Beyond (re)territorializing the boundaries of the “nation”, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian argues that non-formal “modes of return” are critical to empower the stateless to heal from the imprint of
violence on their bodies, minds and spirits. For example, through re-narrativizing the traumas of childbirth, Palestinian women are able to return to the site of violence and violation through the acoustics of voice and inscribe within their narrative what they were denied the ability to say, do or feel in that moment (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014, 55). Motions of return in these various (con)texts of Muslim motherhood are captured not by the end of the pilgrimage but rather in the horizontality of the narrative. In Hajar’s cyclic footsteps, in the wellspring that bursts upward, in dates falling from above and the voice of an angel coming from below for Maryam as she gives birth, and in anti-apartheid movements lead by Palestinians all around the world, there is space being opened by creation and Creator from within the horizon of the text. The unmet needs of (m)others within the netherworld of dependency is without doubt accounted for, one way or another, by witnesses who inherit the work of holding in place the possibility for their return to their mothers, their homelands and their histories.

And so, instead of imagining tradition as a birthright, I imagine tradition as an inheritance of care-work carried out by witnesses that is watched over by the force of maternity. Knowledge production and consumption, in this sense, is a relation of care that is animated by the breathwork of Ar-Rahman and truth is like the Panja-e-Maryam, a medicine that assures safe passage for (m)others. The same root that Maryam grasped as she was overcome by the pangs of birth in the desert in Medina blossoms today in bowls of water across the world. The Panja-e Maryam is a wooden flower that resembles a clenched fist, or a woody ball, if rooted it blossoms into white flowers, if blown away by the wind or picked from the earth, it rolls and rolls into the hands of expecting Muslim mothers. When submerged under water, it unfolds, branching radially from its base to resemble a miniature tree with vast roots. Maryam’s root has travelled “from its ancient home” to become a garden in foreign lands for many Muslim women as they
soak it in a bowl of water in the delivery room and hold onto it while birthing, to call upon “Hazrat Maryam to stand by them in their pain” (Ghazi 2007, 119). Just as this uprooted flower of the desert blossoms elsewhere and otherwise, the same water that sprung from the desert in search of Hajar as she circled the hills of Safa and Marwa, lives on today in a water bottle in my mother’s kitchen closet, as a gift from her mother. After performing Hajj, pilgrims return to their loved ones with gifts of Zam Zam water and the Panja-e Maryam in hopes that they will bring nourishment to their homes, bodies and relations.
Chapter 5: In the Courtyard

O believers! When you are told to make room in gatherings, then do so. Allah will make room for you “in His grace”. And if you are told to rise, then do so. Allah will elevate those of you who are faithful, and “raise” those gifted with knowledge in rank. And Allah is All-Aware of what you do.

Surah Al-Mujadila (She Who Disputes) Quran 58:11

5.1 *Dihlīz*: An Islamic Paradigm of Access

The first woman to lead prayer for our family was my mother. She felt sweetly awkward about it all, but on this special day the universe left her with no choice and called upon her to take her place as a matriarchal head of our family. This was during a trip to my parent’s home to perform a *dua-e-khair* for my partner and I’s engagement. My mother is a fierce de-colonial resister who struggled with the idea of a white man, my partner, lead her family in prayer. So that day she led us in prayer, standing a millimeter behind my partner to lead in a way she felt most comfortable. As she laid down the prayer mat, my father, now a wheelchair user, with the support of my sisters, also entered our “mosque on earth” (Mernissi 1991) to stand with us and offer his first prayer since the stroke. As my mother, father and partner prayed, my sisters and I alternated spittoon duty (as my father has dysphagia). Although it was only three of us who chose to perform prayer, my mother carved space in the presence and witness of Allah for all six of us tied together in this beautifully deviant prayer formation and radical care web (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018).

As my partner is still learning to pray, my mother and father slowed down their recitation to move with his movements; and as my father learned to re-embbody prayer, my sisters and I moved around his body to support his return to the prayer mat. This prayer formation was dynamic, shifting, and responsive to each individual’s access needs. It was through care-based and connection-based modes of knowing that we negotiated how our bodies fit together in co-
constituting this space and how we as individuals, and as a community, wished to appear in the
witness of Creator. What I am centering here is the collective and shared commitment to
accessibility by a community of Muslims and the mark of this intention in the shape of our
gathering. This situation taught me how a prayer space, or a Masjid, can extend, bend and
expand with the intentions of its makers to account for the access needs of those that co-
constitute and hold the space together. Perhaps this is what amina wadud means by surfacing
“horizontal line[s] of reciprocity” within Islamic spaces and praxis (wadud 2013, para. 6). In
witnessing this moment, I learned two connected truths: that no matter the earthly violence that
tries to estrange me from my mother, my motherland, and Ar-Rahman (the Compassionate),
there is a place held for me, Subhanallah, on the prayer mat, in these relations, in my Mother’s
home, and in the witness of Allah.

The slowness, the synchronized body movements, and consent-based care in this story
reminds me of Leah Piepzna-Samarinha’s visual of Creating Collective Access—a care web of
racialized and disabled femmes—moving through an academic conference in a way in which
access is collectively and intentionally negotiated:

Committed to leaving no one behind, we rolled through the conference in a big, slow
group of wheelchair users, cane users, and slow-moving people. Instead of the classic
able-bodied conference experience most of us were used to, where able-bodied people
walked at their able-bodied rate and didn’t notice we were two blocks behind, or
nowhere, we walked as slow as the slowest person and refused to abandon each other

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8 I am super grateful for the mentorship and care of Dr. Shaista Patel and for her thoughtful feedback and
introducing me to scholarship by racialized, Black and Indigenous disability scholars.
Access, here, is not an individual responsibility or merely a material arrangement or re-adjustment, but rather it is a “powerful act of love” and crip solidarity (149) as outlined in Patty Berne and Sins Invalid’s 10 principles of disability justice:

Collective Access: As brown/Black and queer crips, we bring flexibility and creative nuance to engage with each other. We create and explore new ways of doing things that go beyond able-bodied/minded normativity. Access needs aren’t shameful—we all have various capacities which function differently in various environments. Access needs can be articulated within a community and met privately or through a collective, depending upon an individual’s needs, desires, and the capacity of the group. We can share responsibility for our access needs, we can ask that our needs be met without compromising our integrity, we can balance autonomy while being in community, we can be unafraid of our vulnerabilities knowing our strengths are respected (52).

Whether it’s through femme science (Milan 2013), or crip emotional intelligence, the work of accessibility, of making space in our relations, engages the deepest registers of contextualized and care-based epistemologies. My family’s care web is not solely centered on my father’s needs; we are a care web of multiple bodyminds; each of us live with different disabilities and illnesses and have a unique set of access needs. We also bring with us different sets of skills, capacities and resources. It is through prioritizing cross-disability solidarity, receptivity and consent, we navigate the complexities and the breakdowns that arise from the differential distribution of power and responsibility within our care web.

As first-generation immigrants, my family and I have no extended family here to provide respite care and have nowhere “back home” to return to. What also threatens to destroy our care unit is structural oppression that tires our bodyminds to the point of collapse. Whether it is the lack of access to quality and dignified state-funded care or community care for informal caregivers and persons with disability, or the exhausting ableist and racist encounters in medical spaces, or the incredible social isolation of being situated in a relation of dependency care, my
family and I live in both care and crip time and live and are haunted by chronic grief (Samuels 2017; Stevens 2018). Like Hajar and Maryam stranded in the desert, my family remains on the margins of kin-based Islamic communities of care. Sometimes it feels as if nothing, nowhere, and no one in this world is holding place for a future, or even a present, in which our family survives.

Against such forces, access is not just about installing ramps, stairlifts, or handles in our home to support my father as a wheelchair user, but it also includes the more intricate and collective care work of world-building by relational selves. South-African scholar, Ebrahim Moosa develops the Persian and Arabic word *divlīz* into a paradigm of accessibility. *Dīhlīz* is a spatial heuristic that captures access as “the space between the door and the house”, a threshold one must pass through daily. In the context of migration and disability, I understand this space to be located in between the point of entry and coming to dwell within and inhabit a place by making it a home. This place can be the nation-state, a Masjid, a house, a building, a prayer formation, or land etc. The point of entry, be it a border, or a doorstep, is not where one’s arrival into the home is completed.

In a settler-colonial society premised on the displacement of Black, Indigenous and racialized peoples, what does it mean to truly feel at home, as if one has arrived and can now take their shoes off and settle in? What does it feel like to live without the constant worry and anxiety of losing your home or your mother(land)? Refusing to open up how we make a home as Muslims in a settler-colonial society compromises our witnessing capacities—makes us unaware of the scents we have carried in the journey of arrival. Although we have obtained an entry from the outside, what remains open is how we settle and how we relate with Indigenous peoples.
*Dihlīz* represents “the action of two entries: entry from the outside and entry into the inside”, a liminal space between esoteric and the exoteric (Moosa 2005, 48):

Viewed from the house proper, the *dihlīz* is located on the outside. But viewed from the door leading to the street, the *dihlīz* is on the inside. A courtyard, a passage, a porch, or a vestibule can constitute the *dihlīz* in strict architectural terms. While it is the space into which smells and odors from inside the house waft and mix with those produced outside it, it is also more (ibid).

Here, I seek to subvert colonial discussions on the climate of the colony as the mark of inferiority. I invite investigation into the climate of settler-colonial societies in which we arrive and the scents that impress upon us. The textures of our arrival carry many scents, stenches and odours of oppression we have carried in the journey, at the border, in our relations etc. The contact zone is as a contested site within which our arrival is unfolding and taking place; smell as a critical sensibility urges us to be mindful of how we smell, the stench of oppression within a gathering and its mark upon us. If we cannot control the systems and processes which have made the journey homewards impossible, we can make conscious and intentional choices on how we move forward. Do we want to carry the scents of those who displaced our ancestors and chased us to these shores—to displace others and become *that* which spit us out?

Whereas Moosa reads *dihlīz* as an ontological and epistemic gap between the reader/writer, the corpus/the corpse of the writer, and the distance traversed in translation, through a disability justice framework this space reads as the gap in access that can only be accounted for through care-work—by moving matter closer, nearer, farther, or around in tune with our bodyminds’ needs. A ramp, for example, may support my father as a wheelchair-user to move past the door’s threshold to enter our house; however, it is only through responsive and consensual labours of care by which the materiality of our house is (re)made into and sustained as a home for my father; in our home, we hold a place for him as our father, and he holds a place
for us as his family. Queer care ethicist Tim Johnston argues that such care-work requires attentive love, an aspect of maternal thinking, “a kind of knowing that takes truthfulness as its aim but makes truth serve lovingly the person known” (Johnston 2016, 19). Working within the mother-child paradigm, attentive love requires the mother to hold close the child while letting her grow into her self by “knowing when an affirmative feedback loop needs to be altered to better respond” to the child’s changing care and access needs (ibid.). Such attentive love, “lets difference emerge without searching for comforting commonalities, dwells upon the other, and lets otherness be” (20).

Building communities of care between Muslims and Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island requires us to first understand that our sense of placement, of having a home on this land, is tied to the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands. With this as a point of departure, we must then do the difficult work of unlearning colonial sensibilities of home-making and move towards grounding our continual arrival, or our inability to leave, in consent-based processes of dwelling. Imagining possibilities for attentive love in our relations with Indigenous communities requires us to not only unlearn colonial and white supremacist sensibilities but also imagine and harness the de-colonial potential of care-based epistemologies of Islam. Johnston’s interpretation of Ruddick, as well as Hilde Lindemann’s notion of holding and letting go, rely on the recognition and response model in which the carer must both hold in place the “narrative sense” of another person as well as let go of “stories that no longer fit” (25). Such holding and letting go moves with the arc of identity formation and can be forward-looking for children, or backward-looking for elders (26). In the case of Truth and Reconciliation, this means undoing and unlearning the master narrative of multiculturalism, studying the histories of the lands and waters we occupy, and extending our reach in support of local struggles for de-
colonization. Learn about the Treaties with the Canadian state that have facilitated your arrival; seek relations of friendship and care with neighbouring Indigenous communities and families; mobilize against anti-Indigenous policies and political platforms etc. However, we can only begin this journey once we have unlearned toxic and harmful modes of relating and caring for Others that we have inherited from the histories of violence that divide us.

5.2 Unlearning Care as Guardianship and Gatekeeping

Imagining a de-colonial and Islamic ethic of care requires us to let go of maternalist conceptions of care as non-consensual. What is worrying about Johnston’s capacities-based conception of personhood is that it relies on a “misopedic” representation of childhood in which the parent is responsible for translating and reading the child’s personality (Rollo 2016). For the child to transcend into personhood through the parent’s care, the child must illustrate “sufficient mental activity to constitute a personality”, express this personality bodily in a way that is recognizable by others as an expression of personality, and be capable of responding “to what they see” (24). Mapping this language onto my father’s hospitalization, the mother-child paradigm empowers care-providers, doctor’s in this case, with an undue authority of deciding which (in)actions constitute a personality, and therefore, suffice as personhood that is worth holding onto. In the few months after my father awakened from the coma, doctors fixated on his inability to move his eyes to track moving objects in the room. His hand movements, his tears, his heartbeat were all read as rudimentary, reactionary, and spontaneous, but never intended by him, as confirmation of personhood. For medical professionals, these movements were results of their decision to continue his body’s breath with life support, and not the breathwork of Ar-Rahman.
Johnston observes that during critical transitions such attentive love plays a critical role in identity formation. However, the underlying premise of the politics of recognition, that we come to exist as persons only in and through how we are read by others, has serious limitations as a model of citizenship. In this model, children “are not simply human beings with different ways of interacting with the world and others, they are a lesser, deficient, or otherwise incomplete form of human being” defined by the “absence of distinctly human agency” (Rollo 2016, 62). Here, only the care-provider meets the anthropological minimum (Mehta 1999); this power differential in the relation of care means that the care recipient’s self is not relationally held in place, but rather is displaced, seized or captured, for the sake of her “well-being”.

What may seem like a matter of semantics in the written word unfolds into serious abuses of care against persons with disability and Black, Indigenous and racialized peoples in situations of colonial guardianship. Here, space is given to the care recipient as the care-provider considers and evaluates to what extent the Other has developed. In the moment of transition, however, it was not that my mother as my father’s guardian took my father’s place, or affirmed my father as a person, but rather for us he had never ceased to exist as a person; she held a place for him in our world in response to the doctor’s foreclosure. She held out a light for his return that he could sense from within the belly of the whale. My father was, is, and has remained fully capable of possessing personhood. As his bodymind changed with illness, my mother assumed responsibility for changing the shape of our home, and our world, to create for my father a place in which he fits and can dwell meaningfully. This is more than just affirmation or recognizing the worth of another sentient being. Relational selfhood goes beyond affirming or misrecognizing one another. It means remaining responsive to, and address-able for, the moving puzzle pieces, how our bodies fit together, and continually adjusting our selves to ensure that no
one is left behind. Failing to hold someone in place is not a failure in honouring another’s “proper identity”, but rather, complicity in building inaccessible worlds that enslave, colonize and displace the Other. For example, in caring for the elderly living with dementia or Alzheimer’s, it is complicity in neglect, abandonment and refusal to support their care needs as they navigate life, their bodies, and their identities in different and new ways. Whereas white-orientated modes of knowing impose on the Indigenous Other a standard of respectability and civility, through a care-based epistemology of Islam that prioritizes collective access whether we care about an Other is not up for debate. Rather, we must remain responsive to how we care, how care and access needs shift and whether others choose to be cared for (or not). In opening our hearts to build a relationship of care, we must also be open to being rejected, refused and denied access as crucial to the process of moral repair and accountability (Tuck and Yang 2014, 812).

Just as within the contact-zone, there can be mutual transformation for the colonizer and the colonized (Pratt 2008), in the situation of secondary dependency, the mother or carer’s sense of self is also transformed through the work of care. A de-colonial and care-based epistemology of Islam accounts for the moral, ontological and epistemic inscrutability of the self-same, of the mother. What I find problematic about charity-based efforts by Muslims to support Indigenous communities on Turtle Island is that it is a type of settler-benevolence that sanctions the giver, and the process of giving, from being complicit in (re)producing the structures of violence that endanger the person they are caring for. Instead I turn away from the colonial politics of recognition in which dignity and personhood are given through holding one another in personhood and turn towards a materialist-feminist framework that focuses on spatiality. Holding place for Indigenous governance in Islamic thought and praxis requires us to acknowledge that Indigenous peoples’ capacity for proper personhood always remains in place.
5.3 Practicing Intersectional Islam on Turtle Island

Whoever usurps unlawfully even a hand span of land a collar measuring seven times (this) land will be placed around his neck on the Day of Resurrection.

-Hadith narrated by Aisha

Allah created all the creatures and when He finished the task of His creation, Ar-Rahm (ties of relationship) said: ‘(O Allah) at this place I seek refuge with You against severing my ties.’ Allah said: ‘He who maintains good ties with you, I maintain good ties with him; and he who severs your ties, I sever ties with him’ It said: ‘I am satisfied.’

Allah said: ‘Then this is yours’.

Then Messenger of Allah said, "Recite this Ayah if you like: 'Would you then, if you were given the authority, do mischief in the land, and sever your ties of kinship? Such are they whom Allah has cursed, so that He has made them deaf and blinded their sight. (47:22-23)."

-Hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah

Do not crave for property lest you should be absorbed in the desire of worldly life.

-Hadith narrated by Abdullah bin Mas’ud

During the commutes to my grandmother’s home from Lahore to Haripur, there were many mountains. As a child, I would imagine Mount Hira, the cave where the Prophet retreated to for meditation and received Revelation, to be among them. It was my way of feeling close to the stories I was being taught. In Haripur, my Nanoo’s home had the most beautiful courtyard. I return to this place, and this route, often in my mind; the pumice stone she would use as an exfoliator, my first bee sting that my Khala healed with an onion, the nights when my entire maternal family would gather, laughing, telling stories until the call for Fajr prayer would peek through our windows. It was a place held together with so much love and care, a place all of us would give up everything to return to. The courtyard, described as a dihlīz by Moosa, is like no other place I have experienced in Canada. In the Muslim imaginary, the courtyard is a “place of memory”, “a place where inside and outside meet—where people live and pass each other”; and just like Islam, it can only be “experienced from inside” through “smell, touch and sound” (Mignolo 2013). Fatima Mernissi (1994) describes courtyards as the place where the terrestrial collides with the celestial,
My childhood was happy because the frontiers were crystal clear. The first frontier was the threshold separating our family's salon from the main courtyard… I would sit on our threshold and look at our house as I had never seen it before. First, there was the square of the rigid courtyard, where symmetry ruled everything… Looking at the sky from the courtyard was an overwhelming experience. At first, it looked tame because of the man-made square frame. But then the movement of the early morning's stars, fading slowly into deep blue and white, became so intense that it could make you dizzy (2–4).

What I appreciate about Mernissi’s depiction of the “courtyard” as a constitutive feature of Islamic architecture is her appreciation of the complexities of purdah not just as a way of b/ordering space but as a contested site that holds in place a history of relationships and modes of relating. My mother’s home in Ontario, and my access to my motherland through my maternal kin, serve not only as anchors with which I am grounded on this earth, but also, a place that contains within it “sensibilities, memories and world sensing” (Mignolo 2013). This space that was once located within and shaped by the courtyard is now held in place in our relations, in Skype calls between my mother and her sisters, in visiting my Khala’s home in Lahore, and in my grandmothers’ prayers. We hold this place together as somewhere to retreat and return to. The wonder with which I held close those mountains and that courtyard remains for me as a cosmological orientation, a way homewards to my (grand)mother and to Islam that is sense-based. This, along with my positionality as a care-giver for my father, are but glimmers of the vast sensibilities and sense-histories, that shape how I inhabit and make a home in this world for my family to dwell meaningfully. I have inherited the work of home-making, of holding Allah close, and holding my family in place, by witnessing how my Nanoo and her daughters have relentlessly fought to keeping my family together in face of incredible adversity.

How I build relationships, carry knowledge and hold a place is embedded in my practice of Islam and my place in the world as my mother’s daughter and as a primary care-giver. Nested
within a different mountain range, today, it is the force of maternity and these sensibilities that enable me to account for how home-making as an immigrant-settler, or arrivant in Jodi Byrd’s sense (2014), makes me complicit as a proxy, agent and beneficiary of the settler-colonial “processes that have stripped land, lives and nations away” from Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (174). Such cosmological orientations shape not only how I read, write and do political theory but also my rejection of policies that sustain the displacement, dispossession and disintegration of Black, Indigenous and racialized communities. I attempt to re-imagine the border not as a point of entry by which we are thrown into a shared fate with the Canadian state but as a courtyard in which we dwell together in complex and contested ways. Although the courtyard is b/ordered in various ways, it always contains within it multiple possibilities for passing by one another; for having never-ending conversations in our aunties’ rooms; for locking our doors to deny our annoying siblings entry; for inviting guests.

Whether its designing prayer rugs in collaboration with Indigenous weavers (The Canadian Prayer Rug and the Weaving Cultural Identities exhibit at the Vancouver Biennale); or invoking our grandmothers’ *duas* (prayers) to pray for the land; or giving *sadaqah* (charity) to the Muslim Care Centre to distribute food and support Indigenous Muslims living in the Downtown Eastside; or inviting Indigenous elders to the mosque for *iftar* (breaking fast in Ramadan), Muslim immigrant-settlers contribute to truth and reconciliation in Canada in diverse ways. Such initiatives, which focus on re-distributing wealth and community resources, community-building and knowledge-sharing, are rooted in an Islamic ethic of care that obliges us to not only account for our complicity in settler-colonial violence and oppression, but also, deepen relations of responsibility with Indigenous communities as well as the lands and waters we are sustained by. What remains on the horizon for Indigenous and Muslim relations on Turtle
Island is de-centering the Canadian state, as well as multiculturalism policy, as intermediaries and moving towards building intentional and consent-based communities of care. Ties of kinship run deeper than the aims of political alliances and coalitional politics. As Muslims we must align Islamic ethics of hospitality and sharia law with treaty responsibilities, as well as, extend our practice of Islam to be responsive to Indigenous knowledges and governance systems. This requires us to imagine possibilities for “grounded relationalities” and “holding the possibilities for meeting life with life as a matter of being in difference and activating interrelatedness across the antagonisms history has left us” (Byrd 2019, 342).

Decentering the “vertical interactions of colonizer and colonized” and the “primacy and supremacy of white Europeans”, I pave conceptual space to consider a “a hermeneutic of alternative contact” by which Muslims can cultivate de-colonial textual sensibilities and place-making practices from within the Islamic tradition (Byrd 2014, 2019, 176; Carpenter and Yoon 2014, 7-9). Instead of bracketing “for a moment the world-shattering consequences of ‘first contact’” for the sake of revealing “new possibilities for critical, interpretative and activist interventions”, my point of entry is re-conceptualizing the terrain through a disability justice framework (Byrd 2014, 176).

As I have argued in previous chapters, the contact zone, or the shadow of the veil, extends across time and space to disrupt our relations to the maternal, with one another, with the land, and with our selves. Yet this zone can also be a location for the transculturation of meaning, for healing from colonial histories of sense-contact and for moral and social repair. As a child, I did not choose to migrate here and the decision to migrate here was shaped by complex circumstances and multiple interlocking structures of domination. As an adult, however, I can take responsibility for the consequences of this choice and prioritize de-colonial education for
my children, family members etc. De-colonial movement-building requires us to advocate for anti-violence and accountability in our knowledge relations and disinherit our instruction in colonial textual sensibilities with which the “narratives of first contact” were produced (Creative Interventions). In this chapter, I outline what I mean by Islamic textual sense-abilities and how an intersectional and care-based epistemology of Islam paves way to not only re-consider what it means to be Muslim and practice Islam on Turtle Island, but also, offers a moral framework of uprooting colonial knowledge systems. A major obstacle, however, in tracing the “horizontal struggles” between Indigenous and Muslim communities with “competing claims to historical oppressions” is that such exchange is shaped by various pressures from within academia to be translatable to white orientated readerships and agendas of reconciliation which continue to undermine the epistemic worth of Indigenous and Islamic knowledges and cosmologies (Carpenter and Yoon 2014). Yet, this intervention is necessary.

What has shaped my arrival to this conversation, in Sara Ahmed’s sense, was becoming a care-giver for my father. In witnessing how my mother re-read disability and interdependency in a colonial encounter through care-based modes of knowing Islam, I unexpectedly gained access to new ways of re-conceptualizing place, the body and radical relationality to pave conceptual space for more “fruitful consideration of other forms of contact” between Muslims and Indigenous communities beyond the settler-Indigenous binary (Byrd 2011). It is this arrival that I seek to stretch out in this chapter to illustrate that reading disability and dependency differently as a care-giver is not just a way to confront ableism within the Islamic tradition, it also gives us tools to intervene, disrupt and disarm settler-colonialism. Whereas in critical disability studies, space is a matter of access, in settler-colonial studies, displacement and dispossession from land and territory are matters of colonial occupation. Here, abstractions of space as a relationship that
is transposed onto matter does violence not only to the agency of the land as a witness in our relations, but also, to Indigenous peoples’ right to return to, and the return of, their ancestral lands and waters.

A decolonial praxis that prioritizes disability justice and collective access invites Muslim settlers to interrogate their complicity in the ongoing settler-colonial violence that sustains Canadian society. Instead of asking how disability, as an axis of difference can be incorporated into the intersectional and Islamic critique of settler-colonialism, I question the ways we can" (re)write the theoretical terrain occupied by" the axes of race, gender and class "from the vantage point of disability" (Erevelles 1996, 520). How are our “epistemological, ontological and cosmological” relationships to space and land, as well as our Islamic practices of world-building, as Muslim-settlers on Turtle Island predicated upon and complicit in the colonial violence of resource extraction, land theft and genocide (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5)?

For example, Islamic conceptions of environmental stewardship 

(khalîfa) (Abdul-Matin 2010; Ali 2012; Alpay, Özdemir, and Demirbas 2013) offer some points of comparison with various Indigenous worldviews on sustainability but remain ambivalent on questions of coloniality. There is little guidance on whether the food we consume and grow on stolen land can be halal while various Indigenous communities face food insecurity and water advisories; whether property ownership on stolen land or building a mosque through state resources requires us to pay reparations; whether it is appropriate for Muslim scholars, activists and community organizers to use state resources intended for reconciliation to not only further their brands and careers but self-appoint and insert themselves as leaders in de-colonial movements; and finally, in what ways as uninvited travellers have we violated Islamic ethics of hospitality and compromised our witnessing (shahid) capacities in allowing white supremacy to sever our ties
with those who have cared for and continue to defend the land and waters that sustain our livelihoods. How can we cultivate “imagined friendships” with the uwaysī, those who are physically absent, “whose absence opposes your own presence”, yet must be addressed in our testimonies (shahada) and learn to actively listen to their calls for justice (Moosa 2005, 43)? And finally, how can we re-visit and restore Islamic conceptions of consent in our relations with Indigenous peoples?

If the relationship between Allah and his creation is one of care, and such care is interpreted as non-consensual in various schools of Islamic theology, then Allah is read and received as someone with the right to inflict injustice upon others and “dispose of someone else’s property without his consent” (Ghaly 2010, 26). Here, zulm dis-ables another in the form of loss, be it property, bodily health, or relational. Such a patriarchal logic of care, in which the carer has the right to hit the child for his well-being, relies on the adult-child hierarchy and non-ethics of care in which violence is permitted for the child’s advancement into personhood. The child cannot refuse, question or speak back in response to such care. If we learn and inherit how we care from how we are cared for, and who cares for us, then how do such sense-abilities and orientations of care, as harmful, unjust and non-consensual, shape Islamic conceptions of land stewardship and our practice of care as appointed stewards and representatives of Allah on earth (Quran 25:39, 10:14)? Ash‘arī scholar ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) marks a distinction between divinely ordained injustice that is done to us, and justice as that “which the doer can do” (Ghaly 2010, 26). Here, land stewardship in the Islamic tradition takes a strange Lockean turn. As Allah does not need our permission to act, and is the ultimate owner of all property, we can only have “right of access” to such property through trusteeship. And as appointed “vicegerents” or viceroys, Allah has delegated us to exploit, use and make of the earth
what we will as long as we do not exceed our limits to property acquisition through theft or violation to the property of others (Salasal 1998).

As settler-colonial empires continue to force us out of our homelands and “onto Indigenous lands through slavery, war, and economic dislocation” (Pulido 2018, 311; Tuck and Yang 2012), home-making for migrants will always be conflictual as long as it relies on exploiting settler-colonial policies of immigration, property ownership and multiculturalism that seek to “destroy and disappear” Indigenous peoples for profit (Bhatia 2013; Jurkevics 2017). In addition, various critical disability scholars argue that “imperialism and colonialism stand as root causes of massive violations of human rights, famines, malnutrition and the ecological degradation of Indigenous land” and serve “as the root cause of growing impairment in the global South” (Jaffee 2016, 118). However, as scholars of Black political thought and migration studies have argued the “coloniality of migration” upon which nation-states have been founded has relied heavily on the entanglement of the colonial plantation economy to sustain European settler societies (Grosfoguel 2012; Rodríguez 2018). And so, Black-Muslims, for example, whose ancestors were forcefully displaced and re-located through the Transatlantic Slave Trade to Turtle Island have a different relationship with Indigenous peoples and settler-coloniality than political refugees and economic migrants (Ibn Said 1831). Given the vast spectrum of positionalities and migration histories that exist within the Muslim ummah, to typecast all Muslim migrants on Turtle Island as settlers, and as colonizers, would not only perpetuate anti-Blackness in the Ummah, but also, erase how settler-colonial violence continues to influence the lives of Muslims (Palestine, Uyghurs in China, Aboriginal Muslims, Muslims living under South-African Apartheid etc.)
Such a pluriversality of Muslim subjectivities within the global Ummah colours existing discourses on Islamic decoloniality as seen in the scholarship of Shaista Patel, Ramon Grosfoguel and Farid Esack. The shared point of departure for their analyses is that the Islamophobic and anti-Semitic violence against the Muslims and Jews of Andalusia in 1492 shaped Columbus’ imperial desires of conquest and discovery. They draw a parallel between the “Christian Spanish Monarchy[‘s]” conquest of Islamic Spain; the forced conversion and expulsion of Jews and Arabs; Columbus’ “discovery” of the Americas and the enslavement of Indigenous and African peoples to explain the orientalist and white supremacist textures of settler-colonialism (Grosfoguel 2012, 11). Quoting Cherokee scholar of religion Jace Weaver from his essay, “Splitting the Earth”, Patel illustrates how power hierarchies are entangled:

“Salaam Alaykum.” As preposterous as it might seem, those may be the first words Natives ever heard uttered by Christopher Columbus. Although, at this late date, we will never be able to know with certainty, the notion is not as odd as it appears at first blush.... The charts that Columbus took on his voyage had been drafted by Moorish cartographers. In fact, his entire enterprise was only possible because the Moors had been forced off the Iberian Peninsula after years of bloody warfare (qtd. in Patel 2019, 418).

She argues, “the Moors, the Jews, the Africans and the ‘Indians’, all stood as Europe’s enemy in its quest to expand its frontiers” (Patel 2019, 425). The Moor, in particular, as the “archetypal Other of Europe…did not need to be Muslim; the Moor was any and all people who constituted the expellable Other to European purity… all the world’s non-European peoples and religions were ‘stamped with the taint of Muslim impurity’” (Patel 2019, 419). The defining characteristic of such epistemic and ontological racism of the 15th century, that “people with the wrong religion” or no religion were “inferior savages and primitives”, folded into the narrative of the Other as “people without civilization” in the 19th century (Grosfoguel 2012, 11–13). The ableist undergird of such racist discourses works to degrade and disintegrate both the embodied and
cosmological (which includes relationships with the land) dimensions of indigeneity and the “Islamic”. Through this historical parallel, we can study how ableist white supremacy sustains the entanglement of Islamophobia and settler-colonialism to threaten the lives of Indigenous and Muslim communities in connected, yet, deeply different ways.

I argue that as Muslim political theorists we can re-orient place-based Islamic practices to align ourselves within the Muslim Ummah, and in relationship with Indigenous peoples, in the global struggle against ableist white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, US imperialism and settler-colonialism. I argue that through a de-colonial Islamic ethic of care, which is rooted in consent-based care, multi-sensorial response-ability, and intentionality in our knowledge relations, we can prioritize collective access and access intimacy in the places we hold together, and in relations we must hold closer (Mingus 2011, 2017b). An Islamic ethic of witnessing requires me to first unlearn anti-Indigenous sensibilities and orientations I have inherited through both the Islamic tradition and the legacy of the British Raj, as well as, within my instruction in political theory through the neo-liberal academy. As migrants, we have gained access to these lands and waters through the settler-colonial state’s borders and policies of immigration and citizenship. Opening up the “self-same” as a Pakistani-Muslim and Canadian citizen requires me to unlearn and unsettle various emotional plots through which my sense of self has been built. This includes disinherit the fear of polytheism within Islamic epistemologies (Rahemtulla 2017, 145), anti-Indigenous racism against the adivasis of South Asia (Skaria 1999) and multiculturalism as a mode of relating. As a political theorist, I must not only disinherit the impulse “to eat the other” (hooks 2014) by exploiting and appropriating stories of Black, Indigenous and racialized communities in representations of coloniality but also be mindful of the differential distribution of the care-work of translating moral injury and identifying coloniality within our knowledge
relations. Racialized, Black and Indigenous political theorists are charged with the difficult labour of birthing twins, one that speaks to the West and the White world on addressing the problem of the “Other”, and one that speaks to their respective communities on addressing violence from the Western and White world (Bejarano et al. 2019). Instead of inserting ourselves as the guardian or representative that speaks for marginalized communities and spectral epistemologies, we must ask instead how are we complicit in the displacement and erasure of (m)others in our knowledge practices? Historicizing and opening up maternity as a category of analysis requires us to explore whose “lived experiences cannot easily be accounted for within existing categories of analysis” (Tungohan 2019, 234).

Collective access, therefore, is not the work of recognition but rather the work of responsivity and address-ability to one another’s access needs that loops back into our world-building practices. It is not the parent, or the care-provider, that knows best what the care recipient needs, but rather mis-fits in how we fit together invite investigation into the collective access needs of those within the community of care. Similarly in his definition of courage as a caring political virtue, Richard Avramenko (2011) also argues that communities of care arise through the spatial extension that comes with a shared sense of compassion, pity and protective instinct in that if we can “imagine something then we can care about it” (17). He argues that courage is not consensual as we do not choose if we want to protect someone we care about when her life is threatened. However, a disability justice framework shows us that this is deeply problematic because persons with disability face intimate violence from family members who they did not choose to rely on as their sole care-providers. Whether we care, and for whom we are compelled to care for, should not be left to the whims of our instincts, kin-based networks or gut reactions. Just as someone’s “access to access and the world should not be predicated on
desirability or popularity or approval of the able-bodied masses—or anyone” (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018, 151), someone’s care and access needs should not have to be recognizeable by others to be cared about. Here, the burden of articulating access needs is not on the person with disability to constantly communicate and justify her demands prior to her entry into a space. For example, there is a difference between an event promotion ad that mentions the venue is wheelchair accessible without any other information and an ad that mentions dimensions of doors, ticket pricing for care-givers, sliding pay-scale, land acknowledgement, details of the sensescape (sound, smell, taste etc.) and holding open the possibility for re-arranging material and social arrangements of the gathering. In the latter case, the architecture of the gathering is negotiated through the intentions of the hosts and the care and access needs of those in attendance.

5.4 The De-Colonial Potential of Care-Based Epistemologies of Islam

Vrinda Dalmiya (2016) defines care-knowing as a process/virtue of mechanism by which we arrive at the “truth (about selves)” and a character trait/a virtue of character by which we organize “enquiry to make it more inclusive of opposing points of view” (238). By framing knowledge production as a relation of care, I explore how textual practices of judgement within political theory (which includes Islamic thought) engage the ethical sensibilities of attentiveness (caring about), responsibility (caring for), competence (care giving), responsiveness (care receiving) and solidarity (caring with) and how this engagement differs in colonial and de-colonial modes of knowing the “Islamic” (Tronto 2013, 35). Dalmiya argues that “in and through caring we know”. In critique of Kantian/Rawlsian moral theory in which ethical subjects make judgment from an individualized, “neutral and universal standpoint” (Dalmiya 2016, 5; Nedelsky 2012), ethics of care scholars offer a re-vision of the ethical subject as an embodied, and
inherently relational, self whose moral behaviour “aims at fulfilling the (often conflicting) needs” of other “corporeal, and hence vulnerable, selves” (Dalmiya 2016, 5-6). Tronto argues that “those who engage in caring must make judgments: judgments about needs, about conflicting needs, strategies for achieving ends, the responsiveness of care-receivers, and so forth” (Tronto 1993, 137). And so, “successful caring practices are sustained by a caring character—a set of entrenched and stable dispositions or virtues” (Dalmiya 2016, 21). What this means for knowledge production is that there is a flesh and blood (Weems 2003; Yak-Hwee 2003) dimension of the epistemic domain of moral judgement. The textures of this content can only be sensed in the poetic structure of our storied lives through affect, tactility, interdependency and witnessing (Dalmiya 2016, 7). It is only through de-colonial sense-abilities that histories can be “heard with the ear or the heart or both that they serve as “reminders,” or something “worth mentioning” (dhikrā)” and “the contract of future friendship is sealed” (Moosa 2005, 45).

5.5 The Stench of Oppression: Smell as an Islamic Sensibility

“Oh my body, make of me always a man who questions” (qtd. in Mignolo 2011, 132)!

Mignolo argues that this statement by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* represents border epistemology, “the biographical sensing of the Black body in the Third World, anchoring a politics of knowledge that is both in the body and in local histories” (ibid.). This is the practice of thinking geo- and body-politically. Such thinking can only be practiced by delinking from European traditions and categories of thought which operate from a “logic of racialization” (133) Those who practice border thinking “write with [their] bodies on the border…[their]senses have been trained by life to perceive the difference, to sense that [they] have been made anthropoi, that [they] do not belong or belong partially to the sphere and the eyes that look at
as...’others’” (136). To think and act differently means to delink and think on your own terms as an act of epistemic disobedience. It is through world-sensing and body-sensing we are able to open our hearts to hear and tend to the cry that Maldonado-Torres speaks of. For example, in a Jumm’ah Khutbah “What do you Smell Like?” (2019), through various hadiths and (con)texts of Revelation Imam Omar Suleiman offers a relational phenomenology of smell as a sense and the function it serves within Islamic cosmologies of knowledge. As a body-sense, smell evokes our memories and imagination in a way that sight cannot. In the womb, prior to the development of sight and hearing, the child first learns to identify with her Mother through the faculty of smell and detects proximity to her mother by tracing her scent. Imam Suleiman describes smell as a way of bringing something back from the past, a way of placing something that is missing from us or has been absenced. He likens this to a mother that grieves her deceased child by smelling her clothes, or when a person fondly remembers a parent through the smell of their cooking. Our scent is also the mark we “leave on a gathering” and the mark a “gathering leaves” on us. And so, what we leave behind in this world in our remembrance is our scent which means that our sincerity is measured not by our appearance but by the smell that emanates from us over time. To be in good company and do good deeds emits from one a sweet scent; whereas, committing violence and oppression against others emits from one a rotten stench. Our scent rubs off on others and we also carry on us the scent of our gatherings and friendships. The faculty of smell also carries us towards Jannah (heaven) as the scent of paradise not only scents our graves but can also be sensed in the Dunya (the world on earth)—even from five hundred years of travel away. However, similar to Mbembe and Fricker’s comments on the inability to sense the stench of oppression, the oppressor, as someone who is complicit in harming others, through the act of violence he hinders himself from smelling the scent of paradise nor can he
smell the notes of his own stench as rotten and foul. Imam Suleiman notes that’s the oppressor’s scent is like a scorpion on his back that is there, and will bite him, but he requires another witness beyond himself to make him aware of the scorpion.

Whether it’s the sweet scent of citrus, or the foul smell of rotten eggs, the source of the scents in our gatherings is unrecognizable. Imam Suleiman likens this to the spread of fitnah (civil strife) in a community and the inability to determine the face of the fatan, of the person who started the conflict. He gives the example of the person who travels with information for the sake of using it to destroy relations and communities. All that remains visible after this exchange of knowledge is fighting, hatred and distrust within the community which makes it difficult to locate the source, “the person who threw the stinkbomb”, in Imam Suleiman’s words. In contrast, he cites a hadith about a group of travelers from Iraq passing through Medina on their way to Mecca who are asked by Abu Huraira about their intentions and reasons for visiting. Their replies illustrate “a sense” of the Quran that hints to Abu Huraira that they are among good company and are a learned group; and so, he asked if Abdullah Ibn Masood, a renowned knowledge keeper and companion of the Prophet was among them. In recognizing the signature of his knowledge, Abu Huraira was correct as Ibn Masood was indeed among the crowd.

Although as the scent (of khayr and of fitna) diffuses within an environment its source becomes unrecognizable, the signature of individuals who have done good work within a community carries on in the scent of their witnesses, be it their students, followers and communities. Here, the scholar should not strive to become renowned or famous for her work but rather hope that her acts of service (in the form of knowledge production) spread to inspire others to do good as well. The point I am making here is not just that the scent of fitna and oppression should also be included in the accessibility policy of scent-free spaces but also, that body-sense is a corporeal
mode of witnessing within Islamic care-based epistemologies and scholars must take responsibility for the scents they bring into, and take from, different environments.

5.6 The Mujadila Praxis: A Care-Based and Islamic Mode of Knowing

Building upon Moosa’s notion of dihlīz and Piepzna-Samarinha’s notion of collective accessibility, how can Muslims hold a place for, instead of standing in the way of, Indigenous people’s right to return and hold Indigenous peoples close in our relations of care? What embodies such a multi-sensorial, connection-based and relational mode of care-knowing is the mujadila model of discourse in which the Muslim political theorist, as the mujadila, is an interlocutor, in Wolin’s sense, and a khalifa (moral agent). In her essays, “She Who Argues: A Homily on Justice” and “Braiding the Stories” Syrian-American literary theorist and poet Mohja Kahf uses the story of Khaswla bint Thalaba to develop a model of textual interpretation through which the balagha of Muslim women in the early Islamic era could be recovered. Khaswla, known as “she who argued” in the Quran (58:1), appealed Allah to make a way to forgive her husband for the crime of ziha r. Discontent with the legal and Islamic options available for their dispute, she not only petitions a customary divorce law, but in doing so, she also interrogates the “literalistic status quo”, affirms the “primacy of kin and emotional relationships over the letter of the law” and petitions for “a more compassionate alternative” (Kahf 2000, 158). Sūrat al-Mujādilah juxtaposes this reference to Khawla with a call for inclusivity within the newly constituted Islamic community in Medina, “O you who believe! When you are told to make room in your assemblies, make room; Allah will make room for you” (58:1). Kahf argues that “Qu’ranic text acknowledges Khawla’s utterance and knits it into the sura, reflecting back Khawla’s phrase “O dear Allah, I complain unto you” (ashku ilmaika) in the verse, “Allah has indeed heard the utterance of the woman who disputes with thee concerning her husband and
complains unto Allah” (tashtaki ila allah)” (158). The significance of this story for Kahf is the way in which a Muslim woman interrogates the text of a law as inapplicable and unresponsive for her contextual situation and demands of Revelation and Allah to design a connection-based remedy to her ethical dilemma from within the horizon of her relationship. The issue is not just that the patriarchal or androcentric interpretations of social justice within the Islamic tradition do not “extend fully to women” (Wadud 1999, 36) or to “despised genders” (M. Dube 2003). What is critical is the role connection-based knowing plays in our formation as a khalifa (the moral agent) and identifying and tending to zulm (injustice) (Wadud 2006, 14–15).

Allah’s receptivity to Khawla’s petition, and the story’s inscription in the written word of Revelation, affirms the importance of both surfacing the heritage of and reclaiming the authority of Muslim women to interpret and interrogate Islamic (con)texts to respond to their unique circumstances. Khawla’s petition represents the right of Muslim women to demand responsive and attentive models of justice that acknowledge care-based epistemologies and connection-based modes of charting terrains of moral responsibility. Through this surah, Kahf develops the theoretical construct of mujadila:

The term mujāḏila, “she who argues,” the traditionally ascribed name of the suʿra, comes from the verb jadala, which means to “coil” or “braid.” Many Qur’ānic Arabic words have very tangible ancient meanings related to the flesh and bone of life in pre-Islamic Arabia, then acquire more abstract meanings as Arabic develops. The verb jadala means “maneuvering left and right,” as one does in braiding hair; later it came to mean “to debate.” In medieval Islamic discourse, jadal came to mean dialectics, a method used in the field of classical theology. In any dialectics, meaning emerges through process. No one needed to explain all this to Khawla. She was debating theology, without knowing this activity had a name, without knowing such debate would later be abstracted from practical applications into a field of its own (Kahf 2000, 297).

For Kahf (2000), the mujadila praxis is a way of “coming into literary history”, of gathering “those women’s eloquences that are fragmentary and dispersed in textual sources” (ibid).
Mujadila, as an interlocutor, occupies a liminal space “inside and outside the discourse that results from this encounter between herself and others, she both tells the story and is told by it” (ibid.). A mujadila “both interrupts and acknowledges the other to whom she speaks” (Kahf 2000). Similar to Wendy Brown’s sense of tactile texture in contrapuntal analysis, a mujadila discourse is a part of a dialogue “braided with the utterances or texts of others to produce a new meaning for the collectivity” (ibid.). While Kahf focuses on the textual history of care-based modes of knowing the “Islamic”, her model invites investigation into tactile, relational and connection-based modes of revealing the epistemic dimension of moral judgement.

Through the cultivation of mujadila as a sense-orientation, we are able to respond to the zulm of unmet care and access needs, non-responsive and non-consensual practices of care, and asymmetries in the distribution of care-work to design more accessible practices of world-building and knowledge production. It is through care-based and relational modes of knowing the Islamic, we make and sustain how we fit together in this world (Garland-Thomson 2011). For example, my family’s prayer formation is a dwelling place within the Ummah that was held between our bodies, how they fit together, and our receptivity towards one another; it was only sense-able to us in this situation, within this relation of care, and in the eyes of Allah. But this is not where the story ends, this place, these relations, our dispositions, are not frozen in time, or a fixed point or place to work towards in the future. Just as primary care-givers we must stay responsive to my father’s access needs as they range from wheelchair, to walking, to using the walker (depending on the day, his body and the spatial situation), my white partner must also constantly remain responsive to and address-able for the various orders of harm his whiteness brings to Muslim community spaces. The work of care requires us to always be responsive to the access and care needs of those with whom we share a space and ask how are we needed (or not)
in this space by others and sense which ethical obligations arise from such a relation of (inter)dependency and situatedness? And, sometimes such responsiveness ethically obliges us to eject/exist ourselves from community spaces or re-distribute, reject and refuse material resources. Such receptivity begins with and must always be informed by the feedback, consent and critique of those who we care for.

In my return to Vancouver, the energy signature of our radically deviant prayer formation found me again in a community prayer space, Unity Mosque, that is a “gender-equal, queer-friendly, and religiously non-discriminatory” healing and prayer space (Vikander 2017). The Masjid takes places every Saturday at a local community centre and is made into an Islamic space for prayer with the gathering and intentions of its visitors, their care for one another and various modes of embodying prayer as Muslims. The space is held in prayer, in silence, in *dhikr*, and in reflection. The organizers of Unity Mosque have also designed land acknowledgements for their gatherings, offer various ways of attending the Friday Khutbah (online, in person, in prayer, in meditation, in witness etc.), are intentional in co-creating the mosque space as body-positive and centre the work of anti-oppression in their sermons.

We must not only make and hold space for those who are present in our gatherings, we must also hold space for those who have departed into the afterlife. Asli Zengin explores how LGBTQ communities of care arise in response to the “transgressive death” of transgender Muslims in Turkey. In Islam because the human body is given in trust to us by Allah, we are “responsible for taking good care” of it until its return to Creator (Zengin 2019, 85). Building upon Mbembé’s notion of necroviolence (the “corporal mistreatment of the deceased through burial and funeral practices…”) Zengin explores how the Turkish nation-state and the “blood family” collaborate to “reinscribe the gender/sex of the dead body” through rituals of “corpse
washing, cleaning and wrapping” (Zengin 2019, 88). Families refuse to “participate in the washing ritual” and maintain a “distance” from the dead body by “withhold[ing] this most intimate of death rites, as well as the affective, social, and kinship effects these rights are meant to produce” (Zengin 2019, 90). In response to such b/ordering of the afterlife as a cisnormative place, the LGBTQ activist community, and the individual’s chosen family, form communities of care and assume the charge of advocating for, protecting and caring for their friend’s body in her afterlife. Through such labours of love and kin-making, Istanbul’s LGBTQ community works together to prevent their loved ones from being buried in “the cemetery for the unknown”—burial sites in Turkey for “marginal people” (Zengin 2019, 93).

Just as my mother always keeps the door open for me, Unity Mosque keeps its doors open to Queer Muslims and Istanbul’s Muslim transwomen keep the door open to the afterlife for their sisters. Fatima Mernissi (1991) also bears witness to the force of maternity, Ar-Rahman, in her “illiterate grandmother, Lalla Yasmina” who “opened the door” for her to access Islam as “a poetic religion” (62). She recalls her grandmother waking in the early hours of the morning to pray, cook her siblings mahrash and share with them her own renderings of tales of the Prophet’s pilgrimage to Mecca. Shaped and textured by her grandmother’s insomnia and illiteracy, these stories of Islamic (con)texts gave her space to “freely play with words” but were different than the interpretations by “the men of learning” and what she learned at Quran school (63). Mernissi calls this the “dual attitude towards sacred text”; the texture of exegesis depends on the “person who invokes it” (64). Despite heteropatriarchal attempts at displacing Muslim women from Islamic spaces, marking female bodies as impure, and delegitimizing women as interpretive authorities and knowers of the Islam, “the whole earth is a mosque” (69); what I interpret in Mernissi’s definition of the qibla as a cosmological orientation is that it is like our Mother’s
home that holds and opens space not just for our return, but also, a place that has never been taken from us, conquered or subjugated—a place held by Muslims for one another.

Similar to Mernissi who focuses on the poetics of Scripture as held in her memory of, and dialogues with, her grandmother, post-colonial feminist theologian Musa Dube also offers de-colonial and anti-patriarchal textual sensibilities with which we can read Scripture through the story of Utentelezandlane that she inherited through her grandmother. Dube punctuates this story, in which a group of girls kill a princess in envy of her beauty, with the word *Kolobetsa*:

> the word *'kolobetsa'* which may appear in different versions, depending on the ethnic group, simply means *'carry on, go on, keep telling us'* or *'yes, we are listening'* to the story. It is the role of the listeners who become *'participant listeners or active listeners'*. Indeed, in some cultures this interjection can become elaborate and listeners become co-storytellers (Dube 2003).

It is through the story of Utentelezandlane that Dube re-interprets and critiques the Biblical story of Judith as a de-colonial, but not anti-patriarchal, heroine. Through this re-reading of Scripture, Dube critiques the imperial attitude within Christian feminism to exclude Christian women from the Two-Thirds world as interpretive authorities within Christian knowledge production. My mother, Mernissi’s grandmother and Dube’s grandmother are all women who are not only knowledge keepers, but women from whom their daughters inherited a sense and sensibility of religion as a care-based epistemology. It is through the poetic deliverance of Revelation and how our relations take place around kitchen tables (Ahmed 2010; Dube 2003), in the rhythms and movements of storytelling or in *deviant* prayer formations, that the anti-patriarchal, de-colonial and anti-ableist meanings of Scripture are (re)imagined and held in place. Such acts of witnessing are connection-based modes of knowing. What all of these stories have in common is that it is through care-based epistemologies that we sculpt inherited knowledges to make, and sustain, a place for others to dwell, to fit, and to thrive in our worlds.
What is absenced in Islamic historiography, as well as in political theory, are the histories, situations, (inter)dependencies and labours of care with which our ideas are conceived, delivered and textured. Whether its charting the *isnad*, or citations within an essay, the poetic dimension of knowledge production remains spectral. Whereas religious feminists like Dube and Mernissi seek to consciously re-center care as the connective tissue with which we inherit a tradition, my family’s prayer formation as situated within the Home/Domestic sphere remains at the peripheries of sense-ability of scholars of political theory, Islamic jurisprudence and even fellow Muslims, as a potential and legitimate mode of knowing the “Islamic.” Not only do we bury stories of Muslim women as makers of the “Islamic”, but we also de-legitimize receptive technologies of Islamic place-making with which we can design accessible and relational architecture that is attentive to our needs and accounts for the poetic dimensions of the Islamic tradition.

5.7 Grounded Relationalities and the Land

At the crux of this notion of collective accessibility is re-imagining space as relationally and continually held in place through care-based epistemologies (and cosmologies) of place-making. What remains missing in this discussion of spatiality, however, is the ontology of land. Glen Coulthard (2014) argues that land must also be understood as a "field of relationships of things to each other" and place as a "way of knowing, of experiencing and relating to the world and with others" (61). Through such relational land-based practices and modes of knowledge production, "forms of resistance against other rationalizations of the world that threaten to erase or destroy our sense of place" can be dismantled i.e. ableism, racism (ibid.). It is important to outline Coulthard’s definition of land for the purposes of exploring how grounded normativity draws on the interrelatedness of space, embodiment and relationality to counter the state’s
attempts at regulating indigeneity through the Source that "created the universe" (Simpson 2017, 16). He presents three dimensions of land: land as a resource central to our material survival; land as constitutive of Indigenous identity and land as relationship. With this said, the aim of Indigenous anti-colonialism then becomes centered on the question of land:

a struggle not only for land in the material sense, but also deeply informed by what the land as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in non-dominating and nonexploitative terms (Coulthard 2014, 60).

Such a place-based approach, or grounded normativity, is oriented by "modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time" (13). In a previous chapter, through the frame of disability, I illustrated that 1) the necropolitical gaze of settler-colonial hegemony is fixed on both Indigenous and disabled bodies and its ableist and racist agenda operates at the level of the biopolitical by orienting our textual sense-abilities, and 2) ableist white supremacy works to disempower and debilitate Indigenous, Black and racialized peoples through psycho-affective, epistemic and spirit injury (Wing 1997). Queer and Indigenous scholars push the disability justice frame of collective accessibility to consider that spaces are not fixed but are relationally created through practices (Tucker 2011, 231).

And so, the texture of a space feels differently for everyone based on their access needs. Fear, for example, has a serious effect on mobility in that it works to "enable some bodies to inhabit and move in public spaces through restricting the mobility of other bodies to spaces that are enclosed or contained" (The Roestone Collective 2014, 1349). Perceptions of safety are influenced by not only political identities and performance, but also by "how a space is used and
controlled" (ibid.) across time because safe spaces respond to the "patriarchal, heteronormative, racialized and classed imaginary constructions of safety" (The Roestone Collective 2014, 1351). This invites investigation into whether as Muslims we can cultivate modes of relating with the land and land-based practices that build worlds in which Indigenous sovereignty is valued and upheld. Can settler-spaces be subverted through Islamic practices of worship that seek to (re)create, (re)define and (re)produce Canadian spaces “as opposed to merely experiencing” them passively (The Roestone Collective 2014, 1352)? One possible mode of de-subjectification is "building yourself a body in a safe place" because “[t]he objects that compose the [body-] ecology are in constant communication with each other” (The Roestone Collective 2014, 1358). If we understand dihlīz to be a "safe space as co-constituted by bodies, objects and environments" then it is in a constant state of "affective becoming" (1359). Arrival no longer becomes an end-point in a journey that is fixed in time and space, but rather, it is a place that is negotiated in our relationship with Indigenous peoples and must be sustained and (re)produced through shared and consent-based practices of care. Similar to Moosa’s notion of a dihlīz, here we understand bodies as "affectively dynamic" and not just biologically constituted. This blurs the boundaries between objects, space and bodies to pave space for openings for interventions in paradoxical spaces.

Building off of Deleuze, Tucker argues that the body should be understood through topology, "mapped from above" (235). The crux of this is understanding how relational forces move across social worlds to "create new modes of being" (ibid.). How we embody Islam as settlers "can be territorialized and territorializing" in that we "work in connection with other bodies to continually (re)create spaces" (ibid.). A fruitful point of conversation between Indigenous and Islamic imaginaries is (re)building a "web of consensual relationships that is
infused with movement (kinetic) through lived experience and embodiment" (Simpson 2017, 15).

Similar to Islamic cosmologies of knowledge production, in "Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation" Leanne Betasamosake Simpson centres body-sense as the primary site for (re)embodying indigeneity through land-based pedagogy and grounded normativity. She develops Coulthard’s notion of grounded normativity to account for the kinetic, spiritual, imaginative and affective dimensions of place-making. Through her story *Kwezens makes a lovely discovery*, she illustrates the "very basic, core Nishnaabeg values" of love, compassion and understanding (Simpson 2017, 6). The story exemplifies the interrelatedness of theory and embodiment in Nishnaabeg Thought in which theory is "generated and regenerated continually through embodied practice and within each family, community and generation of people" (7). It goes beyond being an intellectual pursuit and is contextually and relationally "woven within kinetics, spiritual presence and emotion" (ibid.). Knowledge production is "intimate and personal with individuals themselves" making them the agents responsible for "finding and generating meaning within their own lives" (ibid.). The process of embodiment entails a coming to know, a process of "mirroring or a re-enactment process where we understand Nishnaabeg epistemology to be concerned with embodied knowledge animated, collectively, and lived out in a way in which our reality, nationhood and existence is continually reborn through both time and space" (15).

The care-based dimension of Nishnaabeg and Islamic epistemologies centre affect, attachment and radical relationality as the flesh and bone dimensions of knowledge production and consumption. There is a relation between attachments and movement in that "what moves, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place" (Ahmed
Such movements are not purely kinetic elitist, they are stirred by the heart, connect us to others, attach us to "this or that place" and influence how we "inhabit the world with others" (ibid.). How we are "touched by others" during critical moments shapes histories of contact which are bound with attachment "insofar as it is a question of what sticks, of what connections are lived as the most intense or intimate, as being closer to the skin" (33). It is on this plane of “fugitive possibilities” and “epistemic disobedience” where communities of care between Indigenous peoples and Muslims are forming on Turtle Island (Martineau and Ritskes 2014). Through sense and sentience, in moving together and alone, and creative expression, we can learn and imagine ways to honour consent, reconciliation and decolonization in our relations.

Grounded normativity, as Simpson (2014) describes it in her story, is the Aunties’ laughter; Kwezens' curiosity and playfulness; the way "they cooked the meat in that sweet water"; Mama rubbing Kwezens' back and telling her "she believes her anyway"; the Aunties high-fiving and high-kicking; in the expression Saasaakwe; the dancing and the hugging; all of these moments are tied to the practice of making maple syrup in the sugar bush (21). How our traditions, foods, and languages move through our body-senses is a care-based process and a way of de-colonizing our imagination. The most powerful takeaway from Simpson is how such care-based and connection-based modes of knowing hold space for healing from affective injury: “we are enough because if we are living our lives out in a Nishnaabeg way (and there are many of these ways), we can access all the knowledge that went into creating the universe" (16).

Building de-colonial worlds is a collective, non-hierarchical, consensual and participatory practice that relies deeply on care-based epistemologies. It is "reactive and productive work" which "reconfigures existing and context-dependent social norms"—making it embodied, symbolic, material and always incomplete (Just and Grahn 2017, 183). The scholarship of
Indigenous political theorists on the aesthetic and poetic dimensions of resurgence invites investigation into how Muslims living on Turtle Island can harness Islamic care-based epistemologies of place-making to not only build just relations with Indigenous communities as owners of the land through political alliances but also, opening up our hearts and intentions through connection-based modes of knowing and being with another.

5.8 Conclusion: Re-Visiting Intentionality

A de-colonial and Islamic ethic of care requires us to re-visit and re-read the issue of intentionality within political theory to interrogate the mark of colonial (con)texts upon our gatherings and within hearts. In particular, through an Islamic rendering of moral judgement, I re-imagine how the practice of niyyah (intentionality) within our knowledge relations equips us to address our complicity in authoring and authorizing mis-fits in our knowledge relations. Responding to the histories and worlds of the ideas we inherit, without response-ability to the (m)others they violate and displace, presences the coloniality of the author’s worlds, their ways of relating, into our horizons. For example, we celebrate John Locke and his theory of property as a point of origin for liberty, yet hesitate to affirm the ways in which his defense of dispossessing Indigenous peoples from their land continues to not only (re)produce settler-colonialism (Arneil 1996), but also, disenfranchise political refugees, landless farmers, members of the homeless community, by framing them as a threats to property-owners.

Instead of journeying to other shores, what is needed is for political theorists to shore up colonial ways of relating we have inherited from our shared, imagined and material past(s) by making the familiar unfamiliar. The speculative care of colonialist authors for the Other is not an abstraction, it is oriented by the material apparatus of colonial rule in which practices of care were appropriated to carry out civilizing missions. The colonialist sentiment of “discovery”
continues to haunt comparative political theorists as we celebrate each other as the first in academia to mine the democratic potential, as well as the political dimensions, of “non-western” (con)texts without recognizing that we inherit these (con)texts and traditions through the work of racialized, Indigenous and Black scholars that have enabled our access, our reach. Just as the East Indian Company ventured to other shores to fund Britain’s industrialization and develop its ideas of civilization, comparative political theorists now turn to non-western traditions with a self-contained desire to fill gaps within “the canon” and a capitalistic urge to claim authorial ownership over the textual traditions and knowledges of non-western communities. With such an orientation, practitioners learn to care-about the other, without doing the work of caring-for the other by refusing to acknowledge that those they seek to write about are people they share a horizon with. As political theorists, we not only inherit these colonial modes of relating to the “Other”, but we also, inherit the work of “othering”, of doing, that which sustains colonial models of knowledge relations. Beyond the writer’s intentionality, by inheriting colonialist ideas, how do we continue to do the work of colonialism through our knowledge relations and knowledge-production systems?

Affirming the relation between thinking, building and dwelling, we can draw a more explicit connection between the colonial ideas, ways of relating and practices of care of the Great White Mother (Jacobs 2009). From dispossessing Indigenous (m)others and their children from their lands and relations, to appropriating the caring labours of Black women to sustain and maintain the Master’s house, to surveilling migrant communities through the delivery of care, the violent phantasms of maternity as a colonial apparatus continue to haunt (m)others today. In inheriting colonial ideas, and the intentions of their authors, we build worlds in which we feel justified in disrupting birthing practices; interrupting Indigenous farming techniques; and implanting
colonial curriculum in schools. Colonial knowledge relations, in which dependency care was institutionalized as an instrument of domination, shaped how colonizers cared-for their colonial subjects. I argue that continuing to dismiss the colonial baggage of political theory as an epiphenomenal bi-product of the author’s temporal and spatial context is an uncaring action because it orients the attention of practitioners to turn away and ignore the historical orientations and relations through which the field, as we know it, has been crafted. There are ethical consequences of this historical amnesia.

Whether its caring for our worlds, the histories we inherit, or for those with whom we share this earth, the practices of reading and writing by which we perform political theory deeply engage various parts of ourselves. How we read is shaped by our relational attachments, sense organs, bodies and collective memories. How does causing harm and violence in our knowledge relations inflict injury upon our hearts, sense-abilities and our capacities to create mutual, caring and non-violent relations with “communities of struggle…on the ground” (Tully 2008, 17)? If we have yet to do the work on ourselves by transforming our practices and unlearning colonial textual sensibilities, is it really sensible to assume the original position of innocence and insert ourselves into the cosmologies of “Other” by force of shared fate? This is where the intentionality of the (un)original authors, their (un)intended readerships, contextual horizons and the colonial imaginary come into play.

5.9 Do the colonial intentions of dead white guys matter?

The notion of intention is understood in political theory most prominently in an interpretive sense through the writings of Quentin Skinner and the historicist model of textual interpretation. In his essay, “The Meaning and Understanding of the History of Ideas”, Skinner
(2002) argues that the task of historicizing political ideas asks of us to “grasp not merely the meaning of what is said, but…the intended force with which the utterance is issued…what they [the authors] are doing in saying it” (82). By centering the writer as an “agent of discourse (‘the author’) as one who acts by speaking in a given context of conversation”, Skinner imagines the theorist as an orator performing a speech act addressed to a particular audience in a specific historical and spatial context. Despite the promising contiguity Skinner builds between intentionality, writing and doing, his vision of authorship is contained within the individual as the one who writes. This delimits not only the scope of historicity, but also erases the field of play within which an idea is received across dialogic networks, is inherited by multiple co-authors and impacts (un)intended readerships across generations. The image of a writer as an orator confines the illocutionary force of the text to the spatiality of the writer’s horizon—delimiting the possibility for interpreting how the poetics of the space (which includes the choir’s reception of the event, the structure of the stage, the audience etc.) plays into the multiple interpretations of the oration. Beyond the relationship between the speaker and the immediate hearer, there are multiple witnesses whose accounts become so deeply imbued with the meaning of the orator’s speech, that it is difficult to draw an indivisible line between the original authors and the unoriginal authors.

Warren Boutcher (2006) expands Skinner’s model to account for the “culture of textual production and circulation” in our reception of a text (73). Instead of asking what the author is doing by writing his text, Boutcher asks “How did the physical forms and cultural modes of circulation of the textual instruments of political discussion – and of knowledge about their origins and uses – condition the agency of actors (74)? Boutcher, instead, explores the dynamic and relational ways in which (con)texts are received and produced through multiple authors,
historical-spatial settings and (un)intended readerships. He troubles Skinner’s expectation for texts to carry within them traceable and transparent marks of an originating author and historical-spatial context. Instead of territorializing intentionality to a single author, Boutcher pushes us to consider “unoriginal authors” (ibid.) of a text. This includes those who shape the conditions through which a text is received and is made sense of through a web of authorship that is co-constituted by both “the readers, the copiers, the recommenders of texts” etc., as well as, different material juridical-discursive contexts across time and space.

I extend Boutcher’s account of authorship to include the circulation of scents, how they travel across different webs of authorship and how they mark the affective and embodied reception of a (con)text. As ideas travel from “person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another” (Said 1983, 226), examining the illocutionary force of the author’s written word requires us to consider multiple authors, multiple heritages and multiple (un)intended readerships who all receive the text by making it into a work of their own. And so, even if we cannot prove, or know, the dispositions of the original author, the author must still be held accountable for the ethical and material consequences of his writing in the way we inherit and receive his ideas—for the way we allow his intentions to impress upon our senses. Yet, in line with Boutcher, the scope of intentionality here extends to multiple authors and (un)intended readerships.

A connection-based model of reading political theory involves not only interrogating the illocutionary force of the author, but also, examining the sensibilities of the text’s readers, of the individual who inherits the text within a tradition by placing herself in a relation with the author, his text and his world. Although the historicist interpretive framework provides meaningful
engagement with the notion of intention in authorship, ideas do not travel on their own and take a life of their own after their inscription into the written word.

As theorized by Edward Said (1983) in, “Travelling Theories”, historicizing political ideas requires charting different kinds of movement, shifts and transformations in the meaning of our ideas by: 1) locating a point of origin “a set of initial circumstances in which the idea came to birth”, 2) measuring the distance travelled, “a passage through the pressure” of various times and contexts, 3) tracing the set of conditions for the idea’s acceptance and resistance that shape its introduction, and 4) charting how the idea is “to some extent transformed by its new uses, its new position in a new time and place” (226–27). Said’s call for historicizing and situating ideas does not entail “infinite intertextuality”, but rather, protects theorists from falling into “an ideological trap” in which theories become unanswerable and limited in their uses to “transfix both its users and what it is used on” (252). He argues that, “no reading is neutral or innocent, and by the same token, every text and every reader is to some extent the product of a theoretical standpoint, however implicit or unconscious such a standpoint may be” (ibid.). Unlike Skinner, Said moves us beyond the writer and his context to “provide resistances to theory, to open it up toward historical reality, toward society, toward human needs and interests” (242) as “history does not get made without work, intention, resistance, effort, or conflict” (245).

Through this intergenerational, relational and multi-dimensional model of authorship, we are able to account for the “transmission of texts” and the material conditions by which they are interpreted. (Boutcher 2006, 79). Both Boutcher and Said trouble the boundaries of “what exactly makes a “classic political text” by contesting intentionality as contained within an “originarial authorial context” to focus on the process by which “a particular, shared political
experience comes to be conceptualized by means of more or less ‘traditional’ argumentative resources recirculated from other contexts” (ibid.). What of texts whose meanings can only be located in the act of transmission and not as “an authorial speech act that reverberates only in one original context” (85)? It is not always about “what the author is doing” (86). Instead, we must “question traditional stories about the circumstances of composition of texts, interrogate producers’ strategies for controlling and circumscribing their interpretation, and consider whether the ‘author’ whose doings interest us is not sometimes the reader, the copier, the ‘recommender’ of others’ works” (92).

By expanding the scope of authorship, and therefore the scope of responsibility, Boutcher and Said offer creative insight into the poetics of authorship, as a web of thoughts, attachments and affinities woven by multiple authors within and beyond the horizon of the writer’s world and relations through which the meaning of a text is inherited as knowledge. When we limit the sensorial field of knowledge production to the sensorial capacities of sight and sound, we limit the field of moral accountability to intention instead of impact. The force field of the illocutionary force of a text is limited to the space of appearance, in the Arendtian sense, that which can be heard in the form of *phonos*, or that which can be read, in the form of *gramma*. And so, colonial practices of reading and writing, as seen in the circulation, transmission and authorization of travel writings, that guide our interpretive work rely heavily on the sense organs of the eyes and the ears and the sensibilities of seeing and hearing. We can only apprehend that of texts which is inscribed into the written word and that which is vocalized as the spoken word placing interpretive authority within the hands of the direct witness, more than the originary context or author. This distance leads to the creation of boundaries, of the (un)knowable, (in)sensible and the (un)imagineable. Beyond the horizon lies *that* which we cannot know, sense,
or imagine, through the faculties of hearing and sight, and therefore, we cannot be complicit in or called to account for. The horizon captures not only the limit to our sensorial capacities, but also, the limit of the field of intentionality that demarcates what, or who, we are accountable for.

5.10  **Niyyah: Allah as an Ever-Present Spectator in our Knowledge Relations**

There was a man from among a nation before you who killed ninety-nine people and then made an inquiry about the most learned person on the earth. He was directed to a monk. He came to him and told him that he had killed ninety-nine people and asked him if there was any chance for his repentance to be accepted. He replied in the negative and the man killed him also completing one hundred. He then asked about the most learned man in the earth. He was directed to a scholar. He told him that he had killed one hundred people and asked him if there was any chance for his repentance to be accepted. He replied in the affirmative and asked, 'Who stands between you and repentance? Go to such and such land; there (you will find) people devoted to prayer and worship of Allah, join them in worship, and do not come back to your land because it is an evil place.' So, he went away and hardly had he covered half the distance when death overtook him; and there was a dispute between the angels of mercy and the angels of torment.

The angels of mercy pleaded, 'This man has come with a repenting heart to Allah,' and the angels of punishment argued, 'He never did a virtuous deed in his life.' Then there appeared another angel in the form of a human being and the contending angels agreed to make him arbiter between them. He said, 'Measure the distance between the two lands. He will be considered belonging to the land to which he is nearer.' They measured and found him closer to the land (land of piety) where he intended to go, and so the angels of mercy collected his soul.

- Hadith narrated by Abu Sa`id Al-Khudri

Whether its spoken with the tongue, inhabits the sentience of the heart, or performed as a kinetic movement, the gestures of *niyyah* (intentionality) in the Islamic tradition is a way for one to not only remember Allah as witness and judge of her actions, but also to orient her senses, her capacity to witness, and her actions towards the work of justice in the world. The ritual of *niyya* is not just an act of discursive communication with which one *speaks* with Allah but rather a practice with which one cultivates an “appropriate attitude towards Allah in his presence” (Asad 2018, 154). Talal Asad (2018) resists Paul Powers’ reading of medieval Islamic jurists declaring *niyya* as a “irreducibly subjective” and internal dimension of ‘*ibādāt* (worship) that cannot be interfered, or known, by the government. It is not that there is an internal component of intent and an external component of will by which one directs the ritual, but rather, the subject is “learning to articulate
her faith”, and through praxis, is phronetically cultivating an attitude of “Reverence and a desire (intention) to get closer to Allah” (155). What makes niyyah untranslatable is not its presumed domesticity within the interiority of the self, but rather, its spectrality as a texture that dwells within the performance of the ritual and the relationships within which it takes place and is witnessed. Interestingly, Asad argues that intention, in some cases, can be discernible: “ Relatives, friends, and teachers, can access the intention of a worshipper because that is how appropriate intentions (and therefore proper ways of worshiping) are taught” (158). What makes an action “great”, worthy of “reward”, or virtuous is not its mere performance, but rather, the intention by which one performs it and how it is received by the Creator. Intention is about “forging the right relationship between the worshipper and her Allah” through embodied rituals that deeply engage and shape our ethical sensibilities and are informed by our relational situatedness (159).

What also stands in-between the Creator and what dwells within our hearts is the mark of the (un)intended consequences of our actions as it becomes inscribed into the architecture of our selves, the Dunya (the world-on-earth), and in our relations. As we will inevitably depart this world for the next, such imprints, marks of ourselves, remain not only in our remembrance, or in representations of us in the spoken or written word, but also in what is inherited in our name, and in the Creator’s name, as the ceaseless work of care. Although our capacity to do good deeds ceases with our death, we can still be rewarded for acting virtuously through what we have endowed in our name for the service of humankind. The three types of action that qualify for such endless reward are sadaga jariyah (continuous charity), beneficial knowledge, and the prayers for the deceased by a virtuous descendant. Conceptually, the issue here is the work we leave behind as our inheritance and how this inheritance is received and delivered by our inheritors in line with
our original intentions. What is acted upon is the mark of our gestures as it travels like a scent that impresses upon those who carry our stories as witnesses.

The first refers to using one’s wealth in the way of Allah to create objects, make places, or experiences with one’s capacity to give (be it through your wealth, her kindness, her labour, her knowledge etc.) to care for the world-on-earth and those who dwell within it. Unlike the famous Gandhian proverb that connotes we must live to plant seeds of trees whose fruits we will not enjoy in our lifetime, in the Islamic tradition, we are rewarded for trees we have planted (or the land, knowledge, wealth we have endowed for charitable purposes) even after our death—for every time the tree provides shade or nourishment to another being. Cultivating land to build a hospital, school or Masjid, or teaching someone how to recite the Quran or a *dua*, or smiling at a stranger, or planting a tree, are all actions whose virtuosity has a durability that survives the action itself. One of my favourite hadiths is that even when “Resurrection is upon us, and it is the final Hour, and we have a seedling in our hands, we are obliged to plant it.” In both of these scenarios, the work of care, of sustaining this world survives our life cycle, and in the latter, even the life cycle of the earth itself. It is not only the individual who intends and donates funds or land to build a place of education but also the relations, labours of care, and the spectral histories of many invisible hands, that sustain the institution within which the education takes place. The actions of children reciting *dua* for their deceased parents, in learning at a school, in praying at the mosque, or in paying a smile forward, or in drinking from a well authorizes the reward not only for the original author who intended to serve creation, and contributed to making a space for such actions to place, but also for all her inheritors who sustain her mark in the world.

And so, the intention to do a good deed multiplies beyond the reach of the original author, relies on the work of many hands to be sustained, and is a reciprocal and interdependent gesture
of giving, receiving and supporting care. Similar to these acts of virtuous world-building, of making places on earth for humans to dwell within and be cared for, other acts of sadaqah include filling someone a glass of water; speaking words that make peace between two people; removing dangerous objects from the road to clear the path for others; caring for the elderly and the ill; greeting a stranger or a family member; performing emotional labour in supporting a friend; or giving a debtor more time to pay. These are small everyday labors and interactions of care by which we not only make ourselves as Muslims, but also make more caring, more democratic, and more Islamic worlds. However, we alone do not author or authorize such actions, rather, our intention to be caring, and to perform an act of care, must be received as such by Creator and creation as acts of sadaqah through Judgment and judgement.

What remains unclear within these popular interpretations of hadiths in regard to knowledge as an act of sadaqah is what role intentionality plays in world-making and knowledge production. In what ways can the practice of care be directed by epistemic and ontological regimes of coloniality to build uncaring worlds and relations? How do the colonial intentions of scholars translate into colonial, and uncaring, worlds through the inheritance of their ideas? And how can Muslim scholars practice de-colonial intentionality within our knowledge practices? In the field of political theory, the notion of intentionality, of what dwells within the writer’s heart, in knowledge production as argued has been theorized in two senses: as an interpretive quagmire by historicists and hermeneuticists or as mindfulness in responsivity ethics by contemporary political theorists. Contributing to, and building upon, existing Islamic scholarship on intention as a performative utterance by which we declare our actions as in the witness of Allah, I define niyyah as an Islamic gesture with both paraxial and poetic dimensions by which we individually and collectively build and sustain an openness for others in our hearts, in our homes, and in our worlds. Openness is that
which roots us into the earth and moves us to care for our selves, the lands and water that sustains us, and the sentient others with whom our histories are irreversibly, (un)intentionally and intimately tied.

Echoing Shahab Ahmed, the individual not only authors herself as a Muslim, but in doing so, is also making Islam as an author of the Islamic. Opening up the boundaries of the “Islamic” contextually, as well as opening up ourselves to moral critique, invites intersectional analysis of Muslim subjectivities to center embodiment and historicity (Shahab Ahmed 2016). Whereas Ahmed offers a more general framework of theorizing Islam as a category of analysis by focusing on its paraxial and historical dimensions, through an Islamic critical ethos, I centre the connection between the poetics of world-making and the formation of an ethical subject that underpin moral judgment within Islamic political thought. To perform niyyah, is 1) to acknowledge that the Creator is an ever-present spectator of that which dwells within our hearts, 2) to develop a spectatorial relation with one’s self and actions, and 3) to orient one’s sensorial capacities as a spectator to respond and attend to the needs of others in a non-violent and caring manner. Islamic subjectivity, the actions by which one makes herself as a Muslim, are rooted in the critical moral capacity to self-witness, to bear witness and to be witnessed.

This language of making oneself witness-able by God through ritualized actions of care is echoed by Melissa Raphael (2003) in her powerful book, Female Intimations of the Holy in Auschwitz. She explores how in the “holocaustal situation” Jewish women’s acts of care for their bodies, by “washing, holding and covering them”, were the vessels through which “the maternal work of Shekinah—the female figure of the indwelling presence of God” could witness their humanity in the profanity of Auschwitz (60). The act of cleaning oneself was a way of making the “the trace of God” visible “in the clean(sed) human face”; and through labours of care Jewish
women made themselves “knowable” and sustained “the redemptive process of divine/human (re)union” (61). Raphael argues:

Cleaning should restore its object, not make it disappear. Judaism ‘washes’ its environment in order to restore or maintain a fit, ordered space in which to conduct its relationship with God. In preserving the cleaness or translucency of the world to God, Judaism also maintains that of the relationships between persons. Yet the physical debilitation, agony, and very often death wrought by punishment in Auschwitz de-faced and dis-appeared the divine image in women (66).

Care in this context is theorized as a way of responding to, and sharing in the work of moral repair, in response to secular, racist and white supremacist violence of Nazism. Similar to the differential distribution of care-work of caring-for the afterlife of Muslim transwomen in Istanbul’s LGBTQ community, ritualized acts of care are ways persecuted and marginalized communities assume the work of witnessing within worlds of violence that deny them sense-ability or sense. A critical distinction between an Islamic notion of moral witnessing and witnessing as it is theorized within ethics of responsivity scholarship is that one opens up her heart to be witnessed by Creator as a spectator and orients herself as an ethical subject accordingly. What is similar across theoretical frameworks, however, is that the ontology of the witness and her capacities to witness are not pre-formed but rather are transformed and informed through witnessing as praxis and histories of sense-contact. Whereas the first two dimensions of Islamic witnessing are rooted in Deen, the third dimension grounds the former in the Dunya, in that the delivery of one’s niyyah is fundamentally relational and inter-dependent on others with whom we share this world on earth. It is rooted not only in the sensorial capacities of sight and sound, but also, within the heart as the primary sense-organ that enables us to practice attentive love.
Islamic practices of care mediate the intersections between the material and spiritual dimensions of Deen and Dunya. When we define Deen, as primarily religion, we assume that Dunya, the earthly, is its subordinate, instead of affirming the dynamic relationship between them. Understanding Deen through the western-modern, Christian-European historical experience of religion as a coherent, comprehensive set of obligations to God “yields… an ethos that is readily identified as a body of sacred rules . . . in which human agency and reason are reduced to acts of compliance” (Sajoo 2013, 591). Such an understanding of religion as something followed, not (re)produced and (re)created through the embodied and situated individual writes out from Islamic history “Muslims acting as Muslims—that is, acting in self-conscious terms of Islam” (Shahab Ahmed 2016, 196). Although niyyah can be spoken with the mouth, or written with the hand, its dwelling place is within the heart, the interiority of the self, of the home, a place we inhabit and return to.

Despite common parlance within Muslim communities of praising or shaming others for their niyyah, humans are not the judges, nor the witnesses, of what dwells in the hearts of others. We can conjecture based on our observations of an other’s words and deeds and relational histories, but this judgment on the rightness or wrongness of one’s niyyah or whether one’s actions have been accepted in line with their intentions ultimately rests with the Creator. And so, instead of framing niyyah as a praxis in the Aristotelian sense as an activity whose ends inhere within itself, I instead frame it as the mark of a gesture, that not only colors the action itself, but remains within the material and perceptual impressions of the action within the world and in the memories of its witnesses. And so, although niyyah is a way of cultivating a spectatorial relationship with one self, others, and Allah, its delivery is a collaborative, inter-dependent and relational labour of authorship in which multiple others and histories become entwined in the
work of authoring the material, ontological and perceptual pre-conditions for such spectatorial judgement.

This analytical shift in how we understand sensorial perception opens up incredible space to frame the bodies and practices of Muslims as not simply compositions of materiality over-coded and given a face by the machinery of the nation-state or Islamic law. Instead this shift pushes us to creatively (re)imagine the ways Islamic practices animate and are animated by Deen and Dunya through the Muslim individual’s multi-sensorial capacity to witness. In particular, how are our bodies, the (im)materiality of our caring labours, our orientations towards the Hereafter and the cultivation of niyyah implicated in world-making? What interests me is the rise of transnational Muslim communities of care committed to transforming wounds of the flesh created by intersecting histories of violence in the Dunya into pressure points for deepening their orientations towards Deen by tending to the plight of the oppressed.

5.11 In Between Deen and Dunya: Weaving De-Colonial Futures

How we reconcile the carnal realities of the flesh, whether its material or moral injury, disability or illness, of Dunya, with our understanding of Deen is a critical point of entry for understanding Islam/Islamic through an intersectional lens and performing the third dimension of niyyah. In doing so, as Muslims we enlist our labours of care in the work of creating more inclusive, caring worlds for communities of struggle. For example, the “Canadian Prayer Rug” was created in collaboration with Indigenous designers, Syrian newcomers and members of Edmonton’s Muslim community. The prayer rug’s design represents the symbols, textiles and weaving patterns from Indigenous and Muslim histories and cosmologies. The project was inspired by the story of the first Masjid ever built in Canada in 1938, Al-Rashid Masjid. The Masjid was designed by a Ukrainian-Canadian architect, as marked in its resemblance of a Russian Orthodox
Church, was funded by members of all faiths, and build with Indigenous, Ukrainian and Lebanese hands for their Muslim neighbors on land donated by the City of Edmonton. The Masjid, which now is a heritage site, has been “preserved through the tireless efforts of some ambitious Muslim women who refused to let the mosque be demolished” (The Canadian Prayer Rug, “Concept”). What remains of the mosque today is not only its material structure, but the gift of its gesture, the impression of its scent, and the intention of its creators to build a place of worship for their neighbours that now lives on as an inheritance within the Muslim community. Whereas the makers of the first Masjid intended to create space for Muslims to pray, the intention to open space in our relations lives on today as Muslim-Canadian communities work to de-colonize their practices of Islam by aligning with Indigenous peoples in the struggle against white supremacy and settler-colonialism. And so, in memory of this gesture, the materials of the prayer rug are made from local wool mill, hand-dyed with plants that are native to the region, and the style of weaving is a mix of Indigenous epistemologies of textile making and a Pakistani form of stitching called the “Qalmi” stitc (“Qalam” and means writing instrument) (Canadianprayerrug.ca). The project is sponsored by Islamic Family and Social Services Association, The Green Room and the Edmonton Heritage Council.

Moral responsibility, in the Islamic tradition, requires us to not only acknowledge and care for the land we are sustained by, but also to create just relations with its rightful owners; and so, in our intentions to settle on this land we cannot be absolved of the set of legal and moral responsibilities that arise from within the Islamic faith to Indigenous peoples. As Muslim-settlers we benefit from the dispossession of Indigenous peoples through the Canadian state and pose a serious threat in our presence on stolen land. How can we account for our relation to the land, to Indigenous peoples, our positionality as settlers in our niyyah? What is intentional is that this
collaborative weaving a “Canadian Prayer Rug” is acting upon the intention to build a world in which “home” is welcoming and familiar, “a place to gather, grow and stay” (ibid.). The prayer rug is based on the Cree word *pehonan*, which means, waiting place, and the word *Masjid*, which means a place of gathering, serenity and home (ibid.). Although it is not an explicit act of de-colonizing political institutions, it is a way of designing an institution within the Islamic tradition in a way that all our relations are reflected in the material objects we create to inhabit our world. What is not inscribed into the materiality of the rug, but still remains as a constitutive feature of its production, are the relational affinities nurtured between its creators, the intimate, and intricate, moments of knowledge translation, and the openings within the hearts of its creators to tend to one another’s wounds of forcible displacement, racism and assimilation.

The makers of Al-Rashid *Masjid*, and the Canadian Prayer Rug, were not all Muslim, and did not perform the *niyyah* as a way of marking their production process as an Islamic activity in the name of Allah; however, the scent, or the mark of their gesture of hospitality permeated not only the design of the end product but also the process by, and materials with which, the product was created. The scent of a good deed rubbed off on all of its makers and inheritors. Although the city of Edmonton granted land to the Muslim community through settler-colonial notions of property and dispossession, who made a place for Muslims to pray were the non-Muslim migrants and Indigenous makers of the mosque. The building was created with the intention that it will be used for worship by Muslims and the moral blueprint of the gesture marked their labour of world-making as an Islamic activity.

Ahmed elaborates on this scenario in the example of non-Muslim scholars who produce scholarship on Islam. He cites the scenario of a non-Muslim scholar of Islam who engages Islamic Con-Text(s) without “hermeneutical engagement” with Revelation (Shahab Ahmed
2016, 449) to produce a discourse on Islam. The work of a non-Muslim scholar that does not engage the primary text(s) of Islam cannot be identified as constitutive of what is “Islamic”, or himself as an author of Islamic thought; however, if his scholarship is engaged with in any level, through critique, or in practice, by a Muslim, or the Muslim community and is “taken up by Muslims as a part of an act of meaning-making in terms of Islam”, then it has gained entry into the “con-text and has become Islamic.” He qualifies this by noting, that “whether or not an actor is Muslim is irrelevant” (ibid.) to the matter of whether or not the act or the product of the act is Islamic” (449–551), because “what matters is the means to meaning” and the “commitment of the self to that meaning” (Ibid.).

The significance is that a non-Muslim can perform an Islamic act, create an Islamic product, such as a non-Muslim architect of a Mosque that is legitimized through its use by Muslims. And so, if the means of scholarship engage Revelation, and if the final product of scholarship is brought into the Con-text (s) of Islam through the hermeneutical, critical labours of the Muslim community in defining what is means to be a Muslim, then it is “Islamic.” This nuanced approach to authorship is significant because it not only prioritizes the self-understanding of the Muslim individual as the central locus for defining the “Islamic” but it also captures the spatiality of world-making by which we come to “have a world” (Solomon and Lawlor 2018), and inhabit it, in Merleau-Ponty’s sense. For Ahmed, Muslims have the authorship rights over “what is Islamic”; however, I invite investigation into both the critical role of non-Muslims in the poetic and spectral constitution of the “Islamic” and how such a relation in pluriversal societies obliges Muslims in the work of social justice to support other marginalized and persecuted communities. The stories of Al-Rashid Masjid and the Canadian Prayer rug compel me to wonder how can we attach ourselves to the lives of those beyond the
scope of our kin in a way that we become responsible for, and implicated in, the conditions for another’s well-being and sustenance instead of their destruction?

*Niyyah* is a way to ground our relations with our selves, with the land, with sentient others in an Islamic ethic of care. The power of gestures as greetings, as articulated by Iris Young, or as promises or acts of forgiveness, as theorized by Hannah Arendt, or of friendship and hospitality, as theorized by the Jacques Derrida, are celebrated in democratic theory and communicative ethics as *openings*. Similar to the hermeneutic impulse of practicing openness within our knowledge production, quoting the Quran, Esack also notes that “And whosoever observes *taqwa* in respect of Allah, for him (or her) He will create an opening” (Q. 15:2). It is these banal, ritualized gestures of promise, friendship and forgiveness by which we are able to open up space in our relations and to build more caring, decolonial worlds. How can the simple gesture of stating your intention as a political theorist engage your heart as a sense organ in the practice of reading, writing and doing political theory?

### 5.12 Ameen.

By stating our intentions as political theorists, and as Muslim scholars, we can at the very least acknowledge that although we may perform the written word with no intention to harm, we are human and our words and their reception, or the process of authorship, will inescapably cause abandonment in our relations, as well as, moral injury, epistemic violence and material damage to others. For this we must bear responsibility for our complicity, ask for forgiveness and the opportunity to learn and commit to moral repair in our relations. To perform my *niyyah*, as a Muslim political theorist producing Islamic scholarship, I open up my actions for judgment by Allah and to critique by the Muslim community and (un)intended readerships. I also take responsibility in advance for the (un)intended consequences of the words that I have written and
their effects on (un)known and (un)intended readerships. I open up my heart to account for the ways in which my scholarship continues to be sustained by not only lands and waters of Coast Salish People but also, the violence of settler-colonial society of Canada that materially supports my career and citizenship status as a settler-of-colour.

Yet, this communicative intention that hides within the written word is incomplete without the public deeds (of publishing, teaching etc.) through which I appear as an Islamic scholar in various interpretive communities, the banality of my gestures and actions with which I care for my relations, and the many worlds I inhabit as a person, as a scholar, as a daughter, as a teacher and so on. To allow the practice of scholarship, and the economies of attention it demands, to pull me away from caring for my relations is to stray away from this intention, leaving others to inherit the care-work needed to sustain my life and our world to write a dissertation. Instead of romanticizing the vita contemplativa, of thinking and writing, as a necessarily solitary and individual act of the enlightened ones, political theory is relational, interdependent and intergenerational written by many (in)visible hands. It requires a division of labour, a community of care and can in and of itself be uncaring and exploitative.

In conclusion, through an Islamic critical ethos, I have unpacked the phenomenological and hermeneutic relationship between thinking, building and dwelling to open up space for decolonial and caring practices of knowledge production and world-building within the field of political theory, as well as, within Islamic thought and praxis. I have acted upon my intentions to open up space within political theory for Islamic epistemologies and practices of knowledge production. More importantly, I intend for this dissertation to be an opening for Muslim, Black, racialized and Indigenous political theorists to feel empowered as interpretive authorities, to lead
by example for others to practice political theory from within their respective traditions and sense of selves. Lastly, I intend for this dissertation to be a moral critique of the coloniality and exclusionary impulses of political theory as a field, and its practitioners, as a serious limit on the normative aims of political theory. I ask you, what is at stake for you as a political theorist, and as a Muslim, in your scholarship? To whom must your writing be answerable? What and who are you responsible for in this world? What is it that you care for and who do you care about? In what ways have your written words parted ways from your deeds, absolved you of the care-work charged of you by your relations? What is the scent of your gatherings? Are you more like the citrus fruit that smells, looks and tastes sweet? Like a date that has no smell but tastes sweet? Like basil that smells sweet but tastes bitter? Or like a vine that has no taste or scent and tastes bitter? And, most importantly, what is in your heart when you write?
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342


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